

Alternative Learning System Volunteer Teachers before Becoming A Full-Fledged Public School Teachers

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ABSTRACT

The Alternative Learning System (ALS) provides a vital educational pathway for out-of-school youth and adults in the Philippines and often serves as a stepping stone for volunteer teachers aspiring to secure permanent positions in the Department of Education (DepEd). This study explored the lived experiences of former ALS volunteer teachers in Maramag, Bukidnon, focusing on their motivations, sacrifices, coping mechanisms, and professional advice for aspiring educators. A qualitative phenomenological design was employed, and data were gathered from 15 purposively selected participants through semi-structured interviews conducted either face-to-face or via Google Forms, depending on participants' availability and location. Transcripts were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's reflexive thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns in participants' professional trajectories. Findings show that mentorship, community support, and the success stories of former ALS volunteers were the primary drivers that encouraged participants to pursue formal teaching careers, outweighing financial incentives. Despite this strong sense of mission, participants experienced pervasive financial instability, irregular or minimal honoraria, and a lack of instructional resources, which required significant personal and economic sacrifices. To cope with these challenges, they drew on purpose-driven resilience—anchored in commitment to learners, faith, social support networks, and practical strategies such as side jobs and careful budgeting. Participants advised aspiring ALS volunteers to balance “heart and skill” by pairing compassion and patience with intentional professional preparation, continuous learning, and strategic planning for career progression. The study concludes that while intrinsic motivation and personal sacrifice sustain many ALS volunteers, relying on these alone is unsustainable and inequitable, particularly for those from less advantaged backgrounds. The findings underscore the need for DepEd and partner institutions to formalize mentorship structures, strengthen financial and resource support, and establish more structured hiring pathways that recognize ALS experience as a legitimate foundation for entry into the public school system. These insights contribute to ongoing discussions on ALS policy and teacher development by highlighting how volunteer-to-teacher pathways can be made more just, stable, and strategically integrated into the basic education workforce.

Keywords: Alternative Learning System, teacher volunteerism, career transition, purpose-driven resilience, DepEd recruitment

INTRODUCTION

The Alternative Learning System (ALS) has become a critical parallel pathway to formal basic education in the Philippines, particularly for out-of-school youth and adults who have been excluded from traditional schooling. It provides flexible, community-based learning opportunities that build basic literacy, numeracy, and life skills, and is now formally institutionalized through Republic Act No. 11510, the Alternative Learning System Act, which mandates ALS as a core component of basic education and allocates dedicated funding for its implementation (Republic Act No. 11510, 2020; Department of Education, 2022). ALS programs are delivered through mobile teachers, learning facilitators, and, in many localities, volunteer instructors who work

in barangay learning centers, homes, and other community spaces rather than conventional classrooms.

For many of these volunteer instructors, ALS functions not only as a venue for community service but also as an entry point into the formal teaching profession in DepEd. Studies on ALS teachers and facilitators show that experience in non-formal settings builds classroom management, contextualized pedagogy, and community-engagement skills that are transferable to formal school settings and valued in subsequent career opportunities (Aniasco, 2024; Bagus, 2026; Mahinay & Manla, 2016; Villanueva, 2025). However, the transition from ALS volunteer to full-fledged public school teacher is often marked by precarity especially in terms of irregular or minimal honoraria, personal financing of learning materials, and limited structured professional development specifically tailored to ALS contexts.

National and local evidence highlight these persistent gaps. The EDCOM 2 policy review on ALS financing emphasizes that, more than three years after the passage of RA 11510, the sector continues to face financing and completion woes, including underfunded program components and fragile support for ALS personnel (Education Commission II [EDCOM 2] Communications, 2024). Qualitative work with ALS teachers likewise documents logistical and resource constraints, emotional and financial strain, and the need to juggle ALS work with other livelihood sources, even as teachers remain committed to serving marginalized learners (Aniasco, 2024; Bagus, 2026; Mahinay & Manla, 2016). These conditions raise equity questions: only those with sufficient economic and social capital can afford prolonged periods of volunteer or contract-based work while waiting for permanent teaching items.

