

Lived Educational Experiences of Persons Deprived of Liberty Enrolled in the Alternative Learning System

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Abstract

This qualitative phenomenological study explored the lived educational experiences of Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDLs) enrolled in the Alternative Learning System (ALS) in selected jail facilities in Negros Occidental during School Year 2026–2027. It specifically examined how PDLs described and made meaning of their educational experiences in terms of motivation and meaning of learning, learning engagement and instructional support, and challenges and personal transformation. Ten PDL learners enrolled in ALS were purposely selected as participants. Data were gathered through semi-structured, in-depth interviews using a researcher-made interview guide. With participants' consent, interviews were audio-recorded and supplemented with field notes. The narratives were analyzed through thematic analysis to identify recurring meanings, patterns, and themes. Findings revealed three major themes and nine subthemes. The first theme, Motivation and Meaning of Learning, showed that participants were motivated by hope for reintegration and self-improvement, the desire to continue and complete education, and the development of renewed purpose and a positive outlook. The second theme, Learning Engagement and Instructional Support, highlighted teacher facilitation and guidance, peer interaction and learning support, and active participation and meaningful learning. The third theme, Challenges and Personal Transformation, revealed institutional constraints and learning barriers, resilience and coping with challenges, and identity change and personal growth. Overall, ALS was experienced as more than an academic program, providing participants with opportunities to sustain hope, engage in meaningful learning, cope with challenges, and develop greater confidence, responsibility, and positive future orientation.

Keywords: *Lived educational experiences, Alternative Learning System, Persons Deprived of Liberty, learning engagement, instructional support*

Introduction:

Nature of the Problem

Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDLs) experience unique barriers to education because learning takes place within a highly regulated and restricted environment. Although the Alternative Learning System (ALS) provides opportunities for PDLs to continue or complete their basic education, institutional conditions such as security procedures, restricted movement, limited learning schedules, inadequate learning spaces and resources, and limited access to teachers and instructional materials may influence their educational experiences. Labarrete and Tiopes (2025) found that PDL learners encountered distinct experiences in participating in ALS Behind Bars and emphasized the importance of understanding the meanings they attach to education while incarcerated. Their findings suggest that educational provision for PDLs should consider not only access to learning but also the particular circumstances under which learning occurs.

Beyond institutional constraints, PDLs may enter ALS with different educational backgrounds, motivations, aspirations, and experiences of interrupted schooling. Their participation may be driven by the desire to complete their education, improve themselves, prepare for reintegration, or develop renewed hope and purpose. Villaos and Regencia (2026) found that PDL learners viewed their educational journey as a transformative experience that strengthened resilience, restored dignity, and provided hope for their eventual reintegration into society. Their experiences also showed that family aspirations, teacher support, peer relationships, and personal determination could help sustain motivation despite the difficulties associated with confinement.

Learning engagement and instructional support are likewise important concerns in understanding the educational experiences of PDLs. Waskin and Mamonong (2025) revealed that PDL learners encountered both learning opportunities and challenges and relied on different forms of educational support and coping strategies as they pursued learning within a jail environment. Their findings indicate that teachers, instructional resources, learning opportunities, and the correctional environment can influence how PDLs participate in and respond to educational activities. Similarly, Buhain (2026) found that PDL learners' educational experiences involved personal, relational, and social factors and reflected motivations associated with personal development, family relationships, resilience, and the desire to begin anew.

Despite the continuing implementation of ALS in correctional facilities, there remains a need for context-specific understanding of how PDLs themselves experience education and interpret its significance in their lives. Existing Philippine studies have demonstrated the importance of motivation, instructional and social support, challenges, resilience, hope, and personal transformation in the educational experiences of incarcerated learners (Buhain, 2026; Labarrete & Tiopes, 2025; Villaos & Regencia, 2026; Waskin & Mamonong, 2025). However, these experiences may differ according to institutional and local contexts. Thus, examining PDLs enrolled in ALS in selected jail facilities in Negros Occidental, particularly in terms of motivation and meaning of learning, learning engagement and instructional support, and challenges and personal transformation, can provide a more contextualized and learner-centered basis for strengthening ALS implementation and educational and rehabilitation support for PDLs.

