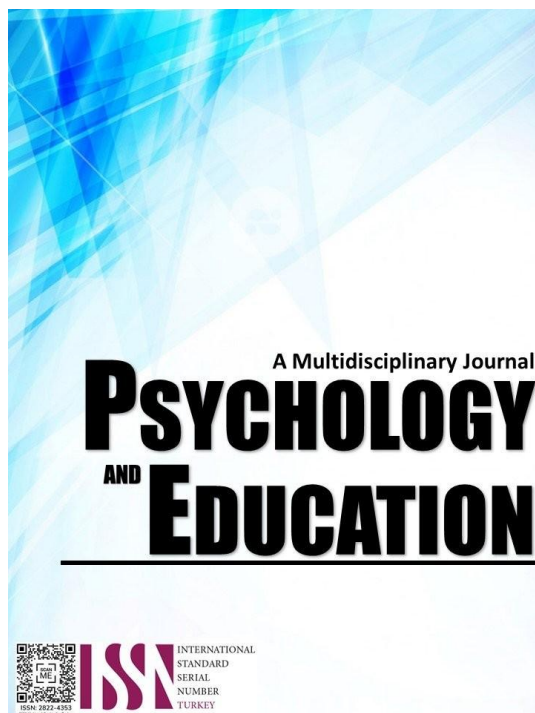


**THE EDUCATIONAL JOURNEY OF PERSONS DEPRIVED OF LIBERTY  
IN ALTERNATIVE LEARNING SYSTEM AT LUCENA CITY  
DISTRICT JAIL: BASIS FOR A LOCALIZED GUIDANCE  
COUNSELING PROGRAM**



**PSYCHOLOGY AND EDUCATION: A MULTIDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL**

Volume: 56

Issue 4

Pages: 488-505

Document ID: 2026PEMJ5467

DOI: 10.70838/pemj.560401

Manuscript Accepted: 04-15-2026

## The Educational Journey of Persons Deprived of Liberty in Alternative Learning System at Lucena City District Jail: Basis for a Localized Guidance Counseling Program

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### Abstract

Education has an important role in rehabilitation, yet Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDLs) often face barriers in accessing quality learning opportunities. In the Philippines, the Alternative Learning System (ALS) provides a flexible second-chance education program for marginalized groups, including those in detention. While ALS has been widely studied in community learning centers, little is known about how incarcerated learners experience it in local jails. This study explored the lived experiences of PDLs enrolled in ALS at Lucena City District Jail to understand how they handle challenges, sustain motivation, and find meaning in learning while behind bars. Using a phenomenological design, data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with 12 purposively selected PDLs. Thematic Analysis was followed to capture themes for each research question and across contextual (environment, curriculum, resources), subjective (emotions, aspirations, beliefs), and interactive (peer and teacher relationships) perspectives. Findings revealed that PDLs perceived ALS not merely as an academic program but as a transformative process that restored dignity, strengthened resilience, and rekindled hope for reintegration. Despite systemic challenges such as a lack of separate rooms for classes, longing for families, and challenging subjects like Math and English, PDLs drew strength from family aspirations, prayer, and peer/teacher support. Their narratives confirm that resilience was cultivated through persistence and relational bonds with peers, turning deprivation into instances for personal growth. The study concludes that ALS in jails should integrate a localized guidance counseling component to address the psychosocial needs of PDL learners. In that way, ALS could enhance rehabilitation, reduce reoffending or recidivism, and prepare incarcerated individuals for successful reintegration into society.

**Keywords:** *alternative learning system, persons deprived of liberty, phenomenology, prison education, resilience, reintegration, rehabilitation*

### Introduction

Education is widely recognized as a foundation of societal development, extending beyond academic achievement to include personal growth, social integration, and emotional well-being. For Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDLs), however, access to education is often interrupted long before incarceration and becomes even more constrained inside jail. Many PDLs enter detention facilities with histories of conflict with the law, poverty, disrupted schooling, early work responsibilities, and limited educational opportunities. Within the context of confinement, education assumes a deeper meaning—serving not only as a pathway to knowledge, but also as a source of hope, dignity, and a sense of normalcy in an environment defined by restriction and uncertainty.

In the Philippine context, the right to education is constitutionally guaranteed under Article XIV of the 1987 Constitution, which mandates the State to “establish, maintain, and support a complete, adequate, and integrated system of education” that is accessible to all, including marginalized and vulnerable populations. This mandate is reinforced by Republic Act No. 9155 (Governance of Basic Education Act of 2001) and Republic Act No. 10533 (Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013), which institutionalize inclusive and flexible learning pathways for learners outside the formal school system. Complementing these education laws, Republic Act No. 6975 and the policy frameworks of the Bureau of Jail Management and Penology (BJMP) place rehabilitative development—including educational programs—at the core of jail administration. In alignment with these mandates, the Department of Education (DepEd), in partnership with BJMP, implements the Alternative Learning System (ALS), a ladderized, modular, non-formal education program designed to serve out-of-school youth, adults, and PDLs.

