Online ISSN: 3082-5121
Aloysian Interdisciplinary Journal of Social Sciences, Education, and Allied Fields
https://journals.aloysianpublications.com
Volume 2 Issue 2 (2026)

Functional Literacy Skills of Alternative Learning System Learners in San Carlos City Division

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Publication Date: Febraury 15, 2026 DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.18676657

Abstract

This study aimed to determine the extent of acquisition of functional literacy skills among Alternative Learning System (ALS) learners in the San Carlos City Division for the School Year 2025–2026. Specifically, it assessed learners' skills across six strands: Communication Skills, Scientific and Critical Thinking Skills, Mathematical Skills, Life and Career Skills, Understanding Self and Society, and Digital Citizenship, as perceived by mobile teachers and school heads. The study also examined the degree of seriousness of problems encountered in teaching functional literacy skills.

A descriptive research design was employed, with a total enumeration of 17 mobile teachers and 75 school heads as respondents. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire checklist and analyzed using the Average Weighted Mean and t-test for independent samples.

Findings revealed that the acquisition of functional literacy skills among ALS learners was generally at a moderate extent. Life and Career Skills were rated highest, while Communication Skills and Scientific and Critical Thinking Skills were lowest. No significant difference was observed between the perceptions of mobile teachers and school heads. The problems encountered by mobile teachers were rated as moderately serious, indicating challenges in delivering functional literacy instruction. Based on these findings, an action plan was proposed to enhance learners' acquisition of functional literacy skills.

Keywords*: Functional Literacy Skills, Alternative Learning System, ALS Learners, Mobile Teachers*

Introduction

The Alternative Learning System (ALS) is a key program of the Department of Education (DepEd) designed to provide education to out-of-school youth, adults, and marginalized sectors unable to access formal schooling. ALS aims to develop learners' functional literacy skills, which are essential for employability, lifelong learning, and active citizenship.

Functional literacy encompasses six critical domains: Communication Skills, Scientific and Critical Thinking Skills, Mathematical Skills, Life and Career Skills, Understanding Self and Society, and Digital Citizenship. Developing these competencies equips learners to meet personal, professional, and societal demands.

Online ISSN: 3082-5121
Aloysian Interdisciplinary Journal of Social Sciences, Education, and Allied Fields
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Despite the program's significance, challenges such as limited instructional time, insufficient resources, and varying learner readiness may affect the acquisition of functional literacy skills. Understanding both mobile teachers' and school heads' perceptions of learners' skill acquisition is crucial to identify gaps and improve program delivery.

This study aimed to determine the extent of acquisition of functional literacy skills among ALS learners in San Carlos City Division, examine differences in perceptions between mobile teachers and school heads, assess the seriousness of problems encountered, and propose an action plan to enhance learning outcomes.

Materials and Methods

Research Design

A descriptive research design was employed to systematically examine existing conditions, perceptions, and practices without manipulating variables (Calderon & Gonzales, 2018). This design allowed for the assessment of learners' functional literacy skills across six strands and the identification of challenges encountered in teaching these skills.

Participants

The study used a total enumeration of 17 mobile teachers and 75 school heads in San Carlos City Division, Pangasinan. Respondents were directly involved in the supervision and delivery of ALS programs, ensuring that their insights reflected the actual implementation of functional literacy instruction.

Instrument

Data for this study were gathered using a structured questionnaire checklist, which was adapted from the study of Crisostomo (2018). The questionnaire consisted of two parts. The first part focused on measuring the extent of acquisition of functional literacy skills among ALS learners across six key strands: Communication Skills, Scientific and Critical Thinking Skills, Mathematical Skills, Life and Career Skills, Understanding Self and Society, and Digital Citizenship. The second part assessed the degree of seriousness of the problems encountered by teachers in delivering these skills, providing insights into the challenges that affect the effective implementation of the ALS program.

Procedure

Approval was secured from the Schools Division Superintendent before data collection. The researcher personally administered the questionnaire to all respondents, explained the study's purpose, and ensured confidentiality. Completed questionnaires were collected, encoded, and analyzed.