The researcher's professional experience as an ALS teacher further motivated the conduct of this study. Through interaction with ALS learners, the researcher recognized the importance of providing flexible and inclusive educational opportunities to individuals who have experienced barriers to formal schooling. These experiences prompted an interest in understanding how PDLs experience learning while confined, what motivates them to participate in ALS, how they engage in learning, what support they receive, and how they deal with challenges and experience personal changes through education.

Thus, the purpose of this study was to investigate and describe how Persons Deprived of Liberty who enrolled in ALS in selected correctional facilities in Negros Occidental during the School Year 2026-2027 characterized and made sense of their lived educational experiences. The study focused on (a) Motivation and Meaning of Learning, (b) Learning Engagement and Instructional Support, and (c) Challenges and Personal Development. The findings may help DepEd, BJMP, ALS teachers, and other stakeholders improve educational and rehabilitation assistance for PDLs while also furthering inclusive, equitable, and meaningful educational opportunities in accordance with UNSDG 4, UNSDG 10, and UNSDG 16.

Current State of Knowledge

Recent research has increasingly recognized education for Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDLs) as extending beyond academic attainment toward rehabilitation, personal development, and preparation for social reintegration. In the Philippine context, Labarrete and Tiopes (2025) explored the lived experiences of PDLs enrolled in the ALS Behind Bars Program and found that participants attached significant meaning to their participation in education while incarcerated. Their phenomenological study demonstrated that the experiences of PDL learners are shaped not merely by their participation in educational activities but also by how they perceive the value and purpose of learning within confinement. Thus, current knowledge suggests that understanding correctional education requires attention to the subjective meanings and experiences of PDL learners themselves.

Furthermore, emerging evidence indicates that motivation, hope, resilience, and personal transformation are important dimensions of the educational experiences of PDLs. Villaos and Regencia (2026), in their phenomenological investigation of 12 PDLs enrolled in ALS at Lucena City District Jail, found that learners experienced education as a means of sustaining motivation and finding meaning despite the difficulties associated with incarceration. Similarly, Buhain (2026) found among ALS learners at the New Bilibid Prison that educational experiences were shaped by interconnected personal, relational, and social factors. Participants expressed motivations to start anew, reconnect with their families, and pursue personal growth, demonstrating the potential of education to foster resilience and transformation. These findings indicate that ALS can function not only as an educational intervention but also as a meaningful avenue through which PDLs reconstruct their aspirations and outlook toward life.

Moreover, research has shown that learning engagement among PDLs is influenced by the opportunities, instructional support, challenges, and coping mechanisms present within the correctional environment. Waskin and Mamonong (2025), through a multiple-case study of PDL learners in the Digos City District Jail Female Dormitory, identified educational opportunities and challenges as well as the coping strategies employed by learners while studying English through ALS. More recently, Brillantes (2026) found that ALS implementation among PDLs at the Ipil District Jail was associated with positive outcomes in knowledge, skills, and attitudes. The qualitative component further revealed that participants regarded ALS as a source of hope, dignity, and preparation for reintegration. Consequently, existing evidence underscores the importance of instructional opportunities and support systems in sustaining meaningful learning and promoting positive educational outcomes among incarcerated learners.

Taken together, the current body of knowledge establishes that ALS can provide PDLs with opportunities for educational advancement, renewed motivation, meaningful engagement, resilience, personal growth, and eventual social reintegration. A recent study of former inmate learners further showed that ALS could serve as an internal catalyst for reintegration by contributing to educational attainment, renewed confidence, and reduced feelings of shame after release (Sala et al., 2026). Nevertheless, existing studies have been conducted in particular correctional contexts, including facilities in Lucena City, Digos City, Ipil, and New Bilibid Prison, suggesting that the experiences documented cannot automatically represent those of PDL learners in other institutional and geographical settings. Therefore, there remains a need for a context-specific understanding of how PDLs in selected jail facilities in Negros Occidental experience and make meaning of ALS, particularly in relation to motivation and meaning of learning, learning engagement and instructional support, and challenges and personal transformation.