National data also show the reach and relevance of jail-based ALS. Official DepEd releases indicate that more than 20,000 PDLs have enrolled in ALS in recent years, with over 10,000 completing basic education levels while incarcerated (DepEd official news release, October 10, 2024; Presidential Communications Office, July 9, 2025). These figures affirm ALS as the primary educational mechanism available to PDLs in Philippine jails. However, while enrollment and completion statistics demonstrate program coverage, they do not reveal how learning is experienced inside detention facilities—spaces characterized by confinement, rigid routines, psychological strain, and the constant loss of personal autonomy.

At the local level, ALS implementation at the Lucena City District Jail (LCDJ) reflects that jail-based education is not merely symbolic but actively sustained. Documented BJMP Lucena posts show regular ALS classes for both male and female PDLs, as well as the conduct of face-to-face ALS graduation ceremonies for School Year 2024–2025, recognizing completers at the elementary and secondary levels, including both currently detained and already released learners. These milestones speak of institutional commitment and learner perseverance. However, behind these visible achievements are less visible struggles—how PDL learners manage academic demands while coping with incarceration, what motivates them to continue learning despite emotional exhaustion, and how education

shapes their sense of self while they remain deprived of liberty.

A review of available literature reveals that research on education inside jails—particularly on ALS within custodial settings—is very limited, both locally and internationally. Existing studies on jail education available online are largely evaluative and outcome-oriented, often focusing on program effectiveness, policy implementation, or recidivism reduction. Many are country-specific assessments conducted within unique correctional systems, making cross-contextual understanding difficult. While these studies provide valuable insights, few explore education inside jails through qualitative approaches that center on learners' voices. In the Philippine context, literature that examines ALS inside jails remains scarce, and studies that investigate the lived experiences of PDL learners—their meanings, coping strategies, emotional challenges, and personal transformations—are particularly limited.

For many PDLs, ALS functions as more than an academic program. It offers structure in long and repetitive days, a sense of purpose amid confinement, and an opportunity to imagine a future beyond incarceration. Learning becomes intertwined with coping, resilience, and meaning-making. However, these psychological and emotional dimensions of learning are rarely captured in conventional evaluations, despite their influence on learners' motivation, persistence, and overall well-being.

Moreover, while ALS provides educational access, it does not automatically address the emotional and psychological burdens associated with incarceration. Feelings of anxiety, shame, isolation, and uncertainty often accompany PDLs throughout their educational journey. In this context, guidance and counseling services become essential. Educational research consistently highlights the role of guidance counseling in supporting learners' academic engagement, emotional regulation, and personal development. However, within the Lucena City District Jail, a localized guidance counseling program specifically designed for ALS-enrolled PDLs remains largely nonexistent.

In light of these gaps, this study seeks to explore the lived experiences of Persons Deprived of Liberty enrolled in the Alternative Learning System at the Lucena City District Jail. By listening to learners' narratives, the study aims to describe their educational journey or to understand how PDLs experience education while incarcerated, how they cope with the demands of learning under confinement, and how ALS influences their sense of hope, identity, and readiness for reintegration. Grounded in these lived realities, the research further aims to propose a localized guidance counseling program responsive to the educational and psychosocial needs of PDL-ALS learners. In doing so, the study contributes to the limited qualitative literature on jail-based education in the Philippines and supports the development of more humane, learner-centered, and rehabilitative educational practices that extend beyond academic completion toward meaningful reintegration into society.

## Research Questions

Through an in-depth interview of participants, this study explores the educational journey of Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDLs) in Alternative Learning System (ALS) at Lucena City District Jail as a basis for crafting a localized guidance counseling program through hermeneutic phenomenology. Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. How do PDL-ALS Learners in LCDJ describe their ALS educational journey in terms of the following perspectives:
  - 1.1 physical environment;
  - 1.2 social environment;
  - 1.3 curriculum;
  - 1.4 learning methods;
  - 1.5 learning materials ;
  - 1.6 emotions;
  - 1.7 aspirations;
  - 1.8 beliefs;
  - 1.9 relationship between PDLs and teachers; and
  - 1.10 relationship between PDLs and PDLs peers?
2. What specific challenges do PDL ALS Learners go through during their ALS educational journey?
3. What coping strategies do PDL ALS Learners use to address the challenges during their ALS educational journey?
4. What comments and suggestions are given by PDL ALS Learners to make their educational journey more meaningful?
5. What localized guidance counseling program for PDL ALS Learners, per components, can be proposed?

## Methodology

### Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDLs) enrolled in the Alternative Learning System (ALS) at Lucena City District Jail. Hermeneutic phenomenology is well-suited for capturing deep, personal meanings as it focuses on interpreting the essence of their social, emotional, and environmental contexts (Smith et al., 2010; Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022).

The research investigated ten core dimensions of the PDL ALS educational journey: the influence of the physical environment, social

environment, curriculum, learning methods, learning materials, emotions, aspirations, beliefs, relationships between PDLs and teachers, and relationships between PDLs and their peers while engaged in ALS.