Data Analysis

The data collected were analyzed using the Average Weighted Mean (AWM) to determine the extent of acquisition of functional literacy skills among ALS learners, with responses measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from Very Low Extent (1) to Very High Extent (5). To identify whether significant differences existed between the perceptions of mobile teachers and school heads, a t-test for independent samples was conducted at a 0.05 level of significance. Additionally, the degree of seriousness of problems encountered in teaching these skills was analyzed using the AWM based on a 3-point Likert scale, with ratings from Least Serious (1) to Serious (3). This approach provided a clear understanding of

Online ISSN: 3082-5121
Aloysian Interdisciplinary Journal
of Social Sciences, Education, and Allied Fields
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learners' skill acquisition, differences in perception, and the challenges affecting functional literacy instruction.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

EXTENT OF ACQUISITION OF THE FUNCTIONAL LITERACY SKILLS ALONG WITH COMMUNICATION SKILLS AS PERCEIVED BY THE MOBILE TEACHERS AND SCHOOL HEADS

Table 2 shows that the acquisition of Communication Skills among ALS learners, as perceived by both mobile teachers and school heads, is generally at a **Low Extent** (overall AWM = 2.11). All individual indicators, including reading newspapers, understanding ads, following instructions in English, conversing in simple English, and presenting ideas in writing or orally, were consistently rated low. This indicates that learners face challenges in comprehending, interpreting, and communicating information effectively. The low level of acquisition highlights the need for targeted interventions, such as enhanced reading and writing activities, practical language exercises, and contextualized communication tasks, to strengthen learners' functional literacy in everyday and academic situations.

Table 2
Extent of Acquisition of the Functional Literacy Skills Along with Communication Skills as Perceived By The Mobile Teachers And School Heads

Communication Skills	Mobile Teachers		School heads		Overall	
	Mean	DE	Mean	DE	AWM	DE
1. Read and understand newspapers and other reading materials both in English and in Filipino.	2.25	LE	2.12	LE	2.19	LE
2. Understand ads and other printed materials along the highway.	2.26	LE	2.34	LE	2.30	LE
3. Understand easily the plot and conversation and dialogue in English when watching Television	1.99	LE	2.07	LE	2.03	LE
4. Follow easily directions and instructions which are expressed in English language	1.98	LE	2.01	LE	2.00	LE
5. Converse using simple English Language	2.17	LE	2.22	LE	2.20	LE
6. Use written language to express one's ideas and feelings clearly and appropriately	1.89	LE	2.17	LE	2.03	LE
7. Respond appropriately to ideas and feelings of others through verbal and non-verbal means.	2.17	LE	2.19	LE	2.18	LE
8. Present an oral summary of an oral or written message that is concise, complete, accurate and original.	1.99	LE	2.01	LE	2.00	LE
Total	2.09	LE	2.14	LE	2.11	LE

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EXTENT OF ACQUISITION OF THE FUNCTIONAL LITERACY SKILLS ALONG SCIENTIFIC AND CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS AS PERCEIVED BY THE MOBILE TEACHERS AND SCHOOL HEADS

Table 3 presents the extent of acquisition of **Scientific and Critical Thinking Skills** among ALS learners as perceived by mobile teachers and school heads. The overall Average Weighted Mean (AWM) of **2.36** indicates that learners acquired these skills at a **Low Extent**. While a few indicators, such as understanding the environment and recognizing changes over time, were rated at a moderate extent, most skills—including investigating societal issues, identifying family and societal problems, applying scientific values, and making recommendations—were rated low. This suggests that learners struggle with critical thinking, problem-solving, and applying scientific knowledge to real-life situations. The findings imply a need for focused instructional strategies, hands-on activities, and practical problem-solving exercises to strengthen ALS learners' scientific reasoning and critical thinking skills.

Table 3
Extent of Acquisition of the Functional Literacy Skills Along with Scientific and Critical Thinking Skills as Perceived by the Mobile Teachers and School Heads