Theoretical Underpinnings

The study is anchored in a constructivist-interpretivist epistemological perspective, which assumes that knowledge and reality are understood through the meanings individuals construct from their experiences and interactions with their social environment. Rather than assuming that there is a single objective reality concerning education among Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDLs), this perspective recognizes that each participant may understand learning, confinement, educational support, and personal change differently. This epistemological position is appropriate for phenomenological inquiry because the study seeks to understand the educational phenomenon from the perspectives of the PDL learners themselves rather than imposing predetermined explanations on their experiences.

Moreover, the constructivist-interpretivist perspective allows the researcher to explore how PDL learners interpret their participation in the Alternative Learning System (ALS) within the particular context of confinement. Their accounts of motivation, engagement, relationships with teachers and peers, challenges, coping, and personal transformation represent meanings constructed through their individual and shared experiences. Accordingly, knowledge in the present study emerges through participants' narratives and the researcher's systematic interpretation of recurring meanings and themes. This perspective is therefore consistent with the

study's phenomenological purpose of describing and interpreting the essence and meaning of PDLs' lived educational experiences.

Furthermore, the study is theoretically anchored in Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory, which explains how adult learners can critically reflect on their experiences and reconstruct previously held assumptions, perspectives, and ways of understanding themselves and their circumstances. Mezirow (1991) proposed that adult learning involves meaning-making and that reflection on significant experiences can transform an individual's frames of reference. This theory is particularly applicable to PDL learners because participation in ALS may provide opportunities to reconsider past experiences, develop new perspectives, strengthen self-confidence and responsibility, and construct more positive views of themselves and their future. Thus, the theory provides a strong lens for understanding the study's themes involving motivation and meaning of learning and challenges and personal transformation.

In addition, the study may be supported by Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory, which views learning as a process through which knowledge develops from experience (Kolb, 1984). Kolb's work emphasizes the central role of experience in learning and development. Applied to the present study, PDLs' experiences of participating in ALS, interacting with teachers and peers, completing learning activities, encountering institutional constraints, and reflecting on their circumstances can contribute to the development of new knowledge, attitudes, and ways of responding to their environment. Consequently, Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory and Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory complement the constructivist-interpretivist epistemological perspective by explaining how PDL learners construct meaning from their educational experiences and how these experiences may contribute to engagement, resilience, personal development, and transformation.

Purpose Statement

This study aimed to explore and describe the lived educational experiences of Persons Deprived of Liberty enrolled in the Alternative Learning System (ALS) in selected jail facilities in Negros Occidental during School Year 2026–2027. Specifically, it sought to find answers to one pressing question: How did persons deprived of liberty (PDLs) describe and make meaning of their lived educational experiences in the Alternative Learning System (ALS) within jail facilities in Negros Occidental in terms of: a) Motivation and Meaning of Learning; b) Learning Engagement and Instructional Support; and c) Challenges and Personal Transformation?

Research Methodology:

Methodological Perspective

The study employed a qualitative phenomenological approach to explore and describe the lived educational experiences of Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDLs) enrolled in the Alternative Learning System (ALS). Phenomenology was appropriate because the inquiry focused on how participants experienced, understood, and constructed meaning from education while in confinement. Reflexivity and bracketing were observed to minimize the influence of the researcher's assumptions on the interpretation of participants' narratives (Creswell and Poth, 2024).

Context of the Study

The study was situated within jail-based ALS education in the Philippines during School Year 2026–2027. ALS provides flexible educational opportunities to learners who have been unable to access or complete formal basic education. Within correctional facilities, its implementation involves coordination between the Department of Education (DepEd) and the Bureau of Jail Management and Penology (BJMP), with instruction occurring within institutional schedules, security requirements, available learning spaces, and resource limitations.

Research Locale

The research was conducted in selected BJMP-managed jail facilities in Negros Occidental, Philippines, where ALS was offered to PDLs. The locale provided an appropriate setting for examining educational experiences within confinement because learning activities were conducted alongside institutional restrictions involving movement, schedules, learning materials, and security procedures.