At the same time, research consistently shows that mentors, supportive supervisors, and strong community networks are central to the persistence of ALS teachers and volunteers. Phenomenological and case studies reveal that ALS implementers draw strength from collegial support, school heads, district ALS coordinators, and local government partners, which help them navigate resource shortages and complex learner needs (Aniasco, 2024; Bagus, 2026; Villanueva, 2025). International literature on non-formal education and volunteer teaching echoes this pattern, noting that mentoring relationships and visible success stories encourage volunteers to remain in education and to pursue formal qualifications and teaching posts (Colodner, 2022; UNESCO; UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, 2023, 2024).

These dynamics suggest that the ALS field operates as both a site of opportunity and a site of risk for aspiring public school teachers. On one hand, ALS offers rich, practice-based learning that strengthens pedagogical resilience and a service-oriented professional identity; on the other hand, the reliance on volunteers and short-term contracts, coupled with uneven institutional support, can delay or derail stable entry into the DepEd system. Yet there is still limited research focusing specifically on the lived experiences of ALS volunteer teachers who have successfully transitioned into full-fledged public school teachers—particularly how they were encouraged, what sacrifices they made, how they coped with instability, and what advice they now give to others following the same path.

Responding to this gap, the present study explores the experiences of former ALS volunteer teachers in Maramag, Bukidnon, who are now full-fledged DepEd public school teachers. Grounded in their narratives, the study examines (a) the forms of encouragement and mentorship that influenced their decision to begin as ALS volunteers, (b) the sacrifices and struggles they encountered prior to securing permanent items, (c) the coping mechanisms they employed, and (d) the advice they offer to aspiring ALS volunteers. By centering these voices, the study aims to illuminate how mentorship, community support, and purpose-driven resilience shape the ALS-to-DepEd trajectory and to generate implications for policy and program design that move beyond individual sacrifice toward more structured and equitable support for volunteer-to-teacher pathways.

Statement of the Problem

This study aimed to examine the experiences of ALS volunteer teachers before becoming full-fledged public school teachers in the Department of Education. Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. What encouragement did you receive that influenced your decision to begin as an ALS volunteer and eventually pursue a career in DepEd public schools?

2. What sacrifices and struggles did you experience as an ALS volunteer before becoming a public school teacher?
3. How did you cope with these challenges?
4. What advice can you give, as a former ALS volunteer now working as a DepEd teacher, to those who plan to follow the same path? What encouragement did you receive that influenced your decision to begin as an ALS Volunteer and eventually pursue a career in DepEd public schools?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study utilized a qualitative phenomenological research design to explore the lived experiences of former ALS volunteer teachers. It focused on understanding their challenges, coping strategies, and motivations in transitioning to public school teaching in the Department of Education.

Locale of the Study

The study was conducted in selected public schools under the Department of Education in Maramag, Bukidnon. The area is characterized as a rural community where the ALS program is actively implemented to support out-of-school youth and adults. The researchers selected this locale because it is one of the areas where ALS volunteer teachers have transitioned into full-fledged public school teachers, making it suitable for examining their experiences, challenges, and professional development.

Participants of the Study

The participants were 15 former ALS volunteer teachers who are now full-fledged public school teachers under Department of Education. Purposive sampling was used to ensure that participants were appropriate and relevant for the purpose of the study, given their firsthand experience of serving as ALS volunteers before transitioning into formal teaching positions. Their insights were considered valuable for understanding the journey from ALS volunteerism to becoming professional teachers.

Research Instrument

Data were collected through a semi-structured interview guide, which provided flexibility for teachers to elaborate on their perceptions while allowing the researcher to probe for clarity and additional detail. The interview guide was reviewed by three practitioners to ensure its content validity, and a certification of validity was issued as a sign of approval.

Data Gathering Procedure

Permission to conduct the study was obtained from school authorities, and participants were briefed on the study's objectives, procedures, and ethical considerations. To facilitate efficient data collection, interviews were scheduled at times convenient for the teachers and conducted in a supportive environment to encourage open sharing. Due to geographical and time constraints, some participants chose to complete the interview via Google Forms, which provided flexibility, accessibility, and organized data recording. Data collection continued until saturation was reached, providing a strong foundation for identifying and refining key themes.