Data were gathered through semi-structured, in-depth interviews conducted in Filipino to allow rich, unfiltered narratives. Guided by the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method, the analysis involved thematic interpretation, moving between individual accounts and the broader context to extract core themes and patterns.

By uncovering how incarcerated learners make meaning of their ALS educational journey, this study aims to contribute to the design of a localized guidance counseling program that is culturally responsive, emotionally supportive, and tailored to the unique conditions of jail-based learning.

### **Participants**

This study utilized purposive sampling, a widely accepted qualitative technique wherein participants are deliberately selected based on characteristics directly aligned with the objectives of the research (Stephanie, 2021). The primary criterion for inclusion is that participants must be Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDLs) who are either current ALS learners or have previously passed the ALS program. Beyond this, participants must express a clear willingness to participate, particularly in sharing their educational journey through storytelling. Approval and access permissions were also secured from the Division Superintendent and the local Bureau of Jail Management and Penology (BJMP) Officer-in-Charge to ensure ethical compliance.

A maximum of ten (10) participants were selected to allow for rich, detailed insights while maintaining focus and depth in the data, with sampling concluding once data saturation is reached (Creswell, 2021). The inclusion criteria required that participants be currently detained at Lucena City District Jail, aged 18 to 40 years old, enrolled in the ALS junior high school program, and without a final conviction or life sentence. They must have been incarcerated for at least five months and demonstrate potential for parole or reintegration. Participation was voluntary, formalized through signed informed consent.

### **Instrument**

The research instrument is an interview protocol composed of four (4) research questions. The first question answered the first research question, dealing with the description of PDLs' ALS educational journey. The next concern answered the second question, which made the participants share their challenges during their ALS classes. Lastly, the last two questions encouraged the participants to share the coping strategies and suggestions that could contribute to the effective conduct of GCPs that may support the PDLs' ALS in their learning endeavors.

To ensure the validity and appropriateness of the interview instrument, a thorough validation process was conducted prior to data collection. The interview guide was subjected to expert validation by a panel of three professionals with backgrounds in the Alternative Learning System (ALS), correctional education, counseling or psychology, and qualitative research methodology. These experts were asked to assess each interview question in terms of clarity, relevance, cultural and contextual appropriateness, alignment with the study's research questions, and sensitivity to the vulnerable status of Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDLs). A validation checklist using a four-point scale (1 – Not Relevant to 4 – Highly Relevant) was provided, along with a comments section for detailed suggestions. Based on the feedback gathered, the researcher revised the interview guide by rewording, adding, or removing questions to improve accuracy, ethical sensitivity, and coherence.

After expert review, the instrument was pilot tested with two PDL participants who met the inclusion criteria. The pilot test assessed the respondents' comprehension of the questions, the logical flow and timing of the interview, and the overall comfort and responsiveness of participants. Revisions were also made based on the pilot feedback to ensure that the instrument is clear, respectful, and capable of capturing rich, meaningful narratives. This process aims to produce a well-validated interview tool that is both methodologically sound and contextually appropriate for use in correctional learning environments.

### **Procedure**

In employing the phenomenological method, the researcher utilized the narratives of participants as empirical data. The participants communicated their stories in Tagalog, facilitating a comfortable narrative process. Prior to the interviews, the researcher visited the jail to provide the respondents with informed consent forms and have a preliminary meeting. Upon receiving the signed consent forms, the researcher scheduled the interviews with PDLs. To ensure the collection of substantial data, the researcher first conducted a simulation interview, followed by the actual interviews.

### **Data Analysis**

To analyze the data from participant interviews, the researcher utilized thematic analysis, a method that identifies, examines, and interprets patterns or themes within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2012). This approach is valuable for uncovering and reporting patterns, offering in-depth analysis in relation to the research question (Grimmett et al., 2018), and enhancing understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Lalani et al., 2021).

The study followed a phenomenological data analysis framework, beginning with bracketing, where the researcher set aside

preconceptions and biases. Data collection involved interviews focusing on the participant's educational journey. Afterward, the researcher immersed themselves in the data, rereading transcripts to familiarize themselves with the narratives. Themes and patterns were identified by examining recurring motifs, using numbering to group similar concepts. This led to the creation of both textual and structural descriptions, which were synthesized to provide a coherent and comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon.

### Ethical Considerations

This study upholds strict ethical standards to protect the dignity, rights, and welfare of all participants. Ethical considerations include:

**Respect for Autonomy and Voluntariness:** All participants were fully informed about the objectives, procedures, risks, and benefits of the study. Written informed consent was obtained before participation. They retain the right to withdraw at any time without penalty.

**Confidentiality and Anonymity:** Personal identities were also protected by using pseudonyms in transcripts and reports. No identifiable information was disclosed. Data (audio files, transcripts, notes) were secured in a password-protected digital folder accessible only to the researcher.

**Non-Maleficence and Risk Mitigation:** Considering the vulnerable condition of Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDLs), interviews were conducted respectfully, in private, and without coercion. Potential emotional distress was mitigated by providing access to BJMP's designated guidance counselor or legal aid representative.