Participants of the Study

Ten PDL learners were purposively selected for individual in-depth interviews. Participants were officially enrolled in ALS and had sufficient experience with the program to meaningfully describe their educational journeys. The sample size was consistent with the phenomenological emphasis on obtaining rich, detailed descriptions rather than statistical representation.

Research Instruments

A researcher-made semi-structured interview guide served as the primary research instrument. Developed from the study's purpose, central research question, and relevant literature, it covered three areas: Motivation and Meaning of Learning, Learning Engagement and Instructional Support, and Challenges and Personal Transformation. Open-ended questions and appropriate probes allowed participants to elaborate on experiences they considered significant.

Data Sources

The primary data consisted of first-person narratives obtained from PDL learners enrolled in ALS during School Year 2026–2027. Individual interviews generated accounts concerning their motivation, learning experiences, instructional and social support, challenges, and perceived personal changes. These narratives constituted the principal evidence for understanding the phenomenon.

Interview Protocol

The semi-structured interview protocol began with rapport-building questions followed by questions addressing the three areas of inquiry. Participants were encouraged to narrate their experiences freely, while follow-up questions and probes were used for clarification and elaboration. Before data collection, appropriate experts reviewed the protocol for clarity, relevance, appropriateness for PDL participants, and alignment with the study's purpose.

Procedures

Prior to data collection, permission was secured from the concerned jail administration, BJMP, and DepEd ALS authorities. Qualified participants were identified in coordination with relevant personnel and were informed of the study's purpose, procedures, and their rights before providing informed consent. Interviews were conducted individually in secure areas designated by the jail administration, subject to institutional schedules and security requirements.

Data Collection and Data Analysis

With participants' consent, interviews were audio-recorded and supplemented with field notes, transcribed verbatim, and checked against the recordings for accuracy. Data were analyzed using Moustakas' (1994) modified Stevick–Colaizzi–Keen method of phenomenological analysis. Transcripts were repeatedly read, significant statements were identified, related meanings were clustered into meaningful units and categories, and recurring patterns were developed into themes. The researcher repeatedly returned to the original narratives to ensure that the final themes remained grounded in participants' experiences.

Inclusion Criteria for Participants

Eligible participants were at least 18 years old, officially classified as PDLs, confined in one of the selected jail facilities, and officially enrolled in ALS during School Year 2026–2027. They were required to have direct and sufficient ALS experience to meaningfully communicate their educational experiences and to provide voluntary informed consent. Both male and female PDL learners were eligible regardless of educational level or specific ALS program.

Trustworthiness of Qualitative Data

Trustworthiness was established through credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. Credibility was strengthened through probing and member checking; dependability through documentation of methodological decisions and an audit trail; confirmability through reflexive notes and grounding interpretations in participants' verbatim accounts; and transferability through adequate description of the participants, ALS context, and correctional setting.

Research Ethics Protocol

Given the vulnerability of PDL participants, the study emphasized respect for persons, beneficence, justice, voluntary participation, confidentiality, and protection from harm. Institutional and gatekeeper approvals were obtained before recruitment. Participants provided informed consent and were informed of their right to refuse questions or withdraw without penalty or loss of privileges. Codes or pseudonyms protected their identities, research materials were securely maintained, and interviews could be paused or discontinued in cases of discomfort or distress. Participation was explicitly separated from institutional decisions concerning confinement, privileges, education, or other matters to minimize coercion or undue influence.

Results and Discussion

Analysis of the participants' narratives generated three major themes and nine subthemes describing the lived educational experiences of Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDLs) enrolled in the Alternative Learning System (ALS): (1) Motivation and Meaning of Learning, comprising hope for reintegration and self-improvement, desire to continue and complete education, and renewed purpose and positive outlook; (2) Learning Engagement and Instructional Support, comprising teacher facilitation and guidance, peer interaction and learning support, and active participation and meaningful learning; and (3) Challenges and Personal Transformation, comprising institutional constraints and learning barriers, resilience and coping with challenges, and identity change and personal growth. Collectively, the themes demonstrate that ALS was experienced not merely as an academic program but as a meaningful opportunity for hope, continued learning, supportive relationships, resilience, and personal transformation.

