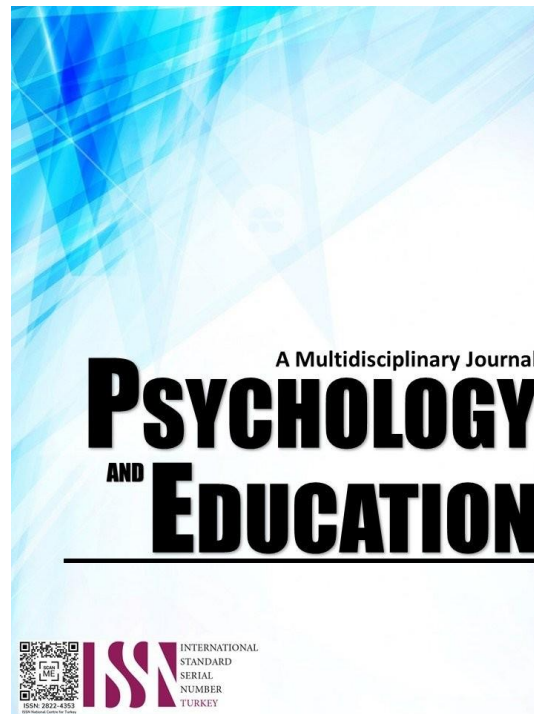


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The Alternative Learning System (ALS) Students' Challenges in Untangling the Reading Comprehension Ability

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Abstract

In the Philippines, the Alternative Learning System (ALS) is a counterpart learning system that offers a practical resort to the existing formal education. The primary goal of this program is to provide diplomas equivalent to either elementary or secondary school levels while eliminating illiteracy. However, little is known about these Alternative Learning System students' struggles and challenges. As a result, the purpose of this research is to identify the struggles and challenges that Alternative Learning System (ALS) students face in untangling their reading ability. The five participants' real-life experiences are highlighted in this phenomenology research study. The collected data was analyzed and interpreted using Moustakas' and Van Kaam's Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). Following a thorough analysis of the collected data, three major themes emerged: impoverished vocabulary, time constraints, and vocabulary development. The lived experiences of these students in untangling their reading ability were determined using these. The study's future expansion could focus on ALS's abilities and capacities in improving its students' reading and comprehension.

Keywords: *alternative learning system, comprehension ability, frustrated readers, impoverished vocabulary, time constraints*

Introduction

The Alternative Learning Systems (ALS) according to EO 365 s. is the Philippine administration's steadfast answer towards its numerous global commitments to provide and create an excellent education available to every Filipino student who for a variety of causes in the formal schooling track did not take part and achieved it. In comparison to the conventional basic education system (Mehra, 2021), the ALS is a community-based educational system. It comprises the Accreditation and Equivalency (A&E), Education Skills Training (EST) three key programs (EST) and Basic Literacy Program (BLP). The A&E's major goal is to grant diplomas similar with either elementary or secondary grade levels while BLP's is the eradication of illiteracy (Chavez, 2021).

After working the requisite number of times, A&E participants must take the A&E tests. Successful test takers are subsequently given diplomas that are equivalent, such as post-secondary and junior or senior high school levels. Alternatively, EST delivers literacy and development of skills its clients. Understanding some challenges, the comprehensive Alternative Learning System (ALS) program faces in addressing reading comprehension issues is the main objective of this study. This study will focus on these Alternative Learning System students' struggles and challenges. The purpose of this research is to identify the struggles and challenges that Alternative Learning System (ALS) students face in untangling their reading

ability.

Fluent reading is essential for comprehension because effortful reading requires focus that takes resources away from understanding (Salendab, 2022). Fluency, spoken language, and vocabulary growth all affect a reader's capacity to comprehend what they are reading, while vocabulary development affects a listener's ability to comprehend what they are listening to. Some pupils also struggle with more fundamental concerns, like slowness and reading difficulty, in addition to these faults. Slow readers are frequently referred to as struggling readers since it takes ongoing effort for them to decode the printed signals (Guiamalon, 2022). Then there are the students who cannot read; they have trouble understanding the written symbols. Fluency is influenced by the kids' reading style in addition to accuracy and speed.

Expression refers to the tone, intonation, and pauses used during reading. Fluent readers read with ease and expression, just like they would when speaking in a conversation. Between words and sentences, there are audible brief and long pauses. It is often believed that reading proficiency is necessary for academic survival and success. Reading involves the four steps of recognizing words, understanding, utilizing prior knowledge, and relating concepts into one's experiences, according to Maramag (2022). The range of knowledge or experience of the reader is merely used as the premise for understanding the words, according to Maramag who also stated that reading giving meaning to rather than the getting of meaning from the

printed texts. He asserted that comprehension entails deciphering characters that written and context to be supplied.

There haven't been many research that addressed problems with reading comprehension in children with ALS. Due to various factors, including but not limited to: limited scope, budget, and or push by the general public to know and understand the challenges that come up or pose if and when students are studying through the Alternative Learning System due to its distinctive nature, there are very few studies that directly address this issue. This study intends to fill that knowledge gap in the Philippines' local setting. This study aims to determine the struggles and challenges of the Alternative Learning System (ALS) students in untangling their reading ability. This qualitative study utilizes a phenomenology research design. It highlights on the participants' real-life experiences. Thus, this study helped to mitigate the participant's concerns about reading, which could serve as basis for an enrichment plan.

Literature Review

This section analyzes the literature's and its studies' relevance to graduates of the Alternative Learning System (ALS English)'s Comprehension Level in terms of grammatical proficiency, vocabulary, and reading comprehension. This will make it easier for readers to recognize the various theories and studies that are pertinent to the Alternative Learning System's English Comprehension Level.

Alternative Learning System (ALS) is one of the ways that Philippine Educational System adapted, it seeks to enrol students who have faced challenging circumstances, regardless of gender and age. ALS employs a variety of methods that are suitable for the learners, such as interpersonal skills, critical analysis, and lifelong learning. Mother Language, disability modes, and educational technologies are only a few of the many learning modalities and resources it enlists to address the unique needs of each other (UNESCO, 2015).

There are variety of educational program with diversified scope and comprehensible purpose that are included in the educational system today. Some alternative programs not only operate independently from traditional schools but also under contract with outside parties like community organizations. Some are designed to help troubled or incarcerated youngsters, while others aim to educate a larger group

of underachieving children. Others are merely short – term arrangements, with the goal of letting the students go back to elementary or high schools that generally grant diplomas. Some award degrees. Some schools generally run even with outdated rules which oversee them as some of the Alternative schools as nether educational institutions, for not all students can go on the tertiary level. Thus, public educational institutions' mission gives emphasis on the Alternative Education system.

The evaluation of results helps evaluate how capable a company is. Although the majority of children and youth in developing country cities have access to elementary education, historically disadvantaged individuals and areas have not been able to receive a top-notch education through national education systems in the world's least developed regions. One of the aims of Education for All is to penetrate quality, exclude gender- biased, and attain relative, meaningful learning result and offer limited hope for traditional public education system (Hartwell et al., 2010).

Few countries have given universal schooling substantial consideration in their issues briefs. Even fewer have vowed to undertake the challenging public policy, restructuring, governance, and mobilization activities required to attain these objectives. Those who are either denied access to education or are assigned schools of the lowest caliber by state-funded educational institutions, such as girls and members of racial and religious minorities, are the people who reside in remote areas, the most vulnerable people, and the most disadvantaged groups. If EFA goals are to be achieved, these are the individuals and locations that must be visited. Evaluations of educational outcomes should take into account the stated goals.

Even while there are ways to measure changes in values, attitudes, and conduct as well as creative and emotional growth, academic achievement is the simplest way to convey them. There are many ways to measure changes in values, attitudes, and behavior. Success on the job market is one of the metrics that can be used to evaluate student progress and more general social or economic advancements. It's critical to distinguish between success, achievement, and other outcome measures that might include broader societal benefits.