**Benevolence:** The research aims to contribute to the improvement of jail-based education and psychosocial support systems, which may positively impact participants' rehabilitation and reintegration. **Justice:** Participant selection followed clear inclusion criteria to ensure fairness, avoiding any discrimination.

The above ethical framework ensures compliance with the Data Privacy Act of 2012 (RA 10173) and the guidelines of the Bureau of Jail Management and Penology (BJMP) as standards of responsible research practices within jails.

### Results and Discussion

This section details the findings from phenomenological interviews with ALS-enrolled Persons Deprived of Liberty, processed through bracketing, immersion, and thematic coding. The results are categorized into main themes and sub-themes, supported by frequency counts to illustrate the prevalence of specific perspectives across participant narratives.

#### *Description of PDL ALS Learners in Their ALS Educational Journey*

##### *Physical Environment*

The PDL ALS learners described their learning environment into 3 themes: (1) Conducive, (2) with adequate space, and (3) conducive but with distraction. The PDLs stated the following: "Maayos naman po ang kalagayan naming habang nag-aaral. May TV kami na nagagamit; May sapat na bentilasyon para sa amin; Maayos po ang pasilidad; ganon din po ang pag handle sa amin ng jail officers; Maayos naman po ang pagaaral namin; Ayos naman po. Hindi masikip.; Sapat ang lugar para sa amin"

Physical conditions of the learning space significantly shaped participants' ability to focus and engage. While some described the environment as conducive and adequate, others pointed out limitations in space and facilities.

In this study, PDL learners expressed mixed views about their learning spaces: some felt the rooms were sufficient, while others pointed out that limited classrooms and weak facilities created obstacles. These perspectives align with Kepper et al. (2019), who explained that environments strongly shape behavior and learning outcomes, and Sharif (2023), who emphasized that institutional support—such as dedicated rooms and structured schedules—is pivotal for consistent program delivery. Similarly, Rogers, De Brún, and McAuliffe (2020) highlighted that complex infrastructures in correctional settings require context-specific planning to ensure effective educational engagement. These studies prove the idea that the physical environment is not just a backdrop but a central factor in sustaining PDL learners' motivation and participation.

*Meanwhile, PDL-ALS learners described environmental disruptions like noise and poor ventilation, as stated: "May pagkakataon na maingay, pag may kasabay na aktibidad; Nakakapag pokus naman po kami, kung minsan lang pag may event, medyo maingay. Minsan mainit pero may 3 electric fan po; Minsan lang po mainit, mahirap mag pokus, nagpapapaypay na lang; Minsan mainit, nagpapaypay na lang."*

Despite some positives, disruptions in the learning environment created notable challenges. Learners struggled with noise and poor ventilation, which hindered concentration and motivation.

Mielke et al. (2022) highlighted that safe and organized environments are crucial for sustaining engagement, especially in correctional education, where distractions are common. In this study, PDL learners reported that noise, cramped spaces, and poor facilities reduced their focus, mirroring these concerns. In similar findings, Auty and Liebling (2019) further explained that the prison's social climate—marked by trust and legitimacy—shapes motivation and persistence, showing that physical conditions cannot be separated from the overall environment. Likewise, Rogers, De Brún, and McAuliffe (2020) emphasized that complex infrastructures demand context-

specific planning to ensure learning continuity. These perspectives reinforce the idea that both the physical and institutional setup of correctional classrooms significantly affect how PDL learners remain attentive, motivated, and engaged.

### **Social Environment**

*The PDL-ALS learners described their social learning environment through three major themes: (1) availability of academic assistance, (2) peer collaboration, and (3) respectful and supportive social environment. The participants stated the following: “Nagbibigay sila ng assistance kapag humingi kami; Pinapaintindi po nila sa amin kapag meron kami tanong o malabo para sa amin; Ayos naman po sila makitungo sa amin, madali silang lapitan kaya natututo po kami; Mahirap kapag may kapwa PDL na hirap makatuto, kailangan tulungan; Mababait sila sa amin, maayos makitungo.”*

Social interactions within the ALS learning environment significantly shaped participants’ academic engagement, confidence, and emotional well-being. Many learners emphasized that approachable teachers and supportive peers enabled them to understand lessons better, clarify difficult concepts, and complete learning tasks with confidence. Statements such as “*Nagbibigay sila ng assistance kapag humingi kami*” and “*Pinapaintindi po nila sa amin kapag meron kaming tanong*” reflect how immediate guidance reduced confusion and strengthened comprehension. Similarly, the response “*Ayos naman po sila makitungo sa amin, madali silang lapitan kaya natututo po kami*” indicates that accessibility and respectful treatment encouraged learners to seek help without fear or hesitation.

In this study, PDL-ALS learners expressed that learning support was reinforced through peer collaboration. One participant shared, “*Mahirap kapag may kapwa PDL na hirap makatuto, kailangan tulungan,*” showing that learners actively assisted one another during academic difficulties. This cooperative practice fostered shared responsibility and strengthened collective learning. Through peer assistance, learners were able to cope with challenging lessons and maintain motivation despite institutional limitations.