Theme 1: Motivation and Meaning of Learning

The participants viewed participation in ALS as an opportunity to continue an educational journey that had been interrupted and to prepare for possibilities beyond confinement. Education acquired meanings that extended beyond academic completion; it became associated with hope, self-improvement, personal accomplishment, and preparation for reintegration. Despite their circumstances, participants continued to perceive themselves as individuals capable of learning, changing, and pursuing meaningful goals.

Hope for Reintegration and Self-Improvement

Participants associated learning with the possibility of becoming better individuals and preparing for life after release. Everyday educational experiences, including learning new concepts, listening to lessons, asking questions, and completing activities, strengthened their sense of accomplishment and hope. As P1 expressed, “...*malipay ko kung may bag-ong kong makat-onan...*” (“...I feel happy whenever I learn something new...”). Learning therefore provided emotional fulfillment while reinforcing the belief that personal development remained possible despite incarceration.

The participants' motivation was evident even when confidence, concentration, and emotional difficulties affected participation. Some hesitated to speak during class or feared making mistakes, yet they continued listening, completing activities, and seeking assistance. Thus, hope was not simply an expectation of a better future but was developed through everyday experiences of educational progress. These findings support Labarrete and Tiopes (2025), who reported that PDL learners perceived ALS as a meaningful opportunity for personal development and eventual reintegration. Sala et al. (2026) likewise found that ALS participation contributed to confidence and psychological and social empowerment among former inmate learners.

The shared experience may therefore be understood as hope and self-improvement through continuing education. ALS provided participants with opportunities to look beyond their present circumstances and recognize that confinement did not necessarily determine their future.

Desire to Continue and Complete Education

A second recurring experience was the strong desire to continue and complete schooling. ALS represented a second opportunity to pursue educational goals that had previously been interrupted. P3 stated, “...*nalipay ko nga nakabalik ko sa pag-eskwela. Ako ni ipadayon hangtod mahuman nako ni...*” (“...I am happy that I was able to return to school. I want to continue until I finish...”). Similarly, P9 explained that continuing education meant finishing what had been started and acquiring something useful for the future.

Educational completion was therefore not viewed solely in terms of earning a certificate. It represented personal accomplishment, restoration of self-worth, fulfillment of unfinished aspirations, and preparation for future opportunities. Even when participants experienced difficulties, their desire to finish remained a source of persistence. Labarrete and Tiopes (2025) similarly identified ALS as a meaningful educational opportunity for PDL learners, while Sala et al. (2026) associated participation with educational attainment and empowerment.

The essence of this experience may be described as continuing and completing education as a new opportunity in life. Through ALS, participants were able to resume interrupted educational journeys and perceive completion as an achievable step toward a more productive future.

Renewed Purpose and Positive Outlook

Participation in ALS also provided participants with a renewed sense of purpose. Studying gave them something constructive to focus on and redirected attention from some of the emotional and personal difficulties associated with confinement. P2 stated, “...*ang pag-eskwela nakahatag nako og tumong kada adlaw...*” (“...studying gives me a purpose each day...”). Likewise, P6 recognized through education that “*dili pa ulahi ang tanan*” (“it is not yet too late”), reflecting an emerging belief that starting again remained possible.

Participants increasingly described themselves in future-oriented terms. Rather than focusing solely on past difficulties, they began thinking about personal improvement, educational completion, and goals after release. P9 captured this transition by stating, “...*mas nakahunahuna ko sa akong kaugmaon kaysa sa akong nangagi. Gusto nako nga mahimong mas maayong tawo.*” (“...I now think more about my future than my past. I want to become a better person.”)

These experiences correspond with research showing that correctional education can contribute to confidence, personal development, psychological empowerment, and future orientation (LaBarbera, 2023; Sala et al., 2026). Thus, the phenomenological essence of this subtheme may be expressed as renewed purpose and a positive outlook through education. ALS became a constructive space where participants could redirect their attention toward learning, personal development, and future possibilities.