Data Analysis

Transcribed interviews were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2019) reflexive thematic analysis, which emphasizes the researcher's active role in interpreting the data. The process involved familiarization with the transcripts, generating initial codes, identifying and developing themes, reviewing and refining them, and defining and naming key patterns before producing the final report. This approach enabled the researcher to capture recurring patterns, challenges, and insights related to the former ALS volunteer teachers who are now

teaching in Department of Education. Direct quotations from participants were included to illustrate key findings and enhance the authenticity of the themes

Research Ethics

Before implementing the study, ethical clearance was secured from the Research Ethics Committee of Central Mindanao University, ensuring that all research activities adhered to established ethical guidelines. Afterward, a formal request was submitted to the Schools Division Superintendent and the respective schools. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, highlighting the purpose, procedures, and objectives of the study and clarifying that participation was voluntary and that they could decline or withdraw at any time. In accordance with Republic Act No. 10173, the Data Privacy Act, anonymity was maintained, and all information collected was kept confidential, stored securely, and used for educational purposes only.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

On the encouragement received that influenced the decision to begin as an Alternative Learning System Volunteers and eventually pursue a career in Department of Education public schools:

Theme 1: Mentorship and Success Stories as Primary Encouragement

This theme addresses the first research question on the encouragement that influenced participants' decisions to begin as ALS volunteers and eventually pursue DepEd teaching careers. Across 11 of 15 narratives, participants highlighted mentors, former ALS volunteers, family members, and community leaders whose support and success stories validated their potential and clarified the ALS-to-DepEd pathway. While some respondents mentioned intrinsic passion or financial aspirations, relational encouragement emerged as the dominant and most sustaining influence.

Several participants credited mentors and local leaders who explicitly affirmed their teaching potential and invited them into ALS work. Participant 1 described being encouraged by mentors and community members who *"believed in my ability to make a difference,"* while Participant 2 shared that observing *"former ALS volunteers before me who were able to penetrate DepEd easier"* strengthened their resolve to follow the same route. Family support also played a crucial role; Participant 8 emphasized that loved ones affirmed their *"heart for teaching"* and framed ALS as a mission, and Participant 9 drew *inspiration from an aunt whose promotion in DepEd showed that perseverance in ALS could lead to stable public school employment.* Some participants also mentioned direct recruitment by ALS coordinators, such as Participant 14, who was personally invited by the district ALS coordinator, and Participant 15, who highlighted encouragement from mentors, teachers, and the wider community to serve out-of-school youth.

These findings resonate with scholarship emphasizing the centrality of mentorship, social networks, and role models in sustaining ALS implementers and volunteer educators (Aniasco, 2024; Bagus, 2026; Villanueva, 2025). International literature on non-formal education similarly underscores that mentoring relationships and visible success trajectories encourage volunteers to pursue formal qualifications and longer-term careers in education (Colodner, 2022; UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, 2023). The present study contributes by showing how these relational dynamics operate specifically for ALS volunteers in rural Maramag and by framing mentorship not just as emotional support but as a concrete career pathway into Department of Education. This highlights the policy value of formalizing mentorship and *"alumni"* networks within ALS to systematically leverage grassroots encouragement as a teacher-supply strategy.

On the sacrifices and struggles as an ALS Volunteer before becoming a public school teacher:

Theme 2: Financial Instability and Resource Constraints as Core Sacrifices

The second research question explored the sacrifices and struggles participants experienced as ALS volunteers before becoming public school teachers. The dominant theme across 13 of 15 accounts was financial instability intertwined with chronic resource constraints. Participants described irregular honoraria, the absence of stable

salaries or benefits, and the need to personally shoulder transportation, printing, and learning material costs, often while supporting families and managing long commutes.

Participants repeatedly linked their volunteer work to economic precarity. Participant 1 noted *“limited resources, minimal financial compensation, and balancing personal responsibilities with teaching,”* while Participant 2 stated that there was *“no salary, just time and effort sacrificed,”* resulting in financial difficulties. As a family breadwinner, Participant 3 underscored the difficulty of needing stable income amid irregular pay, and Participant 5 pointed to being *“not financially stable and limited sources for materials”*. Several participants emphasized that small allowances offered no real security; Participant 6 described *minimal stipends*, Participant 7 explained that *insufficient allowances were partly used to cover shortages in teaching aids*, and Participant 8 recounted *delayed honoraria that forced them to advance funds for transport and handouts*. Others, like Participants 9, 10, 11, 12, 14, and 15, *described unpaid overtime, long travel to far-flung communities, and the burden of juggling side jobs or additional roles to sustain their families while remaining committed to ALS learners*.