The Department of Education refined an Alternative Education system as a no-cost educational initiative that aids students who cannot afford to attend traditional schools and works around their schedule. The curriculum serves as a vigorous

replacement for the current formal school education since it integrates both a life- long learning of individuals and assures right access to education for all (Cabello et al., 2022). One of its objectives is to help students who have failed to enrol in any formal education or who have dropped out of elementary or high school finish their primary or secondary education utilizing non-traditional teaching methods (Villar et al., 2022). Depending on which test they took, they will be regarded as having successfully completed grade school or a high school and will be qualified to apply to universities if they pass the ALS A& E Test.

There are diverse of reasons why some students missed the chances to study in a formal basic education system. One of those, students live in locations where there is no access of learning resources that result to dropping out in school early (Ando et al., 2022; Emia et al., 2022). In accordance to the department's aims to provide free basic quality education, ALS serves as the light for everyone to acquire and fulfilled the basic education in one way or another converge the uniqueness and expertise of each individual.

A study was conducted in Bacolod City, Philippines, to appreciate the lived experiences of ALS students. It spread the idea that education might be flexible enough to meet the requirements of pupils and to transcend national boundaries (Pilar, 2015). A qualitative- phenomenological technique was utilized to thematize the participant's responses (Cabello, 2021). The ALS facilitators on the other hand, were penetrating a more effective teaching techniques to aid the ALS students' grammar and comprehension skills particularly. 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 Alternative Learning System Program as well as the attainment of its objectives that include refining of 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 they are not enrolled in a typical school, students are still able to learn new things and build

lasting skills (Cariaga et al., 2022; Mangubat et al., 2022; Pableo et al., 2022). For those who desired to escape poverty and improve their quality of life, there was an alternative educational system available (Abucejo et al., 2022; Bahinting et al., 2022; Perez et al., 2022).

Alternative Learning System is a modified program under the current educational system. The government in addition yielded support on providing materials and other learning resources need in the program. They pursued on strengthening and maximizing stakeholder's involvement in order 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, are necessary for the plan's implementation to be effective.

It is common misapprehension that reading is essential for academic survival and success. It is also equally important to recognize the four processes of reading, which includes mental process or the perception of words, understanding of words or comprehension, responses of word meaning and integration of ideas presented based on the 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 supports school achievement and successively participation in most areas of adult life (Hulme et al., 2011; Riconalla et al., 2022). In contrary, Polloway et al. (2018) suggested that comprehension is a fundamental learning skill that entails drawing meaning from a specific written text based on the coordination of 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 the surface comprehension, second is between the line's comprehension, then beyond the text comprehension (Bilbao et al., 2016). They argued that understanding is a crucial aspect of reading since without it, reading loses all of its 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 of the words. Furthermore, it is expected of learners to comprehend crucial information and adhere to simple guidelines (Yamon et al., 2022).

However, interpretive level thinking necessitates

higher order thinking because it calls for application and analysis. The reader should consider how statements in the text relate to one another, make inferences to comprehend the implications of the reading segment, and identify any implicit or explicit ideas in the text. On the other hand, the evaluative or critical level forces readers to evaluate the texts they are currently reading by asking them to express "their" evaluations of the reading material. Last on the list is creative level. This type of reading is referred to as transcendental reading because it pushes readers to think in ways that go beyond what the author intended, for instance, employing new knowledge to a different level or fusing the purpose of the writer to come up with their own ideas. In order to show that they understand the reading material, readers at this level must produce new work.

There have been many empirical studies on reading. These studies cover a wide range of topics, including how reading comprehension is assessed, the difficulties readers encounter, and the connection between reading comprehension and students' achievement in other academic areas, like Mathematics. Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-Iri) is a reading program created to assess the reading proficiency level of the students (Cabardo (2015). It involves testing out various reading – related strategies. The results suggest that the annoyance level can be a good indicator of how well the students silently. In the areas of silent and oral reading they both showed some degree of teaching.

Recent reading research, such that done by Celestino, has refuted the idea that first-year students enrolled in computer technology and computing institutes have reading problems. It was discovered that the severity of both family- and home-related reading challenges is strongly correlated with the accessibility of reading materials. The results were stimulated through the summary of the gathered data, it indicates that variables such as students' socioeconomic situation, self-fulfilment, and self- initiated learning, and parental guidance had an exceptional impact on ninth graders' reading competency. Additionally, while having average speed and fluency, their reading comprehension and vocabulary indicators revealed statistically low reading skills. (Celestino (2014)

Similar results were noted by Velasco et al (2016), who discovered that students' reading motivation was increased by their tailored reading intervention. The ability of all those who received the intervention to pay attention for extended periods of time, to stay engaged, and to integrate scenarios from both real life

and the classroom while reading a variety of in-depth reading materials all improved. Additionally, Subibe (2015) confirmed to the value of the Explicit Skill Instruction (ESI) reading approach. Children in the sixth grade who participated in this experimental study showed better or significantly elevated attitudes toward reading, reading comprehension, and method adoption. In a manner similar to this, Hallorina (2009) demonstrated how instrumental religious music can be utilized to raise students' levels of and talents in reading comprehension.

Students who were exposed to this musical genre read better, especially when it came to highlighting specifics, figuring out the primary idea, drawing conclusions, and predicting outcomes. Furthermore, it improved their reading comprehension from a low to a high teaching level. Simbulas'(2015) study found a substantial association between first-year students' reading comprehension and mathematics problem-solving abilities. The only students who can solve math-related problems are those who can understand them and have a good vocabulary.

For instance, an experimental study was conducted and the results disclosed that learning through games makes learning more engaging and it is good source of motivation, involvement and commitment of informatics students in Khan Academy (Tenório et al., (2018). Results showed that this academy-learning environment might offer new opportunities and methods for engaging students, particularly when gamification was included. They did, however, find that professors still had a big impact on motivating students to seek out information outside of the classroom. Furthermore, an action research conducted by Limantoro (2018), supported the effectiveness of employing games in the learning process to assist students in improving their writing-related vocabulary and grammar.

In conclusion, none of the studies specifically target ALS patients as their target audience, despite the fact that there are several studies on reading comprehension and its various components, including therapies and approaches. Since reading is a requirement for all A&E grads, it is imperative to continue your academic efforts. Beyond the obvious, reading is essential for academic success.

Methodology

Research Design

The phenomenology research design was used for this qualitative study. It highlights on the participants' real-life experiences in order to comprehend a particular phenomenon. This study aims to determine the struggles and challenges those Alternative Learning System (ALS) students in untangling their reading comprehension ability. Furthermore, by taking into account the participants' real-life experiences, this study helped to alleviate the participants' concerns about reading, which could serve as the foundation for an enrichment plan.

Sampling Technique

In this study, the participants were chosen using a purposive sample method. This method of sampling involves non-probability sampling, when study participants are chosen depending on the researcher's discretion. Additionally, the individuals are chosen because they match a specific profile. Consequently, participants for this study are chosen through purposive sampling. The participants are selected based on the researcher's own discretion. Furthermore, the participants are chosen because they fit a specific profile. As a result, the researchers provided inclusion criteria for more information about the study's participants.

Inclusion Criteria

1. Participants must be ALS graduates.
2. Participants are Senior High School students enrolled in the Academic Year 2022-2023.
3. The Phil-Iri Pre-test Result categorizes participants as frustrated readers.

Data Collection

The researchers created a letter addressed to the school head's office for approval to request the conduct of the study. After the request had been granted, the transmittal letter was distributed to the participants for their approval. Schedules for interviews were set up after obtaining the participants' approval. The participants' lived experiences were determined using a semi-structured interview. The researchers created their own interview questionnaire and submitted it for approval and validation to the experts. The study will make use of the approved questionnaire. Thus, appropriate ethics are strictly followed in data collection to avoid participant manipulation.

Ethical Consideration

Before the interview, the participants were given written documents outlining the purpose of the study as well as an ethical consent letter. The researchers clarified that the participants' participation in the study was entirely voluntary. The identities of the participants would be kept private and anonymous. Furthermore, veracity and integrity are used to gather relevant data. These preceding processes must be given insistence (Castillo-Montoya, 2016), who evidently explained that the participants must be properly notified on the purpose of the interview and explained further their rights on the conducted study, because qualitative studies will not come to fruition without permission given by the participants.

Data Analysis

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was employed in this study. This was supported by the Modified Van Kaam Approach and popularized by Moustakas. IPA started with horizontalization, wherein the participant's experiences were sorted. Then, through a reduction of experiences, the most essential experiences of the participants are highlighted. It is followed by the thematic construction of the participants' lived experiences. Next is modifying themes; the generated themes were verified against the dataset. The fifth step is textural description, in which the verbatim excerpts from the participants are described. Then, structural description, the interpretation of the participants' experiences. Lastly, the summary and synthesis of the participants' shared experiences.

Table Analysis

Horizon	Textural Language	Themes
Laglom nga mga words ang lisud sabton ug lisud hubaron sa bisaya ang mga laglom nga mga words. Lisud sabton ang mga words kay bag o pa nako ang mga words. (P1) <i>(Unfamiliar words are difficult to understand, I found these words difficult to translate into Cebuano dialect. These are difficult to understand since they are new to me)</i> (P1)	Difficulty in Understanding Unfamiliar Words	Exterminating Impoverished Vocabulary
Kahibalo ko mubasa pero lisud ang paglitok sa mga words. Makasabot ra man apan lisud sabton ang mga laglom nga words. (P2) <i>(I know how to read but I have difficulty in enunciating the words. I can understand simple words but have difficulty in understanding unfamiliar words.)</i> (P2)	Unaccustomed Words	
Maglisud jud kog sabot ug mga English ma'am. Dili nako familiar ang mga words sa English. Maong maglisud ug sabot (P4) <i>(I have difficulty in comprehending English words especially the unfamiliar ones. That is why I have difficulty in understanding reading text.)</i> (P4)	Complication in word recognition	
Sayun ang pagbasa pero ang pagsabot maoy lisud. Lisud sabton tungod kay unfamiliar ang mga words. (P5) <i>(Reading is easy but comprehending the reading text is difficult especially the unfamiliar words.)</i> (P5)	Comprehension dilemma	
Dili maka explain ug tarong ilabina ug iningles. Tungod cguro kay wala kaayu matudlo sa ALS. Gi pa answer ra man mig module. Unya kadali ra kaayu to niya graduate na mi dayun. (P2) <i>(I cannot explain clearly in English maybe because it wasn't taught in ALS. We just answer the modules given in just short period of time then we graduated.)</i> (P2)	Instant Learning	Rigorous Time Constraints
Maong maglisud jud kog express. Lisud siya ma'am, kay wala ko kaagi ato nga mga words. Kay kadalira man mi nag module sa ALS. (P4) <i>(I have difficulty expressing my ideas in English because I was not able to practice it in ALS because I had only modular experience and in just a short period of time.)</i> (P4)	Limited Time	
Lisud sabton tungod kay unfamiliar ang mga words kay wala nako masugati sa ALS. Nag answer ra man mig module balig duha ka bulan. Unya kausa ra sa usa ka semana mi mag kita ni ma'am niya mo submit ra mi sa amu nahuman ug answer. (P5) <i>I have difficulty comprehending the words because they are unfamiliar. I wasn't able to learn those words while I'm studying in ALS. I just answer the modules in two months. We have to meet our teacher once a week to submit the answered activities in the modules.</i> (P5)	Short Space of Time	

Tagaan ug difficult words unya tagaan ug meaning ang mga words dayun gamiton sa sentence ug sa conversation. (P1) <i>(There must be difficult words given then provide definition of the words. Used the words in sentences and conversation.)</i> (P1)	Unlocking of Difficult Words	Astounding Vocabulary Development
Vocabulary Activities pwede pud ug Translation Activity, unya spelling pud. Dayun definition pud sa mga words. (P2) <i>(Vocabulary Activities like Translation, Spelling and Definition of words.)</i> (P2)	Vocabulary Exercises	
Translation, English e translate ug tagalog. Dayun tagaan ug definition ang mga words. (P3) <i>(Translation Activity: English to Filipino then provide definition of the words.)</i> (P3)	Definition of Terms	
Vocabulary Activities arun daghan nga words mabaw an. (P4) <i>(Vocabulary Activities so that there are lot of new words I can learn.)</i> (P4)	Lexical Entry	

Results and Discussion

Three key themes emerge from the thematic analysis and interpretation of ALS students' lived experiences in untangling their reading ability: impoverished vocabulary, time constraints, and vocabulary development.

Theme 1: Exterminating Impoverished Vocabulary

This theme focuses on the students' difficulties understanding the reading text due to a lack of vocabulary; they must look up the meaning of the words and then translate those words into Cebuano so that they can understand the words. "Sayun kaayu ang pagbasa pero lisud kaayu ang pagsabot sa gibasa since ang ubang words kay laglom kaayu," said participant #5. "Kung simple ang mga words, makasabotra ko, ug laglom kay maglisud najud," participant #4 added. "Makabasara man apan lisud sabton ang mga words," said participant #2.

"Reading is easy but comprehending the reading text is difficult especially the unfamiliar words," said Participant 5. "If the words are simple I can easily understand but the unfamiliar ones are so difficult to understand," Participant 4 added. "I can read but comprehending what I'm reading is difficult," said Participant #2.

The participants agree that their limited vocabulary hinders their comprehension of the reading text. Furthermore, one of the causes of difficulty in reading comprehension is a hampered vocabulary, so

developing academic vocabulary is essential in every learner's reading skills.

Theme 2: Rigorous Time Constraints

Alternative Learning System (ALS) is a short-term program for students who have dropped out of school for a variety of reasons. ALS students, unlike regular students, must meet with their teachers once a week. Since the pandemic, students have been given modules to complete at home. There were no conversations. Their grades were determined by the work they submitted. "Maong maglisud jud ko kay wala man ko makaagi atong nga mga words kay kadali ra kaayu mi nag eskwela unya nag module rapid mi," said participant 2. "Maglisud jud kog sabot sa English words kay wala ko kasugat ato sa ALS kay nag module man mi unya nagpatabang rapid ko ug answer sa modules," said participant 4. "Kadalira mi nag eskwela maong wala jud to namo sa ALS," Participant 5 explained.

"I have difficulty in understanding those words because those were unfamiliar, I haven't met those words while studying in ALS for I just answer the modules in just a very short period of time" said Participant 2. "I have difficulty understanding English words because they weren't taught in ALS, I just answered the modules given" Participant 4 added. "We just studied and have modules only for a short period of time that is why I have no chance of learning those words." Participant 5 explained.

Theme # 3: Astounding Vocabulary Development

This theme focuses on how the participants improve their vocabulary. They wished for more vocabulary activities to help them improve their skills. "Unahon nako ug kat on ang vocabulary arun makasabo tnako ug matarong ug explain," Participant 2 stated. "Ganhan nakong e improve ang vocabulary, ang mga meaning sa difficult words kay arun mas makasabot ko saakong gibasa," Participant 3 stated. "Vocabulary arun mas masabtan ang mga laglom nga words sa gibasa," Participant 5 added.

"I will learn vocabulary first so that I can understand and explain things clearly." Participant 2 stated. "I want to improve my vocabulary skill; I want to learn the meaning of the difficult words in order I can understand the reading text." Participant 3 stated. I want to learn Vocabulary so that the meaning of the difficult words will be understood. Participant 5 added.

The process of learning new words is known as vocabulary development. To successfully build

vocabulary skills, a learner must be exposed to new words, understand their definitions, recognize synonyms, learn how to use the words in context, and have the opportunity to practice the new words.

Conclusion

It is shown that the students are eager to learn and improve their reading skills since they recognize the value and importance of expanding the bandwidth of their vocabulary knowledge. The students require more support so that vocabulary would be enriched contributing significantly to reading comprehension.

Teachers need to differentiate teaching pedagogy and provide programs that meet the ALS students' individual needs. Effective teaching practice involving direct teaching instruction and affording opportunities for immediate feedback, providing ALS students with a rich choice of reading materials, and creating opportunities to practice reading both at school and at home.

With the findings of this study, it is recommended then that it is high time for the ALS teachers to adopt pedagogic styles befitting the learners' instructional level, attuned to their learning styles and pace as well as contextualize their learning resources available. Educators can help ALS students to choose reading materials with vocabulary matches their current abilities so that it will not difficult for them to develop their reading comprehension.

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