These findings are consistent with Tett et al. (2017), who emphasized that positive educator–learner relationships promote trust and academic engagement in correctional education. Similarly, Pike (2019) noted that emotional and instructional support strengthens learners’ resilience and commitment to learning. Rogers, De Brún, and McAuliffe (2020) further explained that relational dynamics within correctional institutions strongly influence learners’ motivation, participation, and persistence. Together, these studies support the present findings that academic and peer support function as essential mechanisms for sustaining learning engagement among PDL learners.

Meanwhile, participants also highlighted the importance of a respectful and supportive social environment. Learners described facilitators and peers as kind and considerate, as reflected in “*Mababait sila sa amin, maayos makitungo.*” Such interactions created a safe and encouraging atmosphere where learners felt valued and accepted. Respectful treatment helped counter feelings of stigma commonly associated with incarceration and reinforced learners’ sense of dignity and belonging. Relational support played a crucial role in strengthening emotional security and self-esteem. When facilitators and peers treated learners with kindness and understanding, participants became more willing to express difficulties, ask questions, and remain engaged in learning activities. This aligns with Auty and Liebling (2019), who emphasized that prison climates characterized by trust and legitimacy foster motivation and persistence. Behan (2014) likewise argued that humane relationships in prison education support identity reconstruction and positive behavioral change.

Although most learners expressed positive experiences, their responses also imply that learning progress depended greatly on the availability of assistance and cooperative peer interactions. When guidance was accessible and peer support was present, learners were able to sustain focus and comprehension. Conversely, limited support could potentially weaken engagement and persistence, highlighting the importance of maintaining consistent instructional and relational support systems.

The social context of ALS learning within the correctional setting was shaped by accessible teachers, collaborative peers, and respectful interpersonal relationships. Through consistent academic guidance, peer cooperation, and humane treatment, learners developed confidence, motivation, and perseverance. The findings demonstrate that the social environment is not merely a background to instruction but a central factor that sustains participation, strengthens resilience, and enables meaningful learning among PDL-ALS learners.

### **Curriculum**

*The PDL-ALS learners described their curriculum experiences through five major themes: (1) academic learning difficulties, (2) instructional aids and strategies, (3) manageable learning conditions, (4) behavioral and value formation, and (5) practical and outlook skills. The participants stated the following: “Madali ang ibang subjects, may part na mahirap tulad ng Math; May pagkakataon na nahihirapan ako sumabay pag Math; Nahihirapan ako sa math at English; May mga leksyon na paulit-ulit bago maintindihan; Pag may mga halimbawa na binibigay; Pag may worksheet, module na sasagutan; Nakakasabay naman po ako sa aralin; Opo, dahil ang mga itinuturo ay tulad din ng turo sa regular school; Opo, natutunan ko ang disiplina sa sarili; Tinuturuan kami maging responsible; Ang ALS ay nagbibigay ng pag-asa at direksyon; Dahil sa ALS nanumbalik yung tiwala ko sa sarili ko.”*

The curriculum significantly shaped learners’ academic engagement, personal development, and future orientation. Many participants reported difficulties in foundational subjects, particularly Mathematics and English, which reminded them of gaps from earlier schooling. Learners found numbers, formulas, grammar, and comprehension challenging, which sometimes affected their confidence

in class participation. However, these struggles also motivated them to practice more, seek help, and support one another. The presence of reinforcement activities, illustrative teaching methods, and learning modules helped make difficult lessons more understandable and manageable.

In this study, instructional aids and strategies served as important support mechanisms that enabled learners to cope with academic challenges. Repetition, examples, and self-paced modules allowed participants to review lessons and gradually build mastery. These findings are consistent with Kim (2018) and Thompson (2017), who emphasized that active engagement and self-paced learning strengthen persistence and understanding. Clark (2019) and Rodriguez (2021) likewise highlighted that clear strategies and collaborative approaches help learners sustain motivation, especially in challenging learning contexts.

Meanwhile, learners emphasized the importance of manageable learning conditions. Appropriate pacing and simplified content helped them follow lessons without feeling overwhelmed. Participants appreciated that ALS lessons were aligned with mainstream education, as this gave them a sense of dignity and equality with learners outside jail. Thompson (2017) and Kim (2018) noted that structured pacing supports gradual mastery, while Clark (2019) explained that supportive teaching builds confidence. This study further shows that curriculum alignment not only improves academic performance but also affirms learners' identity and self-worth.

Beyond academics, the curriculum also contributed to behavioral development and value formation. Participants reported learning discipline, self-control, cooperation, and moral responsibility. They also became more aware of their rights and social responsibilities through lessons on laws and social issues. These findings support Behan (2014) and Szifris et al. (2018), who argued that prison education plays a vital role in identity reconstruction and rehabilitation. The results indicate that ALS functioned not only as an academic program but also as a formative tool that supported character development and reintegration.

