Making Connections: An Intervention Program to Address the Reading Difficulties of ALS Students

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Research Article	ABSTRACT
	This study employed a quantitative, quasi-experimental design to determine the effectiveness of the reading comprehension strategy. concentrating on reading issues among students from Barangay Babag and Naboc who are enrolled in the Alternative Learning System (ALS). Reading comprehension had improved, according to competency tests conducted before and after. According to the findings, learners who participated in the intervention experienced increases in both categories that were statistically significant. This implies that it could be a helpful method for enhancing reading comprehension in the context of ALS. Further research should examine the curriculum's long-term effectiveness and potential applications with different ALS learners' types and settings.

INTRODUCTION

Addressing reading difficulties among Alternative Learning System (ALS) students is crucial for their academic success and overall development. ALS is a parallel learning system in the Philippines that provides a practical option to the existing formal education system. The problem at hand revolves around the difficulties these students encounter in comprehending academic texts and materials, which is a critical skill needed. This struggle can affect their overall academic performance and progress, potentially leading to lower grades, increased dropout rates, and diminished self-confidence (Cunha et. Al, 2017.) According to Main, Hill, and Paulino. (2023) Reading difficulties have been associated with limited academic success and related social-emotional outcomes, including anxiety and low motivation. Recent research on the educational impact of the COVID-19 pandemic indicates that children with poor reading skills were disproportionately disadvantaged in Western Secondary Schools in Australia. This growing number of students experiencing reading difficulties will require effective implementation of strategies to prevent long-term disadvantage, including in the challenging context of secondary schools, where teachers are implementing Direct Instruction. Implementation was monitored via interviews with staff, classroom observations, and field notes. These data revealed that, whilst fidelity of programmed implementation was challenging, programmed delivery and student ability and confidence in reading improved over the three years.

In Biliran Province, City of Leyte, Philippines, the study of Tambis et al. (2023) emphasized that within the local context of Alternative Learning Systems (ALS), one of the significant issues is the reading difficulties observed among these learners. ALS students struggling with reading face challenges such as limited vocabulary, fluency issues, and difficulty in understanding written text, impacting their ability to engage effectively with the material.

In the Municipality of Monkayo, many ALS learners have reading difficulties, which makes it hard for them to process the words they have read in their own context. In fact, among the 10 ALS Learners of Monkayo East district, only five of them can write a complete sentence in the Lesson Strand 1 English. Thus, this study was inspired by these learners on how to help them improve their reading skills as well as to improve their reading comprehension.

The study lies in the limited studies on the specific reading difficulties of Alternative Learning System (ALS) learners, especially in local contexts. Existing researches often overlook comprehension issues, focusing instead on overall academic performance. There is a lack of investigation into factors contributing to these struggles and tailored strategies to address them. This highlights the need for more focused research on the reading challenges of ALS learners to inform effective interventions and policies. The study aims to address the reading difficulties of ALS learners contributing to this problem and to propose potential solutions to enhance their reading skills.

Literature Review

The Alternative Learning System (ALS) in the Philippines was developed by the Department of Education (DepEd) as a response to the growing number of out-of-school youth and adults lacking access to formal education. This parallel learning system offers flexible, community-based education through programs such as the Basic Literacy Program (BLP), Accreditation and Equivalency (A&E), and Skills Training. It aims to equip learners with essential knowledge and competencies for improved employability and life outcomes. Since its implementation in 2004 through Executive Order No. 365, ALS has continued to evolve, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, when the A&E exam was temporarily replaced with portfolio assessments. However, despite the program's accessibility, reading comprehension remains a major hurdle among ALS learners due to limited vocabulary, grammatical weaknesses, and poor reading confidence. Studies by Doronilla (2021) and Caraig et al. (2022) point to the disconnect between formal academic content and learners' real-life contexts, highlighting the need for contextualized, digital, and confidence-building interventions to improve reading proficiency.

Several factors contribute to dropout rates and learning gaps within the ALS system. These include socioeconomic barriers such as poverty, absenteeism, early employment, peer influence, and limited interest in formal learning. Research by Valeza et al. (2017) and Tindowen et al. (2017) found that learners often lack motivation and essential 21st-century skills, with acquisition influenced by variables like age, sex, and employment status. Meanwhile, Abad and Galleto (2020) emphasized the critical role of committed teachers and effective teaching practices in learner success. At the national and international level, reports from the World Education Forum (2015) and East Asia and Pacific Review (2016) advocate for improved monitoring, smaller class sizes, and early intervention to enhance ALS efficiency. The INFED initiative further extends DepEd's reach to marginalized communities by promoting life skills and personal development. Success stories, such as those documented by Egcas and Garganera (2019), show that ALS completers often progress to vocational training or higher education, proving the system's potential to transform lives and provide equitable educational opportunities.

ALS Interventions. Alternative Learning System (ALS) in the Philippines has emerged as a crucial intervention to address the educational needs of out-of-school youth and adults who were unable to complete formal schooling. Designed with flexibility in mind, ALS focuses on practical skills and life competencies rather than rigid academic structures, allowing learners to balance education with work and other responsibilities. Despite its inclusive intent, studies have revealed mixed outcomes regarding its effectiveness. Arzadon and Nato (2015) noted that ALS has not produced significant improvements aligned with the pressing needs of its target population. Castolo and Chan (2016) similarly questioned whether ALS interventions are intensive enough to meet their objectives, citing a strong correlation between educational inputs, implementation challenges, and program results. UNICEF (2021) emphasized that while flexibility encourages enrollment, learners still discontinue the program due to similar issues that led them to leave formal schooling—such as financial constraints, lack of parental guidance, and weak preparation for the A&E Test. Gregorio (2024) highlighted that reading comprehension is essential for ALS learners' educational development, yet comprehension gaps persist regardless of demographic variables, pointing to the need for contextualized and skill-specific interventions. Findings from Pascual (2022) affirmed that financial difficulty should not hinder educational attainment, as many former ALS students exhibited resilience and a commitment to self-improvement.

Further studies underscore both the positive impact and persistent limitations of ALS. Abad and Galleto (2020) documented strong teacher commitment in ALS implementation, yet called for higher systemic support to elevate outcomes. Apao et al. (2014) found that ALS completers reported better livelihood opportunities, increased community engagement, and improved quality of life, while Encabo (2013) and Cristobal (2014) observed that many graduates still struggled to pursue higher education due to financial limitations. Moreover, multiple tracer studies (Tolentino, 2012; Lua, 2012; Baywong, 2012; Harina, 2012) affirmed that economic hardship and the need to work prompted learners to deprioritize further education. Quirrez (2011) and Passion (2014) advocated for job-aligned training and stronger LGU and NGO support to sustain learner participation and post-program success. The study by Valeza et al. (2017) revealed that while learners found ALS informative, the practical application of knowledge was only moderately effective. The Asia Pacific Journal of Multidisciplinary Research (2019) and Caingcoy et al. (2021) reiterated that the true measure of ALS success lies not in pass rates alone, but in its ability to transform lives through life skill development, improved income, and social mobility. To this end, Antipuesto et al. (2022) and Aycocho et al. (2013) advocated for the use of contextualized learning materials and enhanced lesson planning focused on real-world skills, urging implementers to strengthen assessment, program oversight, and learner-centered approaches.

Formal and Non-Formal Education. The Alternative Learning System (ALS) in the Philippines is a parallel educational pathway that integrates non-formal and informal learning approaches to serve out-of-school youth, adults, and marginalized populations who lack access to traditional schooling (DepEd, 2016). It emphasizes functional literacy, life skills, and flexible learning modalities that are responsive to diverse learner contexts, including learners from indigenous communities, conflict zones, and correctional institutions (UNESCO, 2015). ALS utilizes contextualized teaching methods such as life skills-based learning, reflective practices, and educational technologies, often employing the learner's mother tongue and disability-friendly tools. The Bureau of Nonformal Education (BNFE) oversees the annual Accreditation and Equivalency (A&E) Test, which certifies successful learners with credentials equivalent to formal elementary or high school diplomas (Arzadon & Nato, 2015). Beyond literacy, ALS addresses 21st-century competencies such as critical thinking, problem-solving, and communication (Moyer, 2016; Gewertz, 2008). Informal and non-formal education, as core components of ALS, play a strategic role in national development by fostering an inclusive and context-appropriate basic education system (Colardyn & Bjornavold, 2004; Nath et al., 1999). In alignment with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, ALS represents an educational justice mechanism that opens opportunities to underprivileged learners, empowering them to finish their education and contribute meaningfully to society (Pimentel, 2018; Villar et al., 2022).

