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Factors Influencing Learner Enrollment in the Alternative Learning System in the Philippines: A Structured Literature Review

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ABSTRACT

The Alternative Learning System (ALS) provides educational opportunities for out-of-school youth and adults in the Philippines. Although previous studies have examined ALS implementation, learner experiences, and educational outcomes, evidence regarding factors influencing enrollment remains dispersed. A structured literature review was conducted using studies published between 2017 and 2026 retrieved from Google Scholar and PubMed. Relevant studies were analyzed using thematic synthesis. The review identified four factors influencing enrollment: educational access and flexible learning pathways, personal transformation and educational aspirations, social and institutional support systems, and economic advancement and future opportunities. However, the literature provides stronger evidence on learner motivations and expectations than on long-term outcomes. The findings support Social Cognitive Theory by highlighting the influence of personal, environmental, and outcome-related factors on enrollment decisions, while Human Capital Theory explains the perceived value of ALS as an investment in future opportunities. Overall, learner enrollment reflects the interplay of individual and contextual influences. Future research should employ comparative and longitudinal approaches to strengthen the evidence base on ALS enrollment.

INTRODUCTION

The Alternative Learning System (ALS) is the Philippine government's primary non-formal education program designed to provide educational opportunities for out-of-school youth and adults who are unable to access or complete formal basic education. As part of the country's commitment to inclusive and lifelong learning, ALS seeks to promote literacy, educational attainment, and skills development among marginalized populations (Baccal & Ormilla, 2021; Salendab & Cogo, 2022).

The continuing relevance of ALS is reflected in concerns that limited access to education may constrain the development of competencies needed to participate effectively in contemporary society, thereby highlighting the importance of alternative learning pathways (Tindowen *et al.*, 2017). Studies involving former learners and graduates further suggest that ALS can support educational completion, personal development, and progression to further educational opportunities (Bometivo *et al.*, 2025; Durog, 2025; Pascual *et al.*, 2022). Research on ALS has examined various dimensions of the program, including implementation, learner experiences, motivations, educational outcomes, and support mechanisms. Existing studies consistently identify flexibility and accessibility as important features of ALS, particularly for learners whose educational participation is constrained by employment, family responsibilities, and other life circumstances (Hero & Gloria, 2025). However, implementation studies also report challenges related to resource availability, technology access, budget allocation, policy implementation, and program delivery (Espejon *et al.*, 2024; Libo-On & Catunao, 2024; Mahinay & Manla,

2025). Similarly, transportation difficulties, limited awareness of ALS programs, work obligations, and low learner participation have been identified as barriers affecting educational engagement (Ramos *et al.*, 2023). These findings collectively indicate that both program characteristics and broader social and institutional conditions influence educational access.

The literature likewise highlights the role of personal and social influences in educational participation. Educational aspirations, self-esteem, resilience, and personal growth have been associated with learner engagement in ALS (Bucanegra *et al.*, 2020; Durog, 2025; Tabanao, 2025). Family support, peer relationships, and supportive learning environments have also been identified as factors that encourage educational participation (Santos, 2025; Ucab & Luzano, 2023; Sacabin *et al.*, 2025). In addition, learners frequently link ALS with opportunities for educational advancement, skills development, and future employment (Bayo & Paglinawan, 2025; Bometivo *et al.*, 2025; Tabanao, 2025).

Recent evaluations further emphasize the importance of institutional support, program effectiveness, and stronger alignment between ALS and broader educational and social initiatives (Albert *et al.*, 2024; Espejon *et al.*, 2024; Libo-On & Catunao, 2024). At the same time, studies involving specific learner groups, including ALS completers and individuals deprived of liberty, demonstrate that learner experiences vary across contexts and populations (Ucab & Luzano, 2023; Sala *et al.*, 2025). These findings suggest that factors associated with enrollment may differ according to learners' circumstances and educational needs.

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Although ALS research has expanded between 2017 and 2026, much of the literature has focused on implementation, learners' experiences, educational outcomes, and program effectiveness (Espejon *et al.*, 2024; Libo-On & Catunao, 2024; Mahinay & Manla, 2025; Sala *et al.*, 2025).

Evidence related to learner enrollment is distributed across studies examining accessibility, aspirations, support systems, and future opportunities, with limited synthesis of how these factors collectively influence enrollment decisions. This structured literature review addresses this gap by synthesizing current evidence to identify recurring factors associated with learner enrollment in the Alternative Learning System in the Philippines.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This study is anchored in Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986) and Human Capital Theory (Schultz, 1961; Becker, 1964) to explain the factors influencing learner enrollment in the Alternative Learning System (ALS).

Social Cognitive Theory asserts that personal factors, environmental influences, and outcome expectations interact to shape behavior. Within the context of ALS, environmental factors are reflected in educational access and flexible learning pathways, as well as in social and

institutional support systems, which influence learners' opportunities to participate in education. Personal factors are reflected in personal transformation and educational aspirations, which shape learners' motivation to pursue educational goals. Outcome expectations refer to learners' perceptions of the potential benefits associated with participation in ALS.

Human Capital Theory complements this perspective by viewing education as an investment in knowledge, skills, and competencies that can improve future opportunities. This perspective is particularly relevant to economic advancement and future opportunities, as learners may perceive ALS as a pathway toward educational attainment, employability, and socioeconomic mobility.

Together, these theories provide a complementary explanation of learner enrollment in ALS. Social Cognitive Theory explains how educational access, personal aspirations, and support systems influence educational decision-making, while Human Capital Theory explains the perceived value of education in achieving future goals. Accordingly, learner enrollment is understood as the result of interactions among educational access and flexible learning pathways, personal transformation and educational aspirations, social and institutional support systems, and economic advancement and future opportunities.

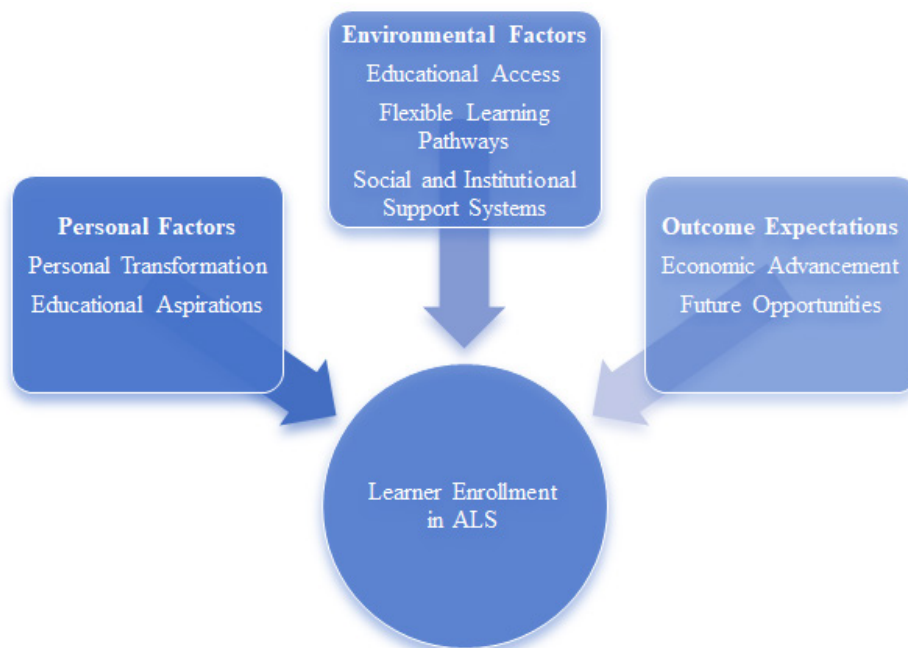


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of Factors Influencing Learner Enrollment in the Alternative Learning System (ALS)

This study is grounded in Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986), which posits that behavior is shaped by the interaction of personal factors, environmental factors, and outcome expectations. Applied to ALS, personal factors encompass personal transformation and educational aspirations; environmental factors include educational access, flexible learning pathways, and social and institutional support systems; while outcome

expectations refer to economic advancement and future opportunities.

The framework proposes that learner enrollment in ALS results from the interaction of these factors. Individuals are more likely to enroll when they perceive ALS as accessible, aligned with their personal aspirations, and capable of providing meaningful future opportunities.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a structured literature review to synthesize empirical and policy-oriented literature related to ALS enrollment.