Moreover, learners valued lessons that developed practical skills and positive outlooks for life after release. Reading, writing, basic life skills, and exposure to new knowledge were viewed as essential for employment and daily survival. Participants also described how ALS restored their hope, confidence, and sense of direction. Rodriguez (2021) and Lange and Houghton (2021) emphasized that practical and life skills enhance the relevance of prison education and prepare learners for reintegration. This study adds that ALS also nurtured optimism and purpose, enabling learners to view education as a bridge between confinement and future opportunities.

Overall, the curriculum served as a multidimensional support system that addressed academic, personal, and social development. Despite learning difficulties and limited resources, the integration of instructional support, manageable pacing, values education, and practical skills empowered PDL-ALS learners to persist, rebuild their self-concept, and prepare for life beyond incarceration.

### **Learning Methods**

The PDL-ALS learners described their learning methods through five major themes: (1) collaborative learning approaches, (2) personalized teaching strategies, (3) instructional aids and materials, (4) technology-supported instruction, and (5) culturally responsive instruction. The participants stated the following: *“Group work, nagtutulungan kami; Pag group discussion; Group sharing; Depend sa topic, pag Math mas gusto ko one-on-one; Depend. Minsan mas gusto ang group; Combination, minsan group, minsan one-on-one depende sa aralin; One-on-one session para mas malinaw; Hirap ako magbasa; Minsan gusto ko mag-isa lang; Actual na pagtuturo, face to face; Pag may worksheet, module na sasagutan; Yung may visual presentation po gamit ang TV; Kapag Tagalog.”*

Many participants emphasized that collaborative learning made lessons more manageable and less overwhelming. Statements such as *“Group work, nagtutulungan kami,” “Pag group discussion,” “Group sharing,”* and *“Pag grupo”* indicate that working together allowed learners to exchange ideas, clarify misunderstandings, and support one another academically and emotionally. Collaboration also fostered a sense of community within the classroom, reducing feelings of isolation and strengthening learners' confidence in facing difficult lessons.

In addition, adaptive grouping was practiced depending on subject difficulty and learner needs. Some participants stated, *“Depende sa topic, pag Math mas gusto ko one-on-one,” “Depende. minsan mas gusto ko ang group,”* and *“Combination, minsan group, minsan one-on-one, depende sa aralin.”* These responses show that teachers flexibly adjusted learning arrangements, allowing learners to receive either group support or individualized attention. This flexibility made learning more inclusive and responsive to varying academic abilities.

These findings are supported by Kauppi et al. (2020), who emphasized that peer support enhances motivation, and by Auty and Liebling (2019), who found that cooperative environments make prison education more meaningful. This study further demonstrates that collaboration in ALS classrooms extended beyond academic exchange, fostering solidarity, companionship, and emotional support that strengthened learners' persistence.

Personalized teaching strategies also emerged as a crucial learning method. Learners valued one-on-one instruction and direct explanations, particularly when they encountered difficulties. Participants shared, *“One-on-one session para mas malinaw,” “One-on-one. Hirap ako magbasa,” “Minsan gusto ko mag-isa lang,”* and *“Actual na pagtuturo, face to face.”* These responses reflect the importance of individualized attention in addressing learning gaps, especially in reading, comprehension, and numeracy.

Consistent with Clark (2019) and Kim (2018), these findings show that flexible pacing and focused guidance improve learning

outcomes among marginalized learners. Beyond academic support, this study highlights that personalized instruction also restored learners' self-belief and sense of dignity, echoing Lange and Houghton's (2021) call for holistic prison education.

Instructional aids and learning materials further supported understanding and independent study. Participants mentioned, "*Pag may worksheet, module na sasagutan,*" and "*May mga pictures na pinapakita habang nagtuturo.*" Others referred to face-to-face demonstrations as helpful visual support. These responses indicate that worksheets, modules, pictures, and illustrations made abstract concepts easier to understand and enabled learners to review lessons beyond classroom time.

In line with Kim (2018), Thompson (2017), and Rodriguez (2021), these findings suggest that structured materials and repeated practice strengthen comprehension and retention. This study adds that in resource-limited jail settings, simple instructional tools also provided emotional stability and motivation, becoming dependable learning companions for PDL learners.

Technology-supported instruction, though limited, generated excitement and curiosity among participants. Learners stated, "*Yung may visual presentation po gamit ang TV.*" This indicates that audio-visual presentations and digital devices enhanced lesson delivery and connected learners to modern educational practices. Even minimal exposure to technology symbolized progress and opportunity.

These findings support Lange and Houghton (2021) and Rodriguez (2021), who emphasized that technology increases relevance and engagement in prison education. This study further reveals that technological tools carried emotional meaning for learners, representing hope and connection to life beyond incarceration.

Culturally responsive instruction also contributed to meaningful learning experiences. One participant stated, "*Kapag tagalog,*" highlighting the importance of using the native language in instruction. Lessons delivered in familiar language and cultural contexts made learning more relatable and accessible. Learners felt respected when their identities and backgrounds were acknowledged. These results are consistent with Behan (2014), Szifris et al. (2018), and Lange and Houghton (2021), who emphasized that culturally sensitive teaching strengthens inclusion, motivation, and empowerment in correctional education.