Theme 2: Learning Engagement and Instructional Support

The second major theme revealed that meaningful participation in ALS was relational and participatory. Engagement involved listening, asking questions, completing activities, interacting with teachers, cooperating with classmates, and continuing to learn despite personal and institutional difficulties. Teacher responsiveness and peer support were particularly important in sustaining participation.

Teacher Facilitation and Guidance

Participants consistently described ALS teachers as important sources of academic and emotional support. Patience, understanding, encouragement, responsiveness, and willingness to provide additional explanations helped learners remain engaged. P1 explained, “*Pasensyoso siya ug usbon gyud niya ang leksyon kung dili pa namo masabtan*” (“He/She is patient and willingly repeats the lesson whenever we do not understand it”). For learners who experienced academic gaps or difficulty understanding lessons, such responsiveness reduced frustration and encouraged persistence.

Teacher support also extended beyond academic instruction. Participants valued teachers who understood their circumstances, respected their emotional readiness, and encouraged them to continue despite difficulties. P10 described the teacher as someone who taught not only lessons

but also values and hope and reminded learners that their past did not determine their future. Thus, teacher facilitation was experienced as both instructional and motivational.

The findings are consistent with Labarrete and Tiopes (2025), who emphasized the positive role of ALS in the development of PDL learners. They also complement Salem and Balasote's (2024) findings on ALS implementation in Negros Occidental, which highlighted the importance of learning resources and supportive learning conditions. The essence of this experience can therefore be described as teacher guidance and support that provide encouragement for learning.

Peer Interaction and Learning Support

Classmates also served as significant sources of learning support. Participants described asking peers for clarification, completing activities collaboratively, discussing lessons, and encouraging one another during moments of difficulty. P2 shared, “...kung dili nako masabtan ang leksyon, mangutana ko sa akong mga kauban ug motabang sila nako...” (“...when I do not understand the lesson, I ask my classmates and they help me...”).

Peer support fulfilled both academic and emotional functions. Collaborative learning helped participants understand difficult lessons, while encouragement reduced feelings of isolation and strengthened motivation. For P6, helping one another made learning difficulties feel less individual, while P7 described classmates as sources of encouragement when motivation declined. The participants therefore experienced their classmates not merely as fellow learners but as learning companions.

These findings correspond with evidence that positive peer relationships can support engagement, collaboration, motivation, and learning (Alotaibi et al., 2023; Hu & Talib, 2023). In correctional settings, Walton et al. (2024) similarly identified positive contributions of peer support, although these may be influenced by institutional and organizational conditions. The shared essence of the participants' experience was therefore learning through mutual support and encouragement among peers.

Active Participation and Meaningful Learning

Meaningful learning was also associated with active participation. Participants described engagement through asking questions, listening attentively, participating in group activities, completing tasks, and cooperating with classmates. P3 explained that participating in activities and asking the teacher questions helped make lessons easier to understand. Similarly, P8 valued group activities because discussing lessons with classmates facilitated understanding.

Importantly, engagement did not always take highly visible forms. Some participants were reluctant to speak because of shyness, emotional concerns, or limited confidence but remained involved by listening and completing activities. P4, for instance, acknowledged difficulty concentrating because of personal problems and the jail environment but continued listening to lessons. Thus, meaningful participation encompassed both active verbal engagement and quieter forms of persistence.

The findings indicate that participation gave learners opportunities to construct understanding rather than merely receive information. This is consistent with research emphasizing the value of active learning and supportive teacher–learner interaction in strengthening engagement and comprehension. The phenomenological essence of the subtheme can therefore be expressed as active participation as a pathway to meaningful learning.

Theme 3: Challenges and Personal Transformation

The third major theme revealed the tension between the difficulties of pursuing education in confinement and participants' capacity to persist and experience personal change. Institutional restrictions, environmental distractions, emotional concerns, limited resources, academic difficulties, and low confidence created barriers to learning. Nevertheless, participants developed coping strategies and increasingly perceived themselves as capable of improvement and change.