Scientific and Critical Thinking Skills	Teachers		School heads		Overall	
	Mean	DE	Mean	DE	AWM	DE
1. Understand the environment and the relationship of the things around and their role in improving life	2.69	ME	2.71	ME	2.70	ME
2. Investigate a societal issue before making a judgment	2.55	LE	2.65	ME	2.60	LE
3. Identify issues affecting family and Society	1.56	LE	1.82	LE	1.69	LE
4. Recognize that everything changes and can compare life situation in the past with the present in terms of progress in science and technology.	2.71	ME	2.72	ME	2.72	ME
5. Apply scientific values and demonstrate positive attitudes in dealing with the advances of science and technology in various life situations.	2.25	LE	2.31	LE	2.28	LE
6. Make recommendations to persons/authorities concerned to help solve identified problems	2.32	LE	2.36	LE	2.34	LE
7. Predict the effect of changes in one population on other populations in the ecosystem.	2.65	ME	2.66	ME	2.66	ME
8. Apply scientific values and demonstrate positive attitudes in dealing with the advances of science and technology in various life situations	1.89	LE	1.92	LE	1.91	LE
Total	2.33	LE	2.39	LE	2.36	LE

EXTENT OF ACQUISITION OF THE FUNCTIONAL LITERACY SKILLS ALONG WITH MATHEMATICAL SKILLS AS PERCEIVED BY THE MOBILE TEACHERS AND SCHOOL HEADS

Table 4 shows the extent of acquisition of **Mathematical Skills** among ALS learners as perceived by mobile teachers and school heads. The overall Average Weighted Mean (AWM) of **2.64** indicates that learners acquired mathematical skills at a **Moderate Extent**. While learners showed moderate competence in practical applications of mathematics, such as understanding money value, integrating mathematics with

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other disciplines, and reporting data accurately, they struggled with higher-order skills like problem-solving creativity, drawing conclusions from data, and making predictions, which were rated at a low extent. This suggests that ALS learners need more guided practice, real-life problem-solving activities, and instructional support to strengthen their analytical and critical mathematical skills for everyday applications.

Table 4

Extent of Acquisition of the Functional Literacy Skills Along with Mathematical Skills as Perceived by the Mobile Teachers and School Heads

Mathematical Skills	Mobile Teachers		School Heads		Overall	
	Mean	DE	Mean	DE	AWM	DE
1. Demonstrate the importance and value of mathematics as a means of communicating and solving problems in daily life, e.g., computing and comparing costs of goods.	2.64	ME	2.68	ME	2.66	ME
2. Demonstrate creativity, interest, and curiosity in asking questions, defining problems, considering different strategies, and finding appropriate solutions to problems through mathematics, e.g., analyzing the given data in a problem and identifying what mathematical operation will be applied to solve the problem.	2.12	LE	2.15	LE	2.14	LE
3. Exhibit honesty and accuracy in collecting and reporting mathematical data, e.g., use of untampered measuring instruments such as measuring tapes, weighing scales, volume measurers, and electric and water meters.	2.89	ME	2.91	ME	2.90	ME
4. Integrate mathematics with disciplines such as economics, agricultural studies, communication arts, science and technology, geography, cooking, architecture, and music.	2.79	ME	2.82	ME	2.81	ME
5. Read and write the money value (in peso and centavos) and compares values of different denominations of Philippine coins and paper bills.	3.06	ME	3.12	ME	3.09	ME
6. Use of comprehension skills in analyzing problems that would lead to the most accurate way of solving the problem, interpret the number of beats musical notes/rests in a musical composition, etc.	2.76	ME	2.65	ME	2.71	ME
7. Draws conclusions from graphic and tabular data using measures of central tendency and variability.	2.34	LE	2.38	LE	2.36	LE
8. Makes simple predictions of events based on the results of experiments.	2.45	LE	2.51	LE	2.48	LE
Total	2.63	ME	2.65	ME	2.64	ME

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EXTENT OF ACQUISITION OF THE FUNCTIONAL LITERACY SKILLS ALONG LIFE AND CAREER SKILLS AS PERCEIVED BY THE MOBILE TEACHERS AND SCHOOL HEADS

Table 5 presents the extent of acquisition of **Life and Career Skills** among ALS learners as perceived by mobile teachers and school heads. The overall Average Weighted Mean (AWM) of **3.08** indicates that learners acquired these skills to a **Moderate Extent**. Learners showed stronger performance in practical applications, such as understanding technology for productivity, innovating products, financial literacy, and sustainable daily practices. However, foundational skills like planning for life and career development and understanding career-related concepts were slightly lower, though still moderate. This implies that while ALS learners are developing essential life and career competencies, continued guidance, mentoring, and exposure to real-life experiences are necessary to further enhance their readiness for future personal and professional challenges.