The integration of collaborative learning, personalized instruction, practical learning materials, technology-supported strategies, and culturally responsive teaching created a supportive and engaging learning environment for PDL-ALS learners. These methods enhanced academic understanding while also fostering confidence, resilience, and a sense of belonging. Despite limited resources, effective instructional practices enabled learners to persist in their studies, rebuild self-worth, and prepare for meaningful reintegration into society.

### **Learning Materials**

The PDL-ALS learners described their experiences with learning materials through three major themes: (1) resource availability and adequacy, (2) technology-enhanced resources, and (3) resource limitations. The participants confirmed the following: "*May notebook, may ballpen, lapis. Lahat ng pangangailangan namin ay naka ready na at tinutugunan ng aming guro; Binibigyan po kami ni mam ng ballpen, notebook, may mga gamit naman po na binibigay sa amin; Opo, binibigyan po kami ni mam ng mga kailangan namin; May mga gamit po na binibigay sa amin; Wala naman po, may mga ballpen at notebook kami; Sapat po, may ballpen, notebook, lapis; Opo. Naka ready na po ang mga gamit namin; Opo. Updated ang mga modules; TV na magagamit dahil minsan pag may gumagamit na iba, laptop lang ni mam ang gamit namin; Tablet, computer; TV; Celphone po sana, pero alam naming na bawal kaya hindi kami naghahanap ng mga ganong bagay; Celphone. Pero ayos lang kahit wala dahil bawal.*"

Learning materials played a significant role in shaping learners' access to education and sense of inclusion. Many participants emphasized that having basic resources such as notebooks, pens, and worksheets enabled them to participate meaningfully in lessons. Statements such as "*May notebook, may ballpen, lapis,*" "*Binibigyan po kami ni mam ng mga kailangan namin,*" and "*Sapat po, may ballpen, notebook, lapis*" show that essential learning tools were generally available and adequately provided. Learners also appreciated that their materials were prepared in advance, as reflected in "*Lahat ng pangangailangan namin ay naka ready na,*" and "*Naka ready na po ang mga gamit namin.*" Occasional updates to instructional materials further strengthened their learning experience, as expressed in "*Updated ang mga modules.*"

These findings are parallel with Barrow et al. (2019) and Boyle et al. (2020), who noted that limited resources often challenge jail-based education. However, this study highlights that even basic materials can promote inclusion and learning continuity when they are consistently provided. The availability of essential learning tools reduced barriers to participation and reinforced learners' sense of belonging within the educational program.

Technology-enhanced resources, although limited, added variety and engagement to learning experiences. Learners mentioned, "*TV na magagamit dahil minsan pag may gumagamit na iba, laptop lang ni mam ang gamit namin,*" "*Tablet, computer,*" and "*TV.*" These responses indicate that even occasional access to audio-visual tools helped clarify lessons and made classroom activities more dynamic. Technology exposure also connected learners to modern learning practices that they would eventually encounter after release.

In line with Barrow et al. (2019) and Lange and Houghton (2021), limited technological access enhanced learners' motivation and sense of relevance. For PDL learners, these tools symbolized progress and connection to the outside world, reinforcing their readiness for reintegration and future employment.

Despite these positive experiences, resource limitations remained evident. Learners acknowledged restrictions on certain materials, particularly mobile phones, stating, *“Celphone po sana, pero alam naming na bawal kaya hindi kami naghahanap ng mga ganong bagay,”* and *“Celphone. Pero ayos lang kahit wala dahil bawal.”* These responses reflect awareness of institutional rules and acceptance of material constraints within the correctional setting.

Rather than allowing these limitations to discourage them, learners adapted by maximizing available resources and adjusting their learning strategies. This resilience supports Behan’s (2014) view that constraints can foster adaptability, while also aligning with Boyle et al. (2020) and Barrow et al. (2019) on structural challenges in correctional education. The present findings further show that PDL learners actively converted material deprivation into opportunities for persistence and self-discipline.

Learning materials served not only as instructional tools but also as critical enablers of participation, engagement, and continuity in learning. Through access to basic resources, limited technological exposure, and adaptive responses to scarcity, PDL-ALS learners were able to sustain motivation and pursue education with resilience and purpose despite highly constrained conditions.