Search Strategy

Literature was identified through searches conducted on Google Scholar and PubMed. Additional relevant sources cited within eligible studies were reviewed when necessary. Search terms included combinations of “Alternative Learning System,” “ALS Philippines,” “ALS

enrollment,” “ALS participation,” “out-of-school youth,” and “adult education.”

Inclusion Criteria

Studies were included if they:

1. Were published between 2017 and 2026
2. Focused on ALS in the Philippine context
3. Examined learner participation, enrollment, experiences, motivations, or program implementation
4. Were published as journal articles, theses, dissertations, or government reports

Table 1: Literature Search and Study Selection Process for the Structured Literature Review (2017–2026)

Screening Stage	Number of Studies (n)
Studies initially identified	55
Studies excluded during screening	36
Studies included in the review	19

Table 1 summarizes the literature identification, screening, and selection process. The search was conducted between May and June 2026. Duplicate records were removed prior to screening, and titles, abstracts, and full texts were reviewed for eligibility. Of the 55 records retrieved from Google Scholar and PubMed, 36 were excluded after screening against the study criteria. The remaining

19 studies were included in the thematic synthesis and formed the evidence base for this review.

Data Analysis

Thematic synthesis was used to identify recurring factors associated with enrollment. Findings were coded, compared, and organized into broader analytical themes.

Table 2: Classification of Reviewed Studies by Theme and Theoretical Alignment

Theme	References	Theoretical Alignment
Educational Access and Flexible Learning Pathways	Baccal & Ormilla (2021) Espejon <i>et al.</i> (2024) Hero & Gloria (2025) Libo-On & Catunao (2024) Mahinay & Manla (2025) Ramos <i>et al.</i> (2023) Salendab & Cogo (2022)	Social Cognitive Theory (Environmental Factors)
Personal Transformation and Educational Aspirations	Bucanegra <i>et al.</i> (2020) Durog (2025) Pascual <i>et al.</i> (2022) Sacabin <i>et al.</i> (2025) Tindowen <i>et al.</i> (2017)	Social Cognitive Theory (Personal Factors)
Social and Institutional Support Systems	Albert <i>et al.</i> (2024) Sala <i>et al.</i> (2025) Santos (2025) Ucab & Luzano (2023)	Social Cognitive Theory (Environmental Factors)
Economic Advancement and Future Opportunities	Bayo & Paglinawan (2025) Bometivo <i>et al.</i> (2025) Tabanao (2025)	Human Capital Theory; Social Cognitive Theory (Outcome Expectations)

Table 2 presents the classification of the 19 studies included in the review according to their primary thematic focus and theoretical alignment. Each study was assigned to one theme based on its primary contribution to understanding factors associated with learner enrollment in ALS. The themes were derived through thematic synthesis and interpreted using Social Cognitive Theory and Human Capital Theory.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The thematic synthesis of the 19 studies included in this review identified four interrelated factors associated with learner enrollment in the ALS: educational access

and flexible learning pathways, personal transformation and educational aspirations, social and institutional support systems, and economic advancement and future opportunities. These themes reflect the interaction of environmental, personal, and outcome-related factors influencing enrollment and provide the basis for understanding how learners navigate educational participation within diverse social and institutional contexts.

Theme 1: Educational Access and Flexible Learning Pathways

The literature consistently positions ALS as an alternative

educational pathway for individuals whose participation in formal schooling has been disrupted (Baccal & Ormilla, 2021; Hero & Gloria, 2025; Libo-On & Catunao, 2024). Researchers frequently identify flexibility in scheduling, learning arrangements, and instructional delivery as a factor that enhances ALS accessibility for diverse learner populations.

Existing studies often assume that flexibility directly translates into participation. This assumption fails to consider the influence of learners' social and economic circumstances on access, in addition to program design. Flexible learning opportunities may reduce educational barriers, yet they do not necessarily eliminate competing responsibilities related to work, caregiving, or household obligations.

Another limitation concerns the predominance of localized case studies. While these studies demonstrate the importance of flexibility within specific contexts, they provide limited evidence regarding which aspects of accessibility exert the greatest influence on enrollment across different regions and learner groups.

Critical Synthesis

The literature supports the importance of accessibility and flexibility, but suggests that enrollment is influenced by how learners negotiate educational opportunities within broader social and economic constraints.

Theme 2: Personal Transformation and Educational Aspirations

Several studies identify personal aspirations as an important factor influencing enrollment (Bucanegra *et al.*, 2020; Durog, 2025; Pascual *et al.*, 2022). Learners often describe ALS as an opportunity to continue interrupted educational journeys, achieve personal goals, and develop greater confidence in their abilities.

However, the concept of personal transformation is inconsistently defined across studies. The absence of a consistent conceptualization of personal transformation limits comparability across studies. This variation makes it difficult to determine whether studies are examining the same phenomenon under different labels.

Learners who successfully entered or remained in ALS programs provide much of the evidence. The perspectives of individuals who chose not to enroll or who discontinued participation are less frequently represented.

Critical Synthesis

The literature suggests that educational aspirations and personal development influence enrollment, although conceptual inconsistencies and selective sampling limit the strength of current conclusions.

Theme 3: Social and Institutional Support Systems

Participation often stems from family encouragement, peer influence, and support from ALS facilitators (Santos, 2025; Ucab & Luzano, 2023; Sala *et al.*, 2025).

Studies generally portray supportive relationships as mechanisms that encourage learners to pursue educational opportunities.

Yet the literature often treats support systems as uniformly beneficial. Many studies do not examine how family responsibilities, community expectations, or institutional limitations may discourage enrollment. As a result, support is commonly analyzed as a facilitating factor rather than as a dynamic influence that may both enable and constrain participation.

Research also tends to focus on interpersonal support while giving comparatively less attention to institutional capacity, resource availability, and local implementation differences.

Critical Synthesis

Social and institutional support appears to influence enrollment, but existing research provides a more developed understanding of supportive factors than of the barriers embedded within these same relationships and structures.

Theme 4: Economic Advancement and Future Opportunities

A recurring finding across the literature is the perception of ALS as a pathway toward future opportunities. Learners frequently associate ALS with educational completion, employability, and future opportunities (Bayo & Paglinawan, 2025; Bometivo *et al.*, 2025; Tabanao, 2025).

Although this theme appears consistently, much of the evidence focuses on anticipated benefits rather than documented outcomes. Studies commonly explore learners' expectations of improved opportunities but provide limited evidence regarding whether such expectations are realized after program completion.

The literature also tends to frame economic motivation as an individual decision-making factor. Less attention is given to structural conditions such as labor market inequalities, regional employment opportunities, and socioeconomic disadvantage, which may shape both enrollment decisions and educational outcomes.

This suggests that the literature is stronger at explaining anticipated benefits than at demonstrating the actual socioeconomic outcomes associated with ALS participation.

Critical Synthesis

Economic aspirations appear to motivate enrollment, but current evidence is stronger in explaining learners' expectations than in demonstrating long-term socioeconomic impacts.

CONCLUSION

This review identified key factors influencing learner enrollment in ALS, including educational access and flexible learning pathways, personal transformation and educational aspirations, social and institutional

support systems, as well as economic advancement and future opportunities. These factors shape enrollment decisions through the interplay of personal motivations, environmental conditions, and expectations regarding future outcomes.

The findings align with Social Cognitive Theory, illustrating how personal and environmental factors intersect in educational decision-making. Additionally, Human Capital Theory sheds light on the significance learners place on future educational and socioeconomic opportunities.

Current literature suggests that existing evidence is more robust in explaining motivations for enrollment than in addressing barriers to participation. Furthermore, it is more effective in documenting anticipated benefits than in assessing long-term outcomes. This review aims to provide a more integrated understanding of ALS enrollment while emphasizing the necessity of comparative and longitudinal research to strengthen the evidence base for policy and practice.

Limitations

This review is limited by its reliance on studies retrieved from Google Scholar and PubMed and by the predominance of qualitative research within the available literature. The findings should be interpreted as a synthesis of existing evidence rather than a comprehensive representation of all factors influencing ALS enrollment.

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