Table 5
Extent of Acquisition of the Functional Literacy Skills Along with Life and Career Skills as Perceived by the Mobile Teachers and School Heads

Life and Career Skills	Mobile Teachers		School Heads		Overall	
	Mean	DE	Mean	DE	AWM	DE
1. Appreciate the importance of planning for life and career development .	2.76	ME	2.78	ME	2.77	ME
2. Demonstrate awareness and understanding of the concept of career-related terms such as career, occupation, job and work in planning for the future	2.98	ME	3.01	ME	3.00	ME
3. Demonstrate knowledge of how their experiences and decisions have already influenced their lives and will affect their lives in the future	2.88	ME	2.89	ME	2.89	ME
4. Demonstrate knowledge of themselves: their relationships with others, their skills, their educational plans, future deeams, their predictions for the future to develop life and career plans that include short- and long-term goals	3.01	ME	3.02	ME	3.02	ME
5. Demonstrate understanding of the possibilities and limitations of using appropriate technology as a means to make a living and improve productivity as an employee	3.13	ME	3.18	ME	3.16	ME
6. Innovate one's product to make it unique and a stand-out.	3.24	ME	3.31	ME	3.28	ME
7. Demonstrate knowledge and skills in financial literacy and consumer economics.	3.21	ME	3.25	ME	3.23	ME
8. Demonstrate understanding of daily practices that promote sustainable living	3.24	ME	3.4	ME	3.32	ME
Total	3.06	ME	3.11	ME	3.08	ME

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EXTENT OF ACQUISITION OF THE FUNCTIONAL LITERACY SKILLS ALONG WITH UNDERSTANDING SELF AND SOCIETY AS PERCEIVED BY THE MOBILE TEACHERS AND SCHOOL HEADS

Table 6 shows the extent of acquisition of **Understanding Self and Society** among ALS learners as perceived by mobile teachers and school heads. The overall Average Weighted Mean (AWM) of **2.91** indicates that learners acquired these skills to a **Moderate Extent**. Learners demonstrated strong development in self-awareness, values formation, self-discipline, emotional management, and sense of responsibility. Skills related to taking a stand on social issues and planning for personal change were slightly lower but still moderate. This suggests that while ALS learners are gradually developing their personal and social competencies, ongoing guidance, reflection, and practical application are necessary to strengthen their understanding of themselves and their roles within society.

Table 6
Extent of Acquisition of the Functional Literacy Skills Along with Understanding Self and Society as Perceived by the Mobile Teachers and School Heads

Understanding Self and Society	Mobile Teachers		School Heads		Overall	
	Mean	DE	Mean	DE	AWM	DE
1. Describe oneself by determining own hobby, interest, skills and talents	2.78	ME	2.79	ME	2.79	ME
2. Evaluate one's worth in terms of values/character through identifying strengths and weakness	2.86	ME	2.89	ME	2.88	ME
3. Observe and develop good values that are learned from elders	2.94	ME	2.95	ME	2.95	ME
4. Become self-directed	2.88	ME	2.91	ME	2.90	ME
5. Develop self-discipline at all times	2.91	ME	2.93	ME	2.92	ME
6. Be able to manage emotions and impulses	2.87	ME	3.01	ME	2.94	ME
7. Improve one's sense of responsibility and accountability	2.94	ME	3.09	ME	3.02	ME
8. Strengthen one's personal convictions by taking a stand on social issues and decide when to take a stand and when to compromise	2.67	ME	2.71	ME	2.69	ME
9. Plan for personal change to develop one'sPotential	3.06	ME	3.13	ME	3.10	ME
Total	2.88	ME	2.93	ME	2.91	ME

EXTENT OF ACQUISITION OF THE FUNCTIONAL LITERACY SKILLS ALONG DIGITAL CITIZENSHIP AS PERCEIVED BY THE MOBILE TEACHERS AND SCHOOL HEADS

Table 7 presents the extent of acquisition of **Digital Citizenship** among ALS learners as perceived by mobile teachers and school heads. The overall Average Weighted Mean (AWM) of **3.00** indicates that learners acquired digital citizenship skills to a **Moderate Extent**. Learners showed competency in using mobile devices to access information, communicate, and solve problems, as well as in practicing safe, ethical, and responsible behavior online. While learners are developing foundational digital skills and

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responsible technology use, there remains a need for continued guidance and reinforcement to ensure consistent and safe application of digital competencies in everyday life.

Table 7
Extent of Acquisition of the Functional Literacy Skills Along with Digital Citizenship as Perceived by the Mobile Teachers and School Heads

Digital citizenship	Mobile Teachers		School Heads		Overall	
	Mean	DE	Mean	DE	AWM	DE
1. Demonstrate smooth interpersonal relationships between and among family members in the use technology	2.76	ME	2.93	ME	2.85	ME
2. Employ the use of mobile devices to access information, communicate with others, and solve problems in daily life	3.36	ME	3.37	ME	3.37	ME
3. Develop a sense of responsibility and accountability on the use of technology.	2.76	ME	2.89	ME	2.83	ME
4. Make use of a presentation software application to produce different documents to present data/information in everyday life	2.79	ME	2.84	ME	2.82	ME
5. Respect others and recognize one's rights, skills, talents, and abilities in the use of all media	3.01	ME	3.06	ME	3.04	ME
6. Practice respectful conduct when using the internet	2.94	ME	2.98	ME	2.96	ME
7. Make use of mobile devices as tools to access information and communicate with others.	3.02	ME	3.04	ME	3.03	ME
8. Demonstrate knowledge of basic hardware operations, software operations, and file management in using a computer.	2.82	ME	2.83	ME	2.83	ME
9. Demonstrate safe and ethical practice to reduce and manage risks and maximize opportunities of digital technologies.	3.31	ME	3.32	ME	3.32	ME
Total	2.97	ME	3.03	ME	3.00	ME

SUMMARY OF THE EXTENT OF ACQUISITION OF THE FUNCTIONAL LITERACY SKILLS AS PERCEIVED BY THE MOBILE TEACHERS AND SCHOOL HEADS

Table 8 summarizes the extent of acquisition of the **Functional Literacy Skills** of ALS learners as perceived by mobile teachers and school heads. The overall Average Weighted Mean (AWM) of **2.68** indicates that learners' acquisition of functional literacy skills is at a **Moderate Extent**. Among the six strands, **Life and Career Skills** ranked the highest (AWM = 3.08), followed by **Digital Citizenship** (AWM = 3.00) and **Understanding Self and Society** (AWM = 2.91), showing that learners are more adept at practical and self-management competencies. Conversely, **Communication Skills** (AWM = 2.11) and **Scientific and Critical Thinking Skills** (AWM = 2.36) were the lowest, suggesting that learners still face challenges in expressing ideas clearly, analyzing information critically, and applying scientific reasoning. This implies a need for targeted instructional strategies to strengthen these foundational skills while continuing to develop life-oriented and digital competencies.

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Table 8
Summary of the Extent of Acquisition of the Functional Literacy Skills as Perceived by the Mobile Teachers and School Heads

Functional Literacy Skills	Mobile Teachers		School Heads		Overall	
	Mean	DE	Mean	DE	AWM	DE
1. Communication Skills	2.09	LE	2.14	LE	2.11	LE
2. Scientific and Critical Thinking Skills	2.33	LE	2.39	LE	2.36	LE
3. Mathematical Skills	2.63	ME	2.65	ME	2.64	ME
4. Life and Career Skills	3.06	ME	3.11	ME	3.08	ME
5. Understanding Self and Society	2.88	ME	2.93	ME	2.91	ME
6. Digital citizenship	2.97	ME	3.03	ME	3	ME
TOTAL	2.66	ME	2.71	ME	2.68	ME

SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCES IN THE EXTENT OF ACQUISITION OF THE FUNCTIONAL LITERACY SKILLS BETWEEN THE MOBILE TEACHERS AND SCHOOL HEADS

Table 9 presents the **significant differences in the extent of acquisition of the Functional Literacy Skills** between the perceptions of mobile teachers and school heads. The data show that although there are slight differences in mean scores across all six strands—Communication Skills (2.09 vs. 2.14), Scientific and Critical Thinking Skills (2.33 vs. 2.39), Mathematical Skills (2.63 vs. 2.65), Life and Career Skills (3.06 vs. 3.11), Understanding Self and Society (2.88 vs. 2.93), and Digital Citizenship (2.97 vs. 3.03)—these differences are not statistically significant. The computed t-value of **0.8322** is lower than the critical value of 2.263 at 0.05 level of significance with 5 degrees of freedom. Consequently, the null hypothesis is accepted, indicating **no significant difference** between mobile teachers' and school heads' perceptions. This suggests a shared understanding among educators regarding the extent of ALS learners' functional literacy skills.

Table 9
Significant Differences in the Extent of Acquisition of the Functional Literacy Skills Between the Mobile Teachers and School Heads

Functional Literacy Skills	Mobile Teachers		School Heads	
	Mean	DE	Mean	DE
1. Communication Skills	2.09	LE	2.14	LE
2. Scientific and Critical Thinking Skills	2.33	LE	2.39	LE
3. Mathematical Skills	2.63	ME	2.65	ME
4. Life and Career Skills	3.06	ME	3.11	ME
5. Understanding Self and Society	2.88	ME	2.93	ME
6. Digital citizenship	2.97	ME	3.03	ME
TOTAL	2.66	ME	2.71	ME

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Computed t-value: *0.8322@ df 5*
Alpha: *@ 0.05 level of significance*
Critical Value: *2.263 , df 5*
Decision: *accept the null hypothesis*
Interpretation: *No significant difference*

EXTENT OF SERIOUSNESS OF PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED BY MOBILE TEACHERS

Table 10 presents the **degree of seriousness of problems encountered** by mobile teachers in the implementation of the ALS program. The overall Average Weighted Mean (AWM) of **2.02** indicates that the problems were considered **moderately serious (MS)**. Among the challenges, the most serious problems identified were **lack of facilities to implement learning experiences (AWM = 2.59, Rank 1)** and **lack of modules/instructional materials (AWM = 2.53, Rank 2.5)**, reflecting significant operational and resource constraints. Other notable issues included insufficient livelihood programs, limited on-the-job training for learners, and lack of ALS implementers, which also hinder effective delivery of functional literacy skills. On the other hand, problems such as unclear policies, lack of information dissemination, and insufficient personality development were rated as **least serious (LS)**. These findings suggest that while mobile teachers face moderate challenges in delivering ALS instruction, the primary concerns are **resource and infrastructure-related**, which directly affect learners' acquisition of functional literacy skills.

Table 10
Degree of Seriousness of Problems Encountered

Indicators	Mobile Teachers		Rank
	Mean	DE	
1. Policies are not clearly defined.	1.18	LS	15
2. Lack of just-in-time information dissemination.	1.24	LS	14
3. No available blueprint of the policies, rules, and guidelines for the implementation of the program.	1.76	MS	11
4. Lack of proper coordination between DEpEd and the Learning Center.	2.06	MS	8
5. Lack of funding/resources to implement the program.	1.88	MS	9.5
6. Lack of facilities to implement the learning experience.	2.59	S	1
7. Lack of modules/instructional materials.	2.53	S	2.5
8. Lack of ALS implementers/Mobile teachers.	2.24	S	7
9. Lack of Training and workshops for the ALS.	1.71	MS	12
10. Lack of teaching strategies that fit the learning needs.	2.29	MS	6
11. Lack of on-the-job training for the learners.	2.47	MS	4
12. Lack of personality development.	1.59	LS	13
13. Lack of livelihood program.	2.53	MS	2.5
14. Lack of sponsors, partnerships, and linkages	2.35	MS	5
15. Lack of motivation from the learners.	1.88	MS	9.5
TOTAL	2.02	MS	

Conclusions

The study concluded that Alternative Learning System (ALS) learners in San Carlos City Division were able to acquire functional literacy skills to a moderate extent. Among the different skill areas, learners demonstrated stronger abilities in life and career skills and digital citizenship, while communication skills and scientific and critical thinking skills were less developed. This suggests that learners are better equipped with practical and career-oriented competencies but require additional support in critical thinking and effective communication.

The perceptions of mobile teachers and school heads were aligned, indicating a shared understanding of learners' performance in acquiring functional literacy skills. The problems encountered by mobile teachers in delivering ALS programs were generally considered moderately serious, with the most pressing challenges related to the lack of facilities, instructional materials, and livelihood programs. Less critical issues included unclear policies and insufficient support for learners' personal development.

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