Despite the successes of ALS, structural and socioeconomic challenges persist. Studies show that barriers such as poverty, geographic isolation, lack of parental support, and limited access to educational resources often hinder participation and completion (Ando et al., 2022; Pilar, 2015). ALS has, however, proven effective in improving learners' quality of life, as evidenced by higher employment rates, professional transitions, and increased family incomes (Labarrete, 2021). Programs such as ALS-EST, which integrates skills training and livelihood education, reflect the government's commitment to aligning education with labor market demands. Portfolio- and performance-based assessments accommodate learner diversity and reinforce the competency-based framework of the revised ALS 2.0 curriculum. Yet, stakeholders stress the need for greater policy mobilization, governance reforms, and stakeholder partnerships to enhance program sustainability and reach. Studies (Doronila, 1997; Caingcoy et al., 2021) argue that the ultimate success of ALS should not be measured solely by academic certification but by long-term impacts on employment, social integration, and lifelong learning. Education remains a powerful force for breaking cycles of poverty and marginalization, and ALS stands as a testament to inclusive, transformative learning—especially when adequately supported by local government units, educators, and civil society.

Reading Comprehension and Illiteracy. Undoubtedly, the magnitude of the importance of reading can be supported. As contained in various pieces of literature, reading is considered a vehicle for understanding concepts across curricula and levels and a fundamental element in the learners' ability to learn and succeed in school, according to Labarret 2019. In essence, it becomes a catalyst in attaining higher education and landing decent jobs, thus improving the living standard of the person in particular and society in general. The mother tongue was the most widely spoken language, followed by Tagalog and English, with a reasonably high reading

comprehension score and an average degree of familiarity and attitude toward the Filipino language, according to Villanueva J, (2022). The most often employed strategies were the Problem-Solving Strategies (PROB), Global Reading Strategies (GLOB), and Support Reading Strategies (SUPP). Students' reading comprehension performance was significantly correlated with their proficiency in the Filipino language and their application of problem-solving metacognitive reading strategies. According to Moneba and Lovitos (2024), reading enjoyment produced the highest score of the three variables, indicating that students thought reading was an engaging activity and one of the most significant ways to learn new things. However, anxiety and reading difficulties rank second in indicators, indicating that while students may enjoy reading, their poor reading comprehension makes it difficult for them to experience positive emotions, and reading and learning new words is the most challenging part of reading. The act of reading suggests that pupils can decipher simple words and have a complete knowledge of the book as a whole, which ranks second to anxiety and trouble with reading. The respondents find it easy to understand the reading material. Additionally, there is a high degree of student motivation. All it suggests is that the pupils are open to participating in the reading exercises. Moreover, Dewi (2018) considers how CSR Collaborative Strategic Reading was implemented. They worked together on reading learning logs, teaching, and learning the process for comprehension as a substitute technique in UIN University's Islam Negeri Walisongo in the university context of Semarang. Furthermore, this research concentrated on how well reading comprehension in higher instruction worked and how students assisted one another in understanding how to send a text. Thirdly, this research aims to explain students' views to look into potential advantages and issues about its application in an EFL academic setting. According to UNESCO (2015), the world illiteracy level is still very high, with about 775 million adults not reading or writing. Three-quarters of these are in ten countries in descending order: India, China, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Brazil, Indonesia, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Two-thirds of these illiterates are women, and very high rates were concentrated in three regions of the world: South and West Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. As the National Literacy Trust (2013) noted, literacy skills are essential to attaining school and fulfilling potential opportunities throughout life. Literacy and numeracy skills are needed in every aspect of life, and denying a child the right to these skills denies them/a good life, skills to adjust correctly, and being a valuable member of society (Ocampo, 2021). Ocampo (2021) asserts that a person who lacks literacy is denied the chance to interact with democratic institutions in order to exercise their right to citizenship, make educated decisions, and act in the public interest. The intellect of an illiterate is dwarfed by their incapacity to assimilate knowledge, making it challenging to control. Nigeria, the most populous black nation in the world and a Sub-Saharan nation, has a sizable illiterate population. UNESCO's (2013) national literacy data show that the adult (15 years and above) literacy rate in Nigeria is 51%, the male literacy rate is 61.38 %, and the female literacy rate is 41.4 %. Forty-one million eight hundred forty-five thousand one hundred seventy-two million adults worldwide lack literacy, with women making up 60.1%. Among youths (15–24 years old), the literacy rate is 66.4%; males make up 75.6 % and females make up 58.0 %. Nine million eight hundred fourteen thousand five hundred sixty-eight million young people lack literacy, with women making up 62.4 %.

The United Nations Literacy Decade, which got underway in 2002, helped countries create policies to lower the number of illiterates; yet it is not feasible to eradicate widespread illiteracy among adults and children by 2025. Regretfully, 10 million school-age children are not attending school, especially in the north; research indicates that Nigeria's literacy rates differ significantly between states and geopolitical zones. Seventy-two percent of primary-age children in the northern state of Borno do not attend school. Conversely, it might be as low as 3% in the southern region. Most primary school dropouts belong to a class of illiterates who have attended school but need to be proficient in the fundamentals of reading, writing, and numeracy. Low literacy and numeracy among primary school graduates is mainly caused by utilizing a foreign language, "English," for communication and learning in schools, according to Parreño, (2023). This study presents particular obstacles Parreño (2023) which highlighted how depressing it is that most language teachers do not speak the language well and do not possess the fundamental abilities they expected to impart. It must determine that illiteracy is the biggest obstacle to a nation's economic success. Most notably, an economic crisis resulting from poverty, which connects to illiteracy, has struck countries in Africa and Southeast Asia. One of the nations in Southeast Asia with the most significant poverty rates has to be determined to be the Philippines. Due to a lack of educational possibilities brought on by illiteracy, the groups most impacted by poverty were Out-of-School Children (OSC), Out-of-School Youth (OSYs), and Out-of-School Adults (OSAs), as mentioned by Apao et al. (2014). The Alternative Learning System (ALS) was developed in response to the issue, enabling all Filipinos to access and complete their primary education in a manner that best meets their needs and circumstances (DepEd, 2016). It is a common misapprehension that reading is essential for academic survival and success. It is also equally important to

recognize the four processes of reading, which include the mental process or the perception of words, understanding of words or comprehension, responses of word meaning, and integration of ideas presented based on prior knowledge and experiences (Longcob et al., 2022; Ogang et al., 2022; Olleras et al., 2022). Reading comprehension is a fundamental cognitive ability for children that support school achievement and successful participation in most areas of adult life (Hulme et al., 2011; Riconalla et al., 2022).

A qualitative-phenomenological technique was used to thematize participant responses (Cabello, 2022). The ALS facilitators, on the other hand, were penetrating more effective teaching techniques to aid the ALS students' grammar and comprehension skills. Besides, there is a constant monitoring of student's growth and performance to ensure that students are well-prepared before taking the ALS Accreditation and Equivalency Test. With this, a high-quality education is demanded outside the classroom. Moreover, a qualitative-quantitative research study was conducted to appraise the effectiveness of the Alternative Learning System Program as well as the attainment of its objectives, which include refining communication skills, literacy skills, critical thinking skills, mathematical skills, and problem-solving skills (Apao et al., 2014). This program was known as victorious in strengthening the participants' life skills. The participant' value of life has ameliorated as they continue to look for purpose and significance in their lives because of the program. It demonstrated that even when not enrolled in a typical school, students can still learn new things and build lasting skills (Cariaga et al., 2022; Mangubat et al., 2022; Pablo et al., 2022). For those who desired to escape poverty and improve their quality of life, an alternative educational system was available (Abucejo et al., 2022; Bahinting et al., 2022; Perez et al., 2022). Conversely, Polaway et. al (2018), suggested that comprehension is a fundamental learning skill that draws meaning from a specific written text by coordinating several interrelated data sources. He claimed that understanding requires decoding textual signals and providing context. In addition, there are different types of comprehension: first is surface comprehension, second is between the line between comprehension, and beyond-the-text comprehension (Bilbao et al., 2016). They argued that understanding is crucial to reading since it loses meaning (Segarino et al., 2022; Ugbamen et al., 2022). The category of factual level also includes literal. It talks about how to assimilate words, assess the meaning of the words, and recognize the relationship between the words. Furthermore, learners must comprehend crucial information and adhere to simple guidelines (Yamon et al., 2022).

The ability to make significant use of reading and writing skills for tasks like using information, interacting with people, and enrolling in a lifelong learning course is known as functional literacy, according to UNESCO (2006). These tasks are critical for an individual's ability to express them daily. A person can utilize it to support the advancement of themselves, their family, and their community. It involves abilities necessary for official and informal participation and those necessary for changing and growing the country. Enhancing participants' functional literacy is one of the program's objectives since it is considered appropriate for handling the difficulties that arise from working in a setting where competition is worldwide. With the claims mentioned above in mind, this study aims to assess learners' functional literacy in the Alternative Learning System and establish a solid foundation for pedagogical intervention and strategic planning to advance and develop the program in question. They believed creative readers should be able to use what they have learned in a new context or environment. In addition, Mickelson and Guttman (2018) claimed that creative comprehension is the reader's response to the material's content, resulting in fresh thoughts based on what they learned. On the other hand, Donaldo (2001), proposed that this dimension requires readers to connect the events and meanings learned in the text to their own or virtual experiences. The Alternative Learning System is a modified program under the current educational system. The government also supported providing materials and other learning resources needed for the program. They pursued strengthening and maximizing stakeholder involvement to boost enrolment and promote the completion of studies by out-of-school adults and youth, which will increase literacy rates. The commitment of the students and mobile teachers, as well as the steadfast cooperation and support of the stakeholders, is necessary for the plan's implementation to be effective. Students' study methods impact their learning and academic performance, and the process impacts the development of cognitive and practical skills and their future career prospects. Similarly, determining students' study habits and their relationship to their academic performance can help them improve their academic performance, strengthen their study habits, and modify them according to (Castillo et.al., 2023).

Another study said that US students, as assessed by PISA and NAEP, struggle with basic literacy tasks like locating information and making inferences, based on national and international tests (Kastberg et al., 2016;

National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). Evaluating educational outcomes is crucial in assessing the effectiveness of a company. While most children in urban areas have access to elementary education in many developing countries, historically disadvantaged individuals and regions still struggle to receive a high-quality education. Education for All aims to provide inclusive, gender-neutral, and meaningful learning outcomes, particularly for those denied education or assigned to low-quality schools. However, achieving these objectives requires significant policy changes, restructuring, governance, and mobilization efforts. Measuring values, attitudes, behavior, and academic achievement changes is essential in evaluating educational outcomes. Success in the job market can also be used as a metric to assess student progress and broader social or economic advancements. It is essential to differentiate between success, achievement, and other outcome measures that may have broader societal benefits. According to Synodi (2023) it serves as a valuable resource for educators, policymakers, and stakeholders in understanding the challenges faced by ALS and finding effective strategies to support their educational journey. There is much review-related literature on reading comprehension of the Alternative Learning System learners who have difficulties understanding the English text; however, the theories that were mentioned will be used for future references. Furthermore, the review emphasizes the need for ALS teachers and community ALS implementers to implement inclusive policies and programs that cater to the unique needs of ALS students. It includes offering comprehension strategies, such as making connections between the English text and ALS learners, to enhance their English comprehension.

Global upheavals, like as the COVID-19 outbreak, worsened the vulnerability of special education pupils and their families. According to Lee (2020) and Bertelli (2020), children with autism spectrum disorder and other cognitive impairments had increased behavioral issues, regression in learning, and emotional distress as a consequence of disruptions in routine and therapy. Parents expressed heightened concern about their children's academic performance, particularly memory recall, attention, and reading comprehension (Gulzar and Qureshi, 2016). As the ALS continues to serve marginalized students, particularly those with special educational needs, a collaborative and innovative approach based on both theory and practice will be vital in transforming educational access into genuine educational equity. The growing need for inclusive and flexible education in the Philippines, particularly within the Alternative Learning System (ALS), demands a diverse approach that incorporates pedagogical innovation, family involvement, and community-based help. Cariaga and colleagues' work provide critical insight into educational features that align with ALS's core goals. For example, Cariaga (2023) highlights the significance of parental involvement in developing learners' reading and numeracy skills—a significant issue in ALS, where learner outcomes are often influenced by the support systems available at home. Strengthening the bond between families and educators is particularly important for kids with special educational needs (SEN), whose development is often reliant on continual communication, collaboration, and emotional support from caregivers. Cariaga (2022) emphasized the need of adaptive and inclusive continuity planning in the face of educational disruptions like as the COVID-19 pandemic, which reflects ALS's commitment to providing accessible and responsive education. These skills are especially crucial for families coping with the specific difficulties of raising children with disabilities. According to Jackson (2004), Ekas et al. (2010), and Rocque (2010), parents of children with exceptional educational needs encounter a range of stressors, including parental exhaustion, financial difficulties, a lack of access to therapy and learning resources, and concern about long-term educational prospects. These characteristics affect not just the child's educational participation, but also the family's ability to actively participate in school-related decisions and activities. Cariaga (2023) reviews the current state of Philippine education and recommends reform choices that might be included into ALS to improve justice, learner-centeredness, and system resilience. As part of this vision, Cariaga (2024) advocates for infusing 21st-century skills such as critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication into instructional design, in accordance with the ALS-Education and Skills Training (ALS-EST) initiative. To develop these skills in kids with SEN, differentiated instruction, assistive equipment, and individualized learning plans may be necessary, all of which require active parental involvement and well-trained facilitators. Furthermore, Cariaga, Pospos, and Dagunan's (2024) research of ICT-based learning in rural areas supports the ALS criterion for accessible, contextualized education. This is particularly advantageous for SEN kids in remote or underdeveloped areas, where educational interventions must be creative and adaptive. Cariaga et al. (2024) emphasize the intimate link between emotional and intellectual development. Their analysis of family narratives emphasizes the need of school systems identifying and addressing the psychosocial aspects of learning, especially for families of disabled children, who often face societal humiliation, isolation, and marginalization (Gona et al., 2010; Thwala, 2004). According to research, many parents of handicapped children are excluded from educational planning due to a lack of training, information, or support. Emotional feelings including shame, embarrassment, and grief (Sencar,

2008; Heiman, 2002) limit parents' ability to completely participate. However, research suggests that when properly guided and empowered, parents may be essential partners in their children's academic success (Lewis & Doorlag, 2006). Close collaboration between parents and ALS facilitators is therefore not only beneficial, but also essential to achieve holistic learning. These challenges are worsened by the financial obligations associated with disability-related care, such as medical bills, adapted equipment, private tutoring, and transportation, which often force families to make difficult choices (Beresford et al., 2007; Dobson et al., 2001). In countries such as the Philippines, where government help for SEN families is limited, many parents report getting no training or support services, in contrast to practices in more inclusive educational systems elsewhere (Mazibuko, 2011).

Statement of the Problem

Many Alternative Learning System (ALS) students struggle with reading, hindering their academic progress and overall potential. This study addresses this significant challenge by implementing and evaluating the "Making Connections" intervention program. The program aims to improve reading and foundational literacy skills among ALS learners. The purpose of this study was to determine the effectiveness of the Intervention strategy to address reading difficulties of ALS learners based on using PHIL-IRI assessment result of the 15 learners of the Alternative Learning System from Naboc Community Learning Center and Babag Community Learning Center of Monkayo ALS east District, Division of Davao de Oro for the school year 2024-2025

Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. What is the competency level of the learners as reflected in the pretest scores?
2. What is the competency level of the learners as reflected in the posttest scores?
3. Is there a significant difference between the pretest and posttest results?

Hypothesis 1. The hypothesis was formulated and tested at a 0.5 level of significance.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study Area

The study was conducted in the community learning centers of the Alternative Learning System in Monkayo East District, Division of Davao de Oro. Namely the barangay Naboc and barangay Babag Community Learning Center. This is where the researcher found the 15 learners of the Alternative Learning System of Monkayo East District.

Design

This is a quantitative research design using a quasi-experimental method in gathering data. That involves collecting, analyzing, and interpreting numerical data by Creswell, 2014. Quasi-experimental design was proposed by Bruce A. Thyer in 2012 to generalize causal inference. The research design was a pre-test-post-test group design wherein the group was given pre-tests in the beginning and post-tests at the end of every period under consideration (Padua, 2000). The data gathered were sourced out from the results of the pre-tests and post-tests of every topic programmed to be discussed in the class, for the duration of the experiment period.

Participants

The subjects of the study were the students of the Alternative Learning System of Monkayo East District for the SY 2024-2025. There were 15 learners from two different CLCs for the purpose of the research through universal sampling, since most of the learners have difficulties in reading, they were screened through Phil-IRI initial screening pre-test.

Research Instrument

This study employed an adapted reading assessment instrument from PHIL-IRI, consisting of a narrative text followed by multiple-choice and constructed-response questions. The multiple-choice questions assessed literal comprehension, requiring participants to select the correct answer from a given set of options. The constructed-response section demanded a higher level of understanding, challenging participants to fill in blanks within sentences and to compose complete sentences answering more complex questions about the story's plot, characters, and themes. This multifaceted approach allowed for a comprehensive evaluation of reading skills across various levels of cognitive demand.

Validation of Instrument

The validation of the research instrument was done by five experts. Initial pilot testing revealed the need for revisions to the narrative text and multiple-choice questions to improve clarity and accessibility. Expert review for further refinements, resulting in a more robust instrument. The final version demonstrated a strong correlation between performance and independent measures of reading comprehension, confirming its reliability and validity for assessing the Alternative Learning System Learners.

Data Gathering Procedures

The researcher adopted the pre-test and post-test from the Phil-IRI Oral Reading Test, a standardized test used in the Department of Education to measure the students' level of reading fluency. 15 students are the recipients of the treatment using the strategy of Making Connections, an Intervention Program. The Phil-IRI Oral Reading pre-test of the group was administered last September 28, 2024. After conducting the pre-test, it was found that almost all students needed to undergo activities that improved their reading comprehension. The implementation of the Intervention Program started right after the Phil-IRI program, which consumed 55 days or 7 weeks. Then, the post-test was given immediately after the implementation of the program for two hours. After conducting the pre-test, it was found that almost all students needed to undergo activities that improved their reading comprehension. The researcher applied the Intervention Program. The implementation procedure started with the teacher-student orientation. The pre-test and post-test results of the classified students/learners with reading difficulties were processed and subjected to statistical treatment. The results were analyzed and interpreted to see if the Intervention Program was an effective tool or not in teaching English with a specialization in reading. Feigelson (2023) stated that not all connections are created equal. Thus, encourages students to make connections, discuss different types of connections (text-to-self, text-to-text, and text-to-world), and the importance of comprehension. These strategies can address the needs and challenges of adult literacy learners. Considering the factors such as motivation, their learning styles, and prior educational experience. The detailed steps on how to conduct this research study were provided in four steps. Step 1: Approved work of ethics review from the research department. Step 2: Written permission that was approved by the Schools' Division Superintendent of Davao de Oro, and then to the District Coordinating School Principal of Monkayo East District, and lastly to our District ALS Coordinator. Step 3, coordination of the researcher with the students and signing the consent letter approved by the learners. Step 3, validation of the reading materials adapted from the DepEd Phil-IRI. Step 4: Conducting the pre-test, intervention, and the post-test. To test the hypothesis formulated, the following statistical tools were used in the research: Mean was used to provide a concise numerical value that represents the average performance of the respondents in taking the pre-test and post-test for reading comprehension. Paired t-test was used to calculate the t-value by comparing the mean difference between the pre- and post-intervention scores to the variability or standard error of the differences.

Ethical Considerations

The design and implementation of "Making Connections," an intervention program addressing the reading difficulties of ALS learners, was done to address the problem among ALS learners. First and foremost, an informed letter of consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring they understood the study's purpose, procedures, potential risks and benefits, and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. The participants informed the benefit of participating in this study such as improved reading skills and academic performance. Confidentiality was maintained throughout the study, protecting participants' identities and data through anonymization and secure storage. The intervention was designed to be non-harmful and beneficial, focusing on supportive and encouraging strategies to enhance reading skills. Any potential discomfort or frustration experienced by participants during the intervention was addressed through empathetic support and adjustments to the program as needed. Finally, the results of the study were presented in a manner that respects the dignity and autonomy of the participants, avoiding any stigmatization or misrepresentation of their abilities. All ethical guidelines and regulations were adhered to throughout the research process.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section discusses the presentation, analysis, and interpretation of data in accordance with the sequence of the statement of the problem.

Competence level of the students' pre-test scores in reading comprehension

Table 1. Pre-test Performance of the ALS Students

Skills	No. of Students	Mean	Class Proficiency	Competency Level
Reading Comprehension	15	4.8	48	Low Mastery

Table 1 presents the pre-test results, revealing that 15 ALS students achieved a mean score of 4.8 in reading comprehension. This corresponds to a class proficiency of 48 percent, categorized as "Low Mastery". This finding suggests a need for targeted interventions to improve reading comprehension skills within this student population. The low mastery level indicates significant room for improvement in reading comprehension abilities.

Table 2. Post-test Performance of the ALS Students

Skills	No. of Students	Mean	Class Proficiency	Competency Level
Reading Comprehension	15	12	100.85	Full Mastery

Table 2 presents the post-test performance of 15 ALS students in reading comprehension. The results show a significant improvement compared to the pre-test. The students achieved a mean score of 12 on the post-test, indicating a substantial increase in their reading comprehension abilities. The class proficiency level is 100.85 percent, which indicates a ceiling effect of making connections to an intervention program to address the reading comprehension difficulties.

Table 3. Test of Difference of means in Pre-test and Post-test Performances of the ALS Students

Control	Mean	p-value	Remarks
Pre-test	4.8		
		0.000	Significant
Post-test	12		

Paired t-test, p-value 0.000, significant

Table 3 presents the difference in means in pre-test and post-test performance of ALS students before and after the intervention program. Before the intervention, students scored an average of 4.8 on the test. After the implementation of Making Connections as an intervention program, their average score went up to 12, and the result showed a p-value of 0.000. This means there is a difference between how students did before and after the intervention. After conducting the pre-test, it was found that almost all students needed to undergo activities that improved their reading comprehension.

The Progress of ALS Students Reading Comprehension Difficulties: Pre-Test vs. Post-Test Scores. This analysis examines the pre-test and post-test reading comprehension scores of 15 ALS students, aiming to understand their progress throughout the program. The data reveals a positive trend in reading comprehension skills; however, a closer examination is needed to fully understand the implications of these scores. The Pre-Test Scores indicate the average reading comprehension level of the students before they began the Intervention Program to address the Reading difficulties of ALS students. However, comparing it to the class proficiency level reveals a significant gap. This suggests that, on average, the students were below the expected proficiency level at the start of the program, highlighting the need for targeted interventions to address existing learning gaps. The Post-Test Scores indicate an improvement in reading comprehension skills compared to the pre-test. The increase in the mean score indicates that the intervention program for ALS learners had a positive impact on the students' reading comprehension abilities. However, it remains higher than the post-test mean score. This indicates that while the students showed improvement, they may still require further support to reach the expected proficiency level, emphasizing the importance of ongoing assessment and individualized instruction.

At the same time, a structured environment and consistent routines provide stability and predictability, reducing anxiety and improving focus. Peer support and opportunities for social interaction cultivate confidence and communication skills, promoting collaborative learning. Breaking tasks into smaller steps makes learning more manageable, ensuring gradual progress without overwhelming students. Optimal seating arrangements and assistive technology further facilitate accessibility, enabling learners to participate actively. Educators build motivation and self-efficacy by recognizing their strengths and using clear, simple language, while consistent routines and positive reinforcement reinforce desired behaviors and foster resilience. By holistically integrating these strategies, the educators create a classroom dynamic where children with special educational needs can thrive academically and socially.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study revealed that the use of the *Making Connections* strategy as an intervention program significantly improved the reading comprehension skills of learners in the Alternative Learning System (ALS) of Monkayo East District. Although the increase in pre-test and post-test scores was minimal, it indicated a positive trend, suggesting that the strategy was effective in addressing reading difficulties. However, the gap between the mean scores and desired class proficiency highlights the need for sustained intervention and tailored instruction. Continued implementation of effective strategies is essential to support ALS learners in achieving higher levels of reading proficiency, which is vital for their academic growth and personal development.

To further enhance learners' reading skills, the following recommendations are proposed:
1. **Individualized Assessment:** Conduct thorough diagnostic assessments to determine each learner's specific reading challenges. This includes analyzing test results, observing reading behaviors, and discussing reading experiences with the students.
2. **Targeted Interventions:** Design and implement focused interventions that cater to the unique needs of each learner. These may include support in phonics, vocabulary development, and comprehension techniques.
3. **Collaborative Learning:** Promote peer-assisted learning and group-based activities to build a supportive and interactive learning environment that encourages reading development through social engagement.
4. **Real-World Applications:** Reinforce the *Making Connections* strategy by integrating real-life contexts and meaningful reading materials that enhance learners' motivation, interest, and understanding.

By embracing these approaches, educators can further close the proficiency gap and empower ALS students with the literacy skills necessary for lifelong learning and meaningful participation in society.

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