Institutional Constraints and Learning Barriers

Learning within the jail environment presented conditions that differed substantially from conventional educational settings. Participants described noise, interruptions caused by institutional activities, limited learning materials, restricted instructional time, academic difficulties, homesickness, and problems maintaining concentration. P1 identified noise and activities inside the facility as major distractions, while P5 described classes being interrupted by jail activities. P9 found some subjects, particularly Mathematics, difficult and recognized the need for additional practice.

These barriers demonstrate that educational participation occurred within the broader realities of incarceration. However, participants continued attending, listening, practicing, and completing learning activities despite such constraints. Their narratives suggest that institutional difficulties influenced but did not eliminate their commitment to education.

These findings are consistent with Labarrete and Tiopes (2025), who found that PDL learners continued to attach meaning to ALS despite correctional restrictions. Salem and Balasote (2024) likewise identified the learning environment as an area requiring attention in ALS implementation in Negros Occidental, while Dimas and Tribunalo (2025) emphasized the need for instructional adaptation in response to adult learners' educational gaps and circumstances. Consequently, ALS delivery in jail facilities requires flexibility, adequate learning resources, instructional responsiveness, and coordination between educational and correctional personnel.

Resilience and Coping with Challenges

Participants responded to learning difficulties through persistence, resourcefulness, help-seeking, repeated practice, and reliance on teacher and peer support. Resilience was not characterized by the absence of difficulty but by the repeated decision to continue learning despite barriers. Participants used available materials when resources were limited, sought assistance when

lessons were difficult, returned to learning following interruptions, and redirected attention toward educational and future goals during periods of emotional difficulty.

For example, P4 responded to gaps caused by interrupted schooling by asking the teacher and classmates for assistance and practicing until lessons became understandable. P7 gradually overcame fear of making mistakes through encouragement from teachers and peers. Similarly, P10 described teacher encouragement as helping restore hope during difficult periods. These experiences demonstrate that resilience emerged through the interaction of personal determination and supportive relationships.

Teacher encouragement is particularly relevant because supportive teacher–learner relationships have been associated with stronger behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement (Vargas-Madriz et al., 2024). The participants' experiences likewise suggest that resilience should not be regarded solely as an individual characteristic; it can be strengthened through supportive educational conditions. The phenomenological essence of this experience may therefore be described as continuing education despite barriers.

Identity Change and Personal Growth

Perhaps the deepest change described by participants concerned how they began to view themselves. Their narratives reflected a gradual movement from self-doubt, emotional difficulty, and limited direction toward greater responsibility, confidence, patience, optimism, and future orientation. P1 reported becoming more responsible and serious about the future, while P3 associated successful completion of learning activities with renewed self-confidence and hope.

Personal transformation was gradual rather than immediate. P4 acknowledged continuing periods of low motivation but described becoming more capable of recovering from difficulties and recognizing that the past did not have to determine the future. P10 similarly identified the restoration of hope and the development of goals for life after release as among the most significant changes associated with ALS participation.

These experiences are consistent with Mezirow's (1991) Transformative Learning Theory, which proposes that meaningful learning and reflection can lead individuals to reconsider established perspectives and construct new ways of understanding themselves and their experiences. They also correspond with studies suggesting that correctional education can influence self-conception, confidence, aspirations, personal development, and future orientation (Conway, 2024; Dhlamini et al., 2025; Vandala, 2024).

The essence of this subtheme is therefore the recognition that personal transformation remains possible despite incarceration. Through educational achievement, reflection, supportive relationships, and continued participation, participants increasingly experienced themselves not solely as individuals defined by confinement or past experiences but as learners capable of growth and future achievement.

Overall Interpretation of the Findings

Taken together, the findings demonstrate that the lived educational experience of PDL learners in ALS involved a movement from interruption toward possibility. Participants entered the program with interrupted educational histories, personal struggles, and the restrictions associated with incarceration. Yet education provided a meaningful opportunity to resume learning, accomplish unfinished goals, develop confidence, and imagine a different future.