### Emotions

The PDL-ALS learners described their emotional experiences in learning through four major themes: (1) emotional struggles, (2) positive learning emotions, (3) motivation and outlook, and (4) resilient learning effort. The participants said the following: *“Malungkot, may kaba din, baka hindi matapos; Naiiyak minsan pag napapaisip sa buhay ko; Malungkot minsan, hindi kasama ang pamilya; Nakakawala ng gana minsan, malungkot, umiyyak ako dahil naiisip ko yung pamilya ko; Pag stress, hirap maka concentrate; Buryong; Nakakainip; Minsan parang nawawalan ng gana; Pag malungkot, parang tinatamad mag-aral; Unti-unti nalalampasan ko din yung lungkot; Masaya, minsan malungkot; Nakakahiya sa una, pero nasanay na; Masaya para din po estudyante nasa loob nga lang; Minsan masaya dahil dito sa loob nakapag-aral ako; Masaya, excited ako pag may klase, ganado ako mag-aral; Natutuwa ako pag naiintindihan ko ang lesson; Tumitibay ang loob ko kapag natututo ako; Ang pamilya ko ang ginagamit kong lakas sa pag-aaral; Minsan, pinipilit ko kahit anong emosyon meron ako.”*

Learning inside confinement was not only an intellectual challenge but also an emotional struggle. Many learners experienced sadness, anxiety, loneliness, and stress that affected their concentration and motivation. Statements such as *“Malungkot, may kaba din,”* *“Naiiyak minsan,”* and *“Pag stress, hirap maka concentrate”* illustrate the emotional burden carried by participants. Feelings of boredom and restlessness, expressed through *“Buryong”* and *“Nakakainip,”* further weakened their engagement, while loss of drive was reflected in *“Minsan parang nawawalan ng gana”* and *“Tinatamad mag-aral.”* At the same time, some learners reported gradual emotional healing, as shown in *“Unti-unti nalalampasan ko din yung lungkot,”* and *“Masaya, minsan malungkot,”* indicating mixed emotional experiences during their learning journey.

These findings are consistent with Cortez and Dioso (2023) and Labarrete and Tiopes (2024), who noted that emotional distress, restlessness, and fluctuating motivation are common among ALS learners in confinement. Unlike system-level reports such as the World Bank (2018), which focus mainly on attendance and academic outcomes, this study highlights the emotional dimensions of learning and shows that education also served as a source of comfort, self-reflection, and emotional recovery.

Despite these struggles, learning also generated positive emotions that strengthened learners’ sense of self-worth and purpose. Participants expressed happiness and excitement in statements such as *“Masaya para din pong estudyante,”* *“Masaya, excited ako pag may klase,”* and *“Natutuwa ako pag naiintindihan ko ang lesson.”* These responses show that moments of understanding, classroom interaction, and academic progress brought joy and renewed confidence. Learning became an emotional anchor that helped learners feel valued and capable despite their circumstances.

These positive emotions support Behan’s (2014) view that prison education restores dignity and fosters personal development. Similarly, Szifris et al. (2018) described education as a “hook for identity change,” which aligns with how learners in this study experienced joy and excitement as reminders of their worth and potential. This study extends earlier research by demonstrating that emotional breakthroughs, rather than test scores alone, were central to learners’ sense of success and transformation.

Motivation and outlook also played an important role in sustaining participation. Learners drew strength from learning itself and from their relationships with family members. Statements such as *“Tumitibay ang loob ko kapag natututo ako,”* *“Ginagawa kong motivation,”* and *“Ang pamilya ko ang ginagamit kong lakas sa pag-aaral”* reflect how education and family served as sources of hope and determination. These findings are consistent with Smith (2022) and Labarrete and Tiopes (2024), who emphasized that reintegration goals and family support strengthen learners’ commitment to ALS participation.

At the core of their emotional journey was resilience and persistent effort. Even when faced with sadness, stress, and discouragement, learners continued to attend classes and engage in learning activities. This determination was captured in the statement, *“Minsan, pinipilit ko kahit anong emosyon na meron ako.”* Such responses reveal that learning inside confinement required emotional strength and self-discipline. Persistence became a form of resistance against hopelessness and despair.

This resilience supports Behan’s (2014) assertion that prison education builds character and emotional strength, and reinforces Cortez and Dioso’s (2023) recommendation to integrate psychosocial support into ALS programs. The findings show that PDL learners did not merely endure emotional difficulties but actively transformed them into motivation for self-improvement.

The PDL-ALS learners' experiences were also marked by struggle, growth, hope, and resilience. Through moments of sadness and joy, discouragement and motivation, vulnerability and persistence, education became both an academic and emotional journey that supported healing, identity reconstruction, and preparation for reintegration.

### Aspirations

The PDL-ALS learners described their aspirations in learning through four major themes: (1) career-oriented learning goals, (2) family-driven motivation, (3) positive outlook and readiness for reintegration, and (4) transformational learning aspirations. The participants shared that: *“Pangarap kong makatapos ng ALS, magkaron ng sariling negosyo; Mapatayo ng sariling tindahan; Makapagtrabaho, magkaron ng maliit na negosyo; Makapag-abroad, magkabusiness; Mag-aral din ng TESDA kung mabibigyan ng pagkakataon, magkaron ng negosyo, makatulong sa pamilya ko; Makapag-abroad; Makahanap ng trabaho; Makapagtrabaho; Makatulong sa pamilya; Makapagtrabaho, makatulong sa pamilya; Manumbalik ang tiwala ko sa sarili ko; Dahil sa ALS naniwala ulit ako sa sarili ko; Parang bumalik yung dati kong pangarap; Unti-unti nawala ang takot ko, nagtiwala sa sarili ko; Nagkaroon ako ng plano sa buhