

## Communication Skills Learning Challenges among Alternative Learning System (ALS) Learners

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### Abstract

Effective communication is essential for academic success and lifelong learning, yet learners in alternative education settings often face persistent challenges in developing these skills. To address this gap, this paper examined the level of communication skills learning challenges among 141 Junior High School learners in the Alternative Learning System (ALS) to provide a basis for an intervention plan. Employing a descriptive research design, data were collected using a valid and reliable self-developed instrument and analyzed through descriptive and comparative statistical methods. Findings revealed that the majority of respondents were male, relatively young, and had parents with higher educational attainment. Overall, learners faced moderate challenges across reading, writing, speaking, and listening, with reading identified as a particularly difficult area, particularly for learners from families with lower educational backgrounds. A comparative analysis further showed no significant differences in communication skills learning challenges when grouped by age, sex, or parents' highest educational attainment, suggesting that these difficulties are broadly experienced across the ALS learner population. These results emphasize that communication skills learning challenges, though of only moderate level, remain a critical concern for ALS learners and require focused strategies to improve proficiency across the all skill areas. Hence, this study offers guidance for developing interventions that target specific skill gaps to support ALS learners' overall competence.

**Keywords:** *Alternative learning system, communication skills, learning challenges*

### Bio-Profile:

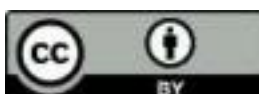
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### Introduction

#### Rationale

According to UNESCO (2023, as cited in Hardy & Woodrock, 2024), education should value every learner equally; however, many individuals worldwide remain deprived of learning opportunities due to factors such as gender, ethnicity, language, religion, socio-economic status, or physical and mental ability. Inclusive education aims to address and eliminate these barriers, encompassing all aspects of the educational process from curriculum design to teaching practices in order to ensure equitable access for all learners.



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While inclusive education is a global priority, its implementation in the Philippine context through the Alternative Learning System (ALS) presents unique challenges, particularly in developing learners' communication skills. ALS offers out-of-school youths and adults a pathway to complete basic education outside formal schooling; however, many ALS learners face challenges in developing essential communication skills, such as reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Deficiencies in such skills can collectively impede the holistic development of communication skills in ALS learners (Idulog et al., 2013).

Tindowen et al. (2017) noted that learners often struggle with language proficiency due to diverse backgrounds and limited formal education, hindering their comprehension and expression. This variable on the level of communication skills learning challenges among Alternative Learning System (ALS) learners aligns with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal on Quality Education (SDG 4)

Along with the growing body of literature on communication challenges among ALS learners, observations in the research venue also reveal unique and pressing gaps that are left unaddressed. For the school year 2024-2025, literacy performance in the Division-Initiated test on communication skills among ALS learners was only 56.75%, which falls below the 75% proficiency level. Also, there was a 9% dropout rate due to economic hardship or limited access to learning centers. Moreover, as observed by the ALS teachers in the research venue, many ALS learners struggle to express their ideas clearly in complete sentences during oral or written activities. There exist persistent struggles of ALS learners in reading comprehension, written expression, oral communication, and active listening. However, no structured intervention program has been developed or implemented to directly address these needs in this setting.

In this context, the researcher finds an urgent need to conduct a study to identify the specific communication challenges ALS learners face in this environment, in order to design an intervention, plan responsive to their distinct needs.

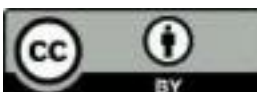
### **Literature Review**

Communication skills learning challenges among Alternative Learning System (ALS) learners stem from the complex nature of communication itself, which requires not only basic literacy but also advanced cognitive, linguistic, and social competencies (Snow & Uccelli, 2019). These challenges are further intensified by limited instructional time, diverse learner backgrounds, and inconsistent prior educational experiences, highlighting the need for targeted and context-specific interventions. The social importance of the ALS program is often overlooked, particularly in addressing learners' oral communication skills, which exposes them to misunderstanding, discrimination, and even bullying due to their age or past educational experiences (Bantulo, 2016). Communication difficulties among ALS learners are largely rooted in gaps in literacy foundations, limited language exposure, and inconsistent learning environments, further influenced by diverse educational and socio-economic backgrounds (Dizon, 2020).

Moreover, communication challenges are closely linked to the development of core language skills, particularly speaking and listening. Speaking is a vital component of effective communication, requiring not only linguistic knowledge but also strategic competence and regular practice (Al-Roud, 2016; Chou, 2021). In today's globalized context, strong speaking skills are essential for academic success, social interaction, and employment opportunities. However, ALS learners often struggle with pronunciation, fluency, anxiety, and lack of confidence, which hinder their oral communication performance.

Equally important is listening, which serves as the foundation for language acquisition and effective communication. Listening is not merely passive hearing but involves complex processes such as attention, comprehension, interpretation, and emotional regulation (Gallo, 2024; Tyagi, 2024). It is a prerequisite to speaking because learners must first understand input before producing language (Widodo & Gunawan, 2018; Windayamati, 2022). Difficulties in listening arise from limited vocabulary, fast speech, unfamiliar accents, and lack of concentration, all of which affect learners' ability to respond appropriately and engage in meaningful communication.

In addition to speaking and listening, communication difficulties are also evident in reading and writing. Reading remains a significant concern globally and in the Philippines, with declining performance reflected in international assessments such as PISA. Learners commonly struggle with identifying the main idea, integrating text structure, and applying higher-order thinking skills (Stevens et al., 2020; Fuqaha & Wartim, 2023). Writing, on the other hand, requires strong vocabulary, grammar, and comprehension skills, yet ALS learners often face challenges



due to limited instructional support, inadequate teaching strategies, and contextual constraints such as lack of time and resources (Nguyen & Suwannabubpha, 2021).

Research indicates that multiple factors influence these communication difficulties among ALS learners. Socio-economic status, parental education, and language exposure at home play significant roles in shaping learners' performance across speaking, reading, writing, and listening tasks (Huang et al., 2018; Abbasian et al., 2020). Studies also show mixed results regarding the influence of age and sex, with some findings suggesting differences in performance while others report minimal impact (Alejandro et al., 2025; Maramag, 2022; Gregorio, 2024). Psychological factors such as anxiety, lack of confidence, and fear of negative evaluation further contribute to speaking and listening difficulties (Islam & Roy, 2014; Loureiro et al., 2020).

Studies on ALS learners further reveal that most participants are younger, often male, and come from low-income or unemployed backgrounds, although some contexts report balanced gender distribution (Mangao et al., 2024; Amarin et al., 2024). Overall, learners generally demonstrate moderate levels of communication difficulty, with writing often identified as the weakest area. Speaking and listening skills show mixed results, with some learners achieving satisfactory performance while still experiencing challenges in fluency and grammar (Labad et al., 2024; Del Rosario, 2025). Despite variations in findings, communication challenges among ALS learners are generally moderate and shaped by a combination of cognitive, linguistic, social, and environmental factors.

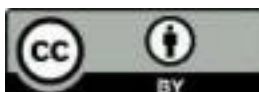
### **Theoretical Underpinnings**

This study is anchored on the Theory of Difficulty proposed by David Perkins (1988) and the Granular Learning Theory proposed by Labarrete and Gillo (2023). The Theory of Difficulty explains that learning challenges arise from the inherent complexity of knowledge itself, where some concepts are naturally more abstract, complicated, or counterintuitive than others. Perkins emphasized that difficulty is not only influenced by learner effort but also by how knowledge is structured and presented. In the context of this study, communication skills such as reading, writing, speaking, and listening are inherently complex tasks that require higher-order thinking, linguistic competence, and cognitive processing. Reading involves inference and interpretation, writing requires organization and grammatical accuracy, while speaking and listening demand fluency, comprehension, and real-time processing, showing that learners' difficulties are largely rooted in the nature of the tasks themselves.

Complementing this is the Granular Learning Theory, which posits that learning becomes more effective when instruction is broken down into smaller, manageable, and context-based segments aligned with learners' real-life experiences (Labarrete & Gillo, 2023). This theory highlights the importance of considering learners' prior knowledge, learning pace, and socio-economic background in designing instruction, promoting flexible and adaptive teaching approaches rather than a one-size-fits-all model. In relation to the present study, this approach is highly relevant as it supports the need to deconstruct complex communication skills into achievable learning steps suited to ALS learners' varied competencies. By applying granular learning principles, educators can design more inclusive and responsive interventions that help learners gradually overcome difficulties in reading, writing, speaking, and listening.

### **Objectives**

This study aimed to determine the level of communication skills learning challenges among Alternative Learning System (ALS) learners in two (2) clusters of a small-sized division in the Negros Island Region for the school year 2025-2026 as a basis for an intervention plan. Specifically, this would answer the following questions: 1) the profile of the respondents in terms of sex, age, and parents' educational attainment; 2) the level of level of communication skills learning challenges among Alternative Learning System (ALS) learners according to reading skills, writing skills, speaking skills, and listening skills; and 3) the significant difference in the level of communication skills learning challenges among Alternative Learning System (ALS) learners when grouped and compared according to the aforementioned variables.



## Methodology

This section discusses the methods used to gather and analyze data based on the specific predetermined objectives. This outline includes research design, subject-respondents, research instruments, data collection procedures, ethical considerations, data analysis, and statistical methods.

### Research Design

In this study, the researcher used a descriptive-comparative method to determine the level of communication skills learning challenges among Alternative Learning System (ALS) learners in two (2) clusters of a small-sized division in the Negros Island Region for the school year 2025-2026, as a basis for an intervention plan.

According to Atmowardoyo (2018), descriptive research is the method used by researchers to describe phenomena as accurately as possible. Descriptive research is comparative in nature when the researcher describes more than one group or condition to identify similarities and differences between them. Furthermore, comparative research involves the study of similarities and differences between two or more cases without experimental manipulation (Miri & Dehdashti Shahrokh, 2019).

The descriptive method is suitable for this research because the researcher gathered detailed information on ALS learners' communication skills challenges and analyzed them without manipulating variables. Further, by using the descriptive design, the researcher can appropriately present the existing challenges and levels of communication skills among ALS learners, thereby providing a factual basis for proposing an intervention plan.

### Respondents

The respondents of this study were a sample of 141 Junior High School ALS learners from a total population of 220, as determined by the Cochran formula. The Cochran formula is used to calculate an ideal sample size given a desired level of precision, a desired confidence level, and an estimated proportion of the attribute in the population (Ahmed, 2024). It is considered especially appropriate in situations with large populations.

The 141 respondents were selected through stratified random sampling, ensuring that all clusters were equally represented. Stratified random sampling is a technique in which the total population is divided into homogeneous groups (strata) to select the sample (Ahmed, 2024). Using the sample-to-population ratio, the number of learners per school was determined, and the final sample respondents were selected through simple random sampling.

### Instrument

The study utilized a self-developed questionnaire consisting of two parts: Part I gathered respondents' demographic profile (age, sex, and parents' highest educational attainment), while Part II assessed the level of communication skills learning challenges among ALS learners across four areas—reading, writing, speaking, and listening—each with eight items rated on a five-point Likert scale. The instrument underwent expert validation by three education specialists, yielding a validity score of 4.85, interpreted as excellent based on established criteria. Reliability was tested through a dry run involving 30 ALS learners from another cluster using Cronbach's Alpha, which resulted in a coefficient of 0.874, indicating good internal consistency of the instrument.

### Procedure for Data Collection

After the research instrument's validity and reliability were established, the researcher sought permission from the school division superintendent to conduct the study. Upon approval, he secured parents' consent before administering the questionnaires, via letters delivered to the school principals. Since the respondents were Junior High School ALS learners, questionnaires were administered during their remedial sessions. Questionnaires were retrieved right after the administration.



## Data Analysis and Statistical Treatment

Objective No. 1 used descriptive analytical scheme and frequency counts and the simple percentage formula to describe the profile of the respondents in terms of age, sex, and parents' highest educational attainment.

Objective No. 2 used a descriptive-analytical scheme and mean to determine the level of communication skills learning challenges among ALS learners across Reading, Writing, Speaking, and Listening.

Objective No. 3 employed a comparative analytical scheme and Mann-Whitney U test in determining if there is a significant difference in the level of communication skills learning challenges among ALS learners when grouped and compared according to the aforementioned variables.

## Ethical Considerations

When conducting research, ethics should be considered to ensure that respondents' participation is voluntary, informed, and secure. It must be ensured that respondents participate voluntarily and without pressure. The privacy and confidentiality of the respondents should be protected. The information collected was held and processed in accordance with RA 10173, the Data Privacy Act of 2012. It is crucial to make it clear to respondents/participants that declining to participate in the study has no negative consequences. The respondents should understand the study's purpose, benefits, and risks before deciding whether to participate. The participants' information in this study was kept confidential. To prevent linking personally identifiable information to other data, participants' information was anonymized. Any harm, either physical, social, psychological, or otherwise, were kept to a bare minimum. The researcher ensured his work was original, free of research misconduct or plagiarism, and accurately communicated his findings.

## Results and Discussions

This section summarizes the study's findings, which come from careful data gathering, in-depth analysis, and thoughtful interpretation. After this, meaningful conclusions were drawn from the initial phase, offering valuable insights.

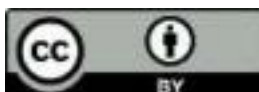
### Profile of the Respondents in Terms of Variables Age, Sex, and Parents' Educational Attainment

This section presents the demographic information of the study participants. It includes details about the respondents' age, sex and parents' educational attainment.

**Table 1**

*Profile of the Respondents*

| Variables                          | Categories                                          | Frequency | Percentage |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Age                                | Younger<br>(below 20 years old)                     | 102       | 72.30      |
|                                    | Older<br>(21 years old and above)                   | 39        | 27.70      |
| Sex                                | Male                                                | 74        | 52.50      |
|                                    | Female                                              | 67        | 47.50      |
| Parents' Educational<br>Attainment | Lower<br>(Elementary level/Graduate)                | 60        | 42.60      |
|                                    | Higher<br>(High School Level/Graduate and<br>above) | 81        | 57.40      |



Total

141

100.00

Table 1 presents the respondents' profiles by age, sex, and parents' educational attainment. As shown in the table, the majority of respondents, 102 (72.30%), are younger than 20 years old, while 39 (27.70%) are older than 21 years old. This indicates that most ALS learners are beyond the typical age range of Junior high school learners and are considered young adults. Similarly, these findings complement the Department of Education's (2018) data, which show that most ALS enrollees are aged 15-24, suggesting that the program is more compelling to younger people.

Regarding sex, 52.50% (74) of the respondents are male, and 47.50% (67) are female. This suggests that males are more likely to return to ALS after leaving formal schooling to improve their job opportunities and complete basic education through a flexible program.

Regarding parents' educational attainment, 60 (42.60%) reached the elementary level, while 57.40% (81) reached the high school level and above. This implies that most of the respondents come from families whose parents have attained a basic level of education, potentially influencing their learners' academic experiences and attitudes toward education.

This is similar to Acevedo's (2025) and Amarin et al.'s (2024) findings, which showed that most ALS learners were young adults with males outnumbering females, and that most of their parents had attained a high school level of education. However, this finding contradicts that of Mangao et al. (2024), who reported that a much larger proportion of ALS learners were older adults. where parents' highest educational attainment is split between elementary and high school levels, with a majority at the high school level, this finding also contrasts with Amarin et al. (2024), Aratea (2025), and Gregorio (2024), who reported a greater proportion of female than male participants in their study.

### Level of Communication Skills Learning Challenges Among Alternative Learning Systems (ALS) Learners in the Areas of Reading Skills, Writing Skills, Speaking Skills, and Listening Skills

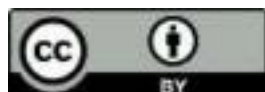
**Table 2**

*Level of Communication Skills Learning Challenges Among Alternative Learning Systems (ALS) Learners According to Reading Skills*

| Items                                                   | Mean        | Interpretation        |
|---------------------------------------------------------|-------------|-----------------------|
| <i>It is a hard time for me to ...</i>                  |             |                       |
| 1. understand the main idea of what I read.             | 3.92        | High Level            |
| 2. recognize unfamiliar words in a passage.             | 3.43        | Moderate Level        |
| 3. read aloud with correct pronunciation.               | 3.36        | Moderate Level        |
| 4. understand the meaning of what I read without help.  | 3.48        | Moderate Level        |
| 5. read and follow written instructions.                | 3.19        | Moderate Level        |
| 6. identify important details from a reading selection. | 3.40        | Moderate Level        |
| 7. summarize what I have read.                          | 3.35        | Moderate Level        |
| 8. answer questions based on a reading passage.         | 3.39        | Moderate Level        |
| <b>Overall Mean</b>                                     | <b>3.44</b> | <b>Moderate Level</b> |

Table 2 shows the level of communication skills learning challenges among Alternative Learning Systems (ALS) learners, by reading skills. As shown in the table, the overall mean score was 3.44 with a verbal interpretation of moderate level. Notably, the lowest mean score of 3.19, at the moderate level, was obtained by item no. 5, which focused on the challenge of reading and following written instructions.

On the other hand, the highest mean score of 3.92 or high level was obtained by item no. 1 on the challenge of understanding the main idea of what has been read. This skill requires higher-level comprehension and critical thinking. Since many ALS learners have had interruptions in formal schooling, they often struggle to distinguish key points from supporting details. Additionally, some learners tend to focus on decoding words rather than grasping the overall meaning, which hinders their ability to accurately identify the main idea.



This finding supports Stevens et al. (2020), who found that identifying the main idea remains a persistent difficulty among many upper-elementary students without explicit instruction, as well as Fuqaha and Wartim (2023), who also documented that learners' greatest challenge lies in identifying the main idea. Generally, this supports the finding that learners' reading skills remained at the lowest level, as reported by Labarrete (2019).

**Table 3**

*Level of Communication Skills Learning Challenges among Alternative Learning Systems (ALS) Learners According to Writing Skills*

| Items                                             | Mean        | Interpretation        |
|---------------------------------------------------|-------------|-----------------------|
| <i>It is hard for me to ...</i>                   |             |                       |
| 1. write complete sentences with correct grammar. | 3.56        | High Level            |
| 2. organize my ideas clearly in writing.          | 3.49        | Moderate Level        |
| 3. spell words correctly.                         | 3.38        | Moderate Level        |
| 4. use correct punctuation in my writing.         | 3.23        | Moderate Level        |
| 5. write a short paragraph about a topic.         | 3.33        | Moderate Level        |
| 6. express my thoughts in written form.           | 3.43        | Moderate Level        |
| 7. revise or edit my writing for errors.          | 3.12        | Moderate Level        |
| 8. write answers to questions in my own words.    | 3.38        | Moderate Level        |
| <b>Overall Mean</b>                               | <b>3.36</b> | <b>Moderate Level</b> |

Table 3 depicts the level of communication skills learning challenges among alternative learning systems (ALS) learners according to writing skills. The overall mean obtained was 3.36, interpreted as a moderate level. At the same moderate level is item no. 7, which had the lowest mean of 3.12. This is on the learners' challenge of revising and correcting writing errors.

Meanwhile, the highest mean result of 3.56 or a high level was obtained by item no. 1 on the difficulty of writing sentences with correct grammar. Junior high school ALS learners find this highly difficult because they have limited exposure to formal writing and grammar instruction and have experienced interruptions in schooling.

This finding confirms the study by Hikman et al. (2019), which found that junior high school students' writing skills were poor in both mechanics and grammar. Similarly, it supports the findings of Deponio et al. (2025), who found that ALS learners possess relatively strong grammatical knowledge but still struggle to apply it effectively in writing. Moreover, in the same study, it was noted that ALS JHS completers ranked "Knowledge of English grammar" very highly, whereas "Developed writing skills in English" ranked among the lowest. The study of Del Rosario (2025) also found that across all competencies, writing skills were the lowest.

The result contradicts that of Amarga and Quirap (2024), showing that the level of writing challenges in terms of content, mechanics, and organization is "Highly Challenged".

**Table 4**

*Level of Communication Skills Learning Challenges among Alternative Learning Systems (ALS) Learners According to Speaking Skills*

| Items                                                    | Mean        | Interpretation        |
|----------------------------------------------------------|-------------|-----------------------|
| <i>It is hard for me to ...</i>                          |             |                       |
| 1. speak clearly so others can understand me.            | 3.28        | Moderate Level        |
| 2. use correct grammar while speaking.                   | 3.45        | Moderate Level        |
| 3. express my ideas in complete sentences when speaking. | 3.41        | Moderate Level        |
| 4. pronounce words correctly.                            | 3.37        | Moderate Level        |
| 5. speak in front of a small group or class.             | 3.28        | Moderate Level        |
| 6. ask and answer questions during a discussion.         | 3.21        | Moderate Level        |
| 7. participate in conversations using appropriate words. | 3.18        | Moderate Level        |
| 8. give short oral reports or share stories.             | 3.23        | Moderate Level        |
| <b>Overall Mean</b>                                      | <b>3.30</b> | <b>Moderate Level</b> |



Table 4 shows the level of communication skills learning challenges among Alternative Learning Systems (ALS) learners, by speaking skills. All the items were of a moderate level; hence, the overall mean of 3.30 was also moderate. It is clear from the table that the lowest mean score was in item no. 7 on the difficulty of participating in a conversation using appropriate words.

On the other hand, the item with the highest mean score of 3.45, still at a moderate level, was item no. 2, which addressed the ALS learners' challenge of using correct grammar while speaking. This implies that although learners have some knowledge of grammar rules, they encounter difficulty applying them in spontaneous communication, possibly due to limited exposure to spoken English and a lack of confidence in oral expression.

This aligns with the study by Labad et al. (2024), which found that Junior high school students experienced moderate speaking difficulties, including challenges with applying correct grammatical structures during oral communication. Moreover, Islam and Roy (2014) affirm that the lack of a language lab poses a significant challenge for learners and teachers in developing their speaking skills.

On the other hand, the finding does not support the study by Parede et al. (2022), which found that, while students reported difficulty in many aspects of speaking (pronunciation, vocabulary, fluency, confidence), grammar was not viewed by many students as a major difficulty. Similarly, the overall result of a moderate level of difficulty in speaking skills contradicts Aratea's (2015) finding that ALS learners have low competence in extensive speaking.

**Table 5**

*Level of Communication Skills Learning Challenges among Alternative Learning Systems (ALS) Learners According to Listening Skills*

| Items                                                            | Mean        | Interpretation        |
|------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|-----------------------|
| <i>It is hard for me to ...</i>                                  |             |                       |
| 1. understand spoken instructions.                               | 3.21        | Moderate Level        |
| 2. follow along when someone is speaking in English or Filipino. | 3.40        | Moderate Level        |
| 3. remember what I heard after a lesson or conversation.         | 3.13        | Moderate Level        |
| 4. identify the main idea from what someone says.                | 3.32        | Moderate Level        |
| 5. understand words or terms I hear for the first time.          | 3.41        | Moderate Level        |
| 6. stay focused while listening to a speaker.                    | 3.01        | Moderate Level        |
| 7. respond correctly after listening to a question or direction. | 3.03        | Moderate Level        |
| 8. listen and take notes at the same time.                       | 3.07        | Moderate Level        |
| <b>Overall Mean</b>                                              | <b>3.20</b> | <b>Moderate Level</b> |

Table 5 shows the level of communication skills learning challenges among alternative learning systems (ALS) learners according to listening skills. The overall mean score, as shown in the table, was 3.20, indicating a moderate level. Meanwhile, item no. 6 on the challenge of staying focused while listening to a speaker got the lowest mean of 3.01, or a moderate level.

Similarly, it was at a moderate level for item no. 5, which obtained the highest mean score of 3.41. It is the challenge of understanding words or terms heard for the first time. This implies that ALS learners have limited vocabulary and listening comprehension, making it difficult for them to understand unfamiliar words during conversations or lessons.

This supports the result of Windamayanti et al. (2021), who found that students struggle with listening comprehension mainly due to limited vocabulary, fast speech, and low confidence; and to Hardiyanto et al. (2021), who revealed that low-proficiency students faced significant difficulties with unfamiliar words, lack of vocabulary, and speed of speech. Nevertheless, this contradicts Del Rosario's (2025) finding that ALS learners scored at the "skilled" level in English communication, with many listening and speaking indicators rated as competent.



### Comparative Analysis in the Level of Communication Skills Learning Challenges among Alternative Learning System (ALS) Learners in the Areas of Reading Skills, Writing Skills, Speaking Skills, and Listening Skills when Grouped According to Variables Age, Sex, and Parents' Educational Attainment

This part presents evidence on whether significant differences existed in the level of communication skills learning challenges among Alternative Learning System (ALS) learners when grouped and compared by age, sex, and parents' educational attainment.

**Table 6**

*Difference in the Level of Communication Skills Learning Challenges Among Alternative Learning System (ALS) Learners According to Reading Skills When Grouped and Compared According to Age, Sex, and Parents' Educational Attainment*

| Variable                        | Category | N   | Mean Rank | Mann-Whitney U | p-value | Sig. level | Interpretation  |
|---------------------------------|----------|-----|-----------|----------------|---------|------------|-----------------|
| Age                             | Younger  | 102 | 70.59     | 1947.50        | 0.848   |            | Not Significant |
|                                 | Older    | 39  | 72.06     |                |         |            |                 |
| Sex                             | Male     | 74  | 73.68     | 2281.00        | 0.412   | 0.05       | Not Significant |
|                                 | Female   | 67  | 68.04     |                |         |            |                 |
| Parents' Educational Attainment | Lower    | 60  | 76.00     | 2130.00        | 0.209   |            | Not Significant |
|                                 | Higher   | 81  | 67.30     |                |         |            |                 |

Table 6 shows the difference in the level of communication skills learning challenges among Alternative Learning System (ALS) learners, grouped by reading skills, age, sex, and parents' educational attainment. Using the Mann-Whitney U test, the result was not significant.

As to age, the younger group had a mean rank of 70.59 while the older group had 72.06, with a test value of 1947.50 and a p-value of 0.848. As to sex, the male group had a mean rank of 73.68 while the female group had 68.04, with a test value of 2281.00 and a p-value of 0.412. As for parents' educational attainment, the lower group had a mean rank of 76.00, while the female group had a mean rank of 67.30, with a test value of 2130.00 and a p-value of 0.209. Since all the obtained p-values were greater than the 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis was accepted, indicating that there is no significant difference in the level of communication skills learning challenges among Alternative Learning System (ALS) learners in terms of reading skills when grouped and compared according to age, sex, and parents' educational attainment.

The result implies that reading-related communication challenges are distributed across ages, as ALS learners have interrupted schooling; age alone may not determine reading ability. Furthermore, both male and female ALS learners experience similar challenges in communication and reading because the ALS environment provides a more flexible and inclusive setting where learners share comparable learning experiences, resources, and opportunities regardless of gender. Also, parental schooling has no bearing on reading challenges for ALS learners because many of them are older and no longer depend on parental support.

This is consistent with Del Rosario's (2025) study, which found that although learners showed weaknesses in some communication areas, there were no significant differences by age. However, this does not align with the results of Alejandro et al. (2025), who found significant sex differences in basic reading task difficulty.



**Table 7**

*Difference in the Level of Communication Skills Learning Challenges Among Alternative Learning System (ALS) Learners According to Writing Skills when Grouped and Compared According to Age, Sex, and Parents' Educational Attainment*

| Variable                        | Category | N   | Mean Rank | Mann-Whitney U | p-value | Sig. level | Interpretation  |
|---------------------------------|----------|-----|-----------|----------------|---------|------------|-----------------|
| Age                             | Younger  | 102 | 71.39     | 1949.50        | 0.855   |            | Not Significant |
|                                 | Older    | 39  | 69.99     |                |         |            |                 |
| Sex                             | Male     | 74  | 76.15     | 2098.00        | 0.114   | 0.05       | Not Significant |
|                                 | Female   | 67  | 65.31     |                |         |            |                 |
| Parents' Educational Attainment | Lower    | 60  | 68.76     | 2295.50        | 0.573   |            | Not Significant |
|                                 | Higher   | 81  | 72.66     |                |         |            |                 |

Table 7 shows the difference in the level of communication skills learning challenges among Alternative Learning System (ALS) learners, grouped by writing skills, age, sex, and parents' educational attainment. Using the Mann-Whitney U test, the result was not significant.

When grouped and compared by age, the younger and older groups had mean ranks of 71.99 and 69.99, respectively, with a test value of 1949.50 and a p-value of 0.855. When grouped and compared by sex, the male and female groups had mean ranks of 76.15 and 65.31, respectively, with a test value of 2098.00 and a p-value of 0.114. When grouped and compared according to parents' educational attainment, the lower and higher groups had mean ranks of 68.76 and 72.66, respectively, with a test value of 2295.50 and a p-value of 0.573. Since all computed p-values exceeded the 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis that there is no significant difference in the level of communication skills learning challenges in writing among Alternative Learning System (ALS) learners, when grouped and compared according to the identified variables, was not rejected.

The result implies that writing challenges are consistent across ALS learners, as proficiency depends more on literacy exposure and instruction than on age or experience. Further, sex does not play a determining role in their writing performance, as both male and female learners receive equal learning opportunities and instructional support from mobile ALS teachers. Finally, home educational background has no bearing on learners' writing difficulties, implying that regardless of parental education, ALS learners benefit primarily from the literacy instruction and support provided within the program rather than from academic guidance at home.

This finding aligns with Del Rosario (2025), revealing no significant differences in listening challenges by sex. However, this contradicts the results of Marijuan & Salvaleon (2025), which showed a significant difference in writing performance by socio-economic status and parental educational attainment, and of Amarga and Quirap (2024), who showed a significant difference in writing challenges by age.

**Table 8**

*Difference in the level of communication skills learning challenges among Alternative Learning System (ALS) learners according to Speaking Skills when grouped and compared according to the Age, Sex, and Parents' Educational Attainment*

| Variable | Category | N   | Mean Rank | Mann-Whitney U | p-value | Sig. level | Interpretation  |
|----------|----------|-----|-----------|----------------|---------|------------|-----------------|
| Age      | Younger  | 102 | 71.54     | 1933.50        | 0.797   | 0.05       | Not Significant |



|                                 |        |    |       |         |       |                 |
|---------------------------------|--------|----|-------|---------|-------|-----------------|
|                                 | Older  | 39 | 69.58 |         |       |                 |
| Sex                             | Male   | 74 | 70.96 | 2476.00 | 0.990 | Not Significant |
|                                 | Female | 67 | 71.04 |         |       |                 |
| Parents' Educational Attainment | Lower  | 60 | 70.33 | 2389.50 | 0.865 | Not Significant |
|                                 | Higher | 81 | 71.50 |         |       |                 |

Table 8 reveals the difference in the level of communication skills learning challenges among Alternative Learning System (ALS) learners, grouped by speaking skills, age, sex, and parents' educational attainment. Using the Mann-Whitney U test, the overall result was not significant.

Based on age grouping, the younger group had a mean rank of 71.54, and the older group, 69.58, yielding a test value of 1933.50 and a p-value of 0.797. Based on sex grouping, the male had a mean rank of 70.96, the older, 71.04, yielding a test value of 2476.00 and a p-value of 0.990. Based on grouping by parents' educational attainment, the lower group had a mean rank of 70.33, and the higher group, 71.50, yielding a test value of 2389.50 and a p-value of 0.990. All computed p-values were greater than the alpha level of 0.05; therefore, the null hypothesis that there is no significant difference in the level of communication skills learning challenges in speaking skills among Alternative Learning System (ALS) learners, when grouped and compared according to the identified variables, was not rejected.

The result suggests that speaking difficulties can occur across age groups; thus, age is not a reliable predictor of which ALS learners will struggle with spoken communication. Further, male and female ALS learners exhibited similar speaking-skill challenges because both groups experienced comparable learning support and opportunities for oral practice from their teachers; hence, sex does not play a determining role in their speaking performance. Also, as most ALS learners are independent adults, parental education has little impact on their learning, and the ALS program's learner-centered support helps equalize speaking-skill development regardless of family background.

This confirms the study by Aratea (2025), which found no significant difference in the level of challenges in competence in fluency across respondents' profiles, such as age and sex. Meanwhile, this does not align with Pei and Pamintuan (2024) and Balatero (2025), who found a significant difference in the level of challenges in speaking proficiency by sex. Similarly, Labad et al. (2025) found a significant difference in speaking ability among Junior High School students based on parental education.

**Table 9**

*Difference in the Level of Communication Skills Learning Challenges Among Alternative Learning System (ALS) Learners According to Listening Skills when Grouped and Compared According to the Age, Sex, and Parents' Educational Attainment*

| Variable                        | Category | N   | Mean Rank | Mann-Whitney U | p-value | Sig. level | Interpretation  |
|---------------------------------|----------|-----|-----------|----------------|---------|------------|-----------------|
| Age                             | Younger  | 102 | 72.12     | 1874.50        | 0.596   |            | Not Significant |
|                                 | Older    | 39  | 68.06     |                |         |            |                 |
| Sex                             | Male     | 74  | 66.94     | 2178.50        | 0.213   | 0.05       | Not Significant |
|                                 | Female   | 67  | 75.49     |                |         |            |                 |
| Parents' Educational Attainment | Lower    | 60  | 77.40     | 2046.00        | 0.108   |            | Not Significant |
|                                 | Higher   | 81  | 66.26     |                |         |            |                 |

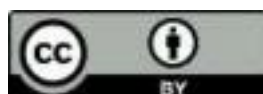


Table 9 depicts the difference in the level of communication skills learning challenges among Alternative Learning System (ALS) learners, grouped by listening skills and age, sex, and parents' highest educational attainment. Using the Mann-Whitney U test, the overall result was not significant.

In the age categories, the younger group had a mean rank of 72.12, the older, 68.06; with a test value of 1874.50 and a p-value of 0.596. On sex categories, the male obtained a mean rank of 66.94, the female, 75.49; obtaining a test value of 2178.50 and a p-value of 0.213. Based on categories of parents' educational attainment, the lower group had a mean rank of 77.40, the higher, 66.26, yielding a test value of 2046.00 and a p-value of 0.108. All p-values were above the alpha level of 0.05; thus, the null hypothesis that there is no significant difference in the level of communication skills learning challenges in listening among Alternative Learning System (ALS) learners across the identified profile variables was accepted.

Regardless of age, sex, and parents' educational background, ALS learners may encounter similar listening challenges because they share comparable learning environments and materials within the program. They have equal opportunities to enhance their listening skills through inclusive, communicative learning approaches. Therefore, ALS learners' listening challenges may be more strongly shaped by factors such as individual learning experiences and program support than by age, sex, or parental education.

This finding agrees with Del Rosario (2025), who found no significant differences in listening skills challenges based on sex. In the same light, this confirms Francisco and Buri's (2024) result that parental education does not emerge as a statistically significant predictor of listening-challenge scores after program/contextual factors are considered.

### **Conclusion**

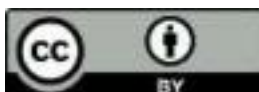
The study found that most ALS respondents were younger males with parents who had higher educational attainment. Overall, learners experienced a moderate level of communication skills challenges in reading, writing, speaking, and listening, regardless of sex, age, or parental education, with no significant differences observed across these variables; however, greater difficulty in reading was noted among those with parents of lower educational attainment. These findings suggest that while learners possess basic communication competencies and their challenges are manageable, targeted support—particularly in reading—is still necessary. Moreover, since communication difficulties are common across all groups, there is a need for inclusive and comprehensive instructional strategies that address the diverse needs of all ALS learners.

### **Recommendation**

Based on the findings and conclusions, it is recommended to design and implement gender-sensitive and age-appropriate enrichment programs for ALS learners, alongside a comprehensive communication enhancement program for Junior High School ALS learners focusing on the four macro skills through activities such as reading sessions, guided writing, speaking exercises, and listening tasks. Additionally, collaboration with ALS coordinators and community leaders should be strengthened to conduct monthly family literacy workshops that equip parents with simple home-based reading strategies, while partnerships with local government units should be established to provide external tutors or literacy teachers who can deliver small-group and individualized support to further enhance learners' communication skills.

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### Authorship Contribution Statement

**Rondubio:** Concept and design, literature review, data collection, analysis, interpretation and editing.  
**Tumarong:** Reviewing, supervision, and material support.

### Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest related to the conduct, authorship, and publication of this research. All procedures and interpretations were performed independently, and no financial, professional, or personal relationships influenced the results of this study.

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