These experiences mirror evidence that ALS and comparable non-formal education programs often rely on undercompensated labor and volunteers who subsidize education through personal sacrifice (Mahinay & Manla, 2016; Bagus, 2026; Dayuta, 2026). Policy analyses also point to underfunding in ALS and other non-formal systems relative to their learner share and to persistent resource gaps affecting ALS implementers (EDCOM II, 2024; Department of Education, 2023, 2025; UNESCO, 2024). The present study adds qualitative depth by showing how these systemic financial pressures are experienced at the micro-level by volunteers who subsequently become DepEd teachers. It underscores the risk that only those with sufficient economic buffers can endure prolonged volunteer periods, raising equity concerns for the ALS-to-DepEd recruitment pipeline. Strengthening stipends, reimbursements, and resource support is therefore central to building a fair and sustainable pathway from ALS volunteerism to formal public school teaching.

On coping with the challenges:

Theme 3: Purpose-Driven Resilience as the Primary Coping Mechanism

The third research question focused on how participants coped with the challenges of volunteering. Across all 15 narratives, participants described a multidimensional coping pattern that can be summarized as purpose-driven resilience. This involved a strong sense of mission toward ALS learners, faith and personal conviction, relational support from family and peers, and pragmatic strategies such as side jobs, budgeting, and seeking donations.

Participants consistently grounded their perseverance in their commitment to learners and the broader mission of making education accessible. Participant 1 emphasized *“constantly reminding myself why I started... to serve and make education accessible,”* while Participant 8 framed teaching as a *“mission beyond income”*. Participant 6 described drawing strength from reflecting on their *“volunteer journey,”* and Participant 15 highlighted focusing on *“the needs of out-of-school youth”*. Many also anchored their resilience in faith and inner conviction; Participant 3 referred to *“God’s grace and self-belief,”* Participant 7 spoke of trusting that *“struggles are temporary,”* and Participant 10 noted *relying on prayer and patience*. Social support further buffered the pressures of volunteer work: Participant 2 shared that *co-volunteers helped ease stress*, Participant 4 acknowledged *guidance from the district ALS coordinator and peers*, and Participant 11 mentioned both *mentors and family as key supports*. To address financial and logistical barriers, participants adopted practical strategies such as collaborating with colleagues for donations and shared materials (Participant 5), *tightening time and budget management* (Participant 8), *engaging in online ESL work or tutorials* (Participants 10 and 14), and *maintaining a forward-looking mindset focused on eventual regularization* (Participants 9, 12, 13).

These patterns align with broader research on resilience among educators in resource-constrained and non-formal settings (Sawatang, 2025; Villanueva, 2025; UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, 2023). The present findings extend this work by foregrounding how resilience functions specifically in the transitional space between ALS volunteerism and public school employment. While purpose-driven resilience supports individual survival and continuity, the data also reveal its limits: without parallel institutional support,

resilience can mask structural inequities and shift the burden of systemic underfunding onto individuals. This underscores the need to pair resilience-building efforts—such as recognition, mentoring, and peer support—with concrete improvements in compensation and career pathways.

On the advice of the former ALS Volunteer to those who want to follow the same path:

Theme 4: Service-Oriented Commitment and Professional Preparation as Advice for Future ALS Volunteers

The fourth research question asked what advice former ALS volunteers, now DepEd teachers, would offer to those who wish to follow the same path. Participants collectively emphasized a balanced approach: cultivating service-oriented dispositions such as compassion, patience, and commitment to marginalized learners, while simultaneously investing in professional preparation, networking, and practical financial strategies.

In terms of affective and ethical commitments, participants encouraged future volunteers to clarify their motivations and sustain a learner-centered orientation. Participant 1 advised entering ALS with the “*right heart and clear purpose*,” Participant 3 underscored *kindness and patience*, and Participant 8 urged aspiring volunteers to “*teach with compassion*”. Participant 5 highlighted the importance of *self-belief and a desire to make a positive influence*, and Participant 14 framed *service as both a responsibility and a privilege*. Alongside these dispositions, participants stressed deliberate skill-building and professional growth. Participant 1 recommended using *the volunteer period to improve teaching strategies and build relationships*; Participant 6 emphasized *sharpening skills and attending trainings*; and Participant 11 highlighted *continuous learning and adaptation*. Several participants also pointed to *persistence and faith doing one’s best, trusting the process, and remaining hopeful about timing* (Participants 2, 10, 13, 15). Few respondents acknowledged the necessity of pragmatic planning, including taking *part-time work or tutorials to supplement income* (Participant 14), *maintaining discipline and resilience* (Participant 9), and *actively engaging in networking, trainings, and collaboration* (Participants 1, 2, 8, 11).

This advice aligns with literature showing that structured volunteer experiences can strengthen pedagogical competence, classroom management, and community engagement, which later benefit teachers in formal school settings (Mahinay & Manla, 2016; Santos & David, 2024; Sawatang, 2025). International evidence also suggests that mentorship and career-oriented volunteer programs improve transition into formal teaching roles and increase retention in underserved areas (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, 2024; Colodner, 2022). The present study contributes by articulating a “heart-and-skill” blueprint specific to ALS volunteers in the Philippine context: volunteers are encouraged to view ALS not only as service, but also as a structured training ground for DepEd careers. This underscores the policy value of formally recognizing ALS experience in hiring, integrating targeted professional development modules for volunteers, and tracking volunteer-to-teacher outcomes as part of ALS quality assurance.

Taken together, the four themes portray the ALS volunteer-to-teacher pathway as both an opportunity and a vulnerability. Mentorship and community networks draw volunteers in and help them persist; financial instability and resource gaps test their capacity to remain; purpose-driven resilience and faith enable them to cope; and service-oriented advice for future volunteers reveals the depth of their commitment to marginalized learners. At the same time, the findings show that these individual strengths operate within a structurally fragile system, where institutional support has not kept pace with the expectations placed on volunteers. By foregrounding the voices of former ALS volunteers who successfully transitioned into DepEd roles, this study contributes nuanced, context-specific evidence that can inform ALS policy, particularly around mentorship, compensation, and the formal recognition of volunteer experience as part of teacher development and recruitment.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The study concludes that the transition from ALS volunteer to full-fledged public school teacher is primarily driven by relational factors, such as mentorship, community support, and the observed success of predecessors, rather than purely financial incentives. While these volunteers are motivated by a deep sense of mission, they

face pervasive systemic challenges characterized by financial instability, irregular honoraria, and a lack of instructional resources, which often force them to use personal funds to sustain their teaching duties. To navigate these hardships, volunteers develop purpose-driven resilience, leaning on faith, social support networks, and practical side-income strategies to maintain their commitment to learners. A successful career transition thus requires a holistic balance of “heart and skill,” where affective qualities like compassion and patience are paired with intentional professional development and strategic skill-building during the volunteer period.

The findings imply that relying solely on intrinsic motivation and personal sacrifice is unsustainable and inequitable, as volunteers from lower socioeconomic backgrounds may be disproportionately burdened. There is a significant gap between the high individual coping capacity of volunteers and the level of institutional support provided by the education system. If the Department of Education wishes to leverage ALS as a robust recruitment pipeline, it must formalize mentorship programs and strengthen structural support systems to ensure that dedicated volunteers can transition into permanent roles without enduring prolonged financial and professional precarity. Without these systemic changes, the quality of instruction and the retention of experienced educators in ALS may be compromised.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To support ALS volunteer teachers and enhance their transition into formal public school teaching roles, the following recommendations are proposed:

For the Department of Education (DepEd), prioritize policy interventions to regularize and increase volunteer honoraria, provide timely stipends, and establish structured hiring pathways that grant preferential points or priority to former ALS volunteers during the recruitment process.

For school administrators and district ALS coordinators, institutionalize formal mentorship and peer-support programs to provide volunteers with professional guidance, emotional support, and clear road maps for career progression, which have been shown to be key motivators for retention.

For local government units and community partners, collaborate to provide localized resource support, such as transportation allowances and subsidized teaching materials, to alleviate the financial burden on volunteers and ensure instructional continuity.

For aspiring ALS volunteers, intentionally treat the volunteer period as a professional training ground by sharpening teaching strategies, participating in available training, and establishing practical financial coping mechanisms, such as part-time work or tutorials, to sustain themselves during the transition.

For future researchers, conduct further studies comparing the long-term classroom performance and retention rates of teachers who transitioned from ALS with those who entered the system through traditional pathways, as well as examining ALS volunteer experiences in other regions.

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