Motivation was sustained by the participants' desire for self-improvement, educational completion, and eventual reintegration. Learning became meaningful because it provided purpose and enabled participants to experience progress despite confinement. This meaning was strengthened through supportive teachers who provided patient guidance and encouragement and through classmates who offered academic assistance, cooperation, and emotional support. Engagement therefore emerged as a relational process rather than an individual activity.

At the same time, the participants' experiences demonstrate that jail-based education cannot be separated from the institutional context in which it occurs. Noise, restricted schedules, interruptions, limited resources, emotional concerns, academic gaps, and low confidence affected learning. Nevertheless, participants responded through persistence, help-seeking, practice, peer support, and continued participation. Their resilience was therefore developed through the interaction of personal determination and educational support.

Most importantly, ALS contributed to changes in how participants perceived themselves and their future. Education provided opportunities to regain confidence, become more responsible, develop greater emotional control, establish goals, and recognize the possibility of personal change. This supports the transformative view of learning proposed by Mezirow (1991), wherein meaningful educational experiences can contribute to the reconstruction of previously held perspectives about the self and one's possibilities.

The findings further suggest that reintegration may begin before release. Through learning, participants were already developing knowledge, confidence, responsibility, aspirations, and future-oriented identities that could support their eventual return to the community. This interpretation is consistent with Labarrete and Tiopes (2025) and Sala et al. (2026), who emphasized the potential of ALS to contribute to personal transformation, empowerment, and reintegration among incarcerated and formerly incarcerated learners.

Overall, ALS was experienced as considerably more than an alternative pathway for completing basic education. It became a space for learning, connection, resilience, hope, and personal reconstruction. Despite the restrictions of confinement, participants continued to perceive education as worthwhile because it allowed them to see themselves as learners capable of improvement and to envision possibilities beyond their current circumstances. The essential meaning of their lived educational experience can therefore be understood as hope and personal transformation through continuing education despite confinement.

Implications:

The findings imply that the Alternative Learning System should be viewed not only as an educational intervention but also as an important component of rehabilitation and preparation for reintegration among Persons Deprived of Liberty. Since participants associated ALS with hope, self-improvement, completion of interrupted education, and renewed purpose, programs for PDL learners should intentionally connect academic learning with personal development, goal setting, life planning, and preparation for life after release. In this way, ALS can strengthen both educational attainment and future-oriented thinking among incarcerated learners.

Furthermore, the findings emphasize the importance of supportive and responsive teaching practices within jail-based ALS programs. Participants valued teachers who were patient, encouraging, flexible, and willing to provide clarification when lessons were difficult. This suggests that ALS teachers assigned to correctional settings should be equipped with learner-centered and context-sensitive strategies that address differences in educational background, confidence, emotional readiness, and learning pace. Continuous professional development may therefore be necessary to strengthen teachers' capacity to respond effectively to the academic and psychosocial needs of PDL learners.

The findings also imply that peer interaction and the overall learning environment should be strengthened as important elements of ALS implementation. Participants experienced classmates as sources of academic assistance, encouragement, and belonging, while institutional conditions such as limited resources, interrupted schedules, noise, and restricted learning time created barriers to participation. Thus, structured peer-supported activities, adequate learning materials, more consistent instructional schedules, and closer coordination between DepEd ALS personnel and BJMP administrators may help create a more supportive and meaningful learning environment for PDLs.

Finally, the findings have implications for how the outcomes of jail-based ALS programs are evaluated. Success should not be measured solely through enrollment, attendance, assessment results, or completion rates. The participants' experiences indicate that education may also contribute to resilience, confidence, responsibility, identity reconstruction, hope, and readiness for reintegration. Accordingly, DepEd, BJMP, and other stakeholders may consider including indicators of personal growth, learner engagement, psychosocial development, and future orientation when assessing the effectiveness of ALS programs for PDLs. Such an approach recognizes that meaningful educational outcomes may include both academic achievement and transformation in how learners perceive themselves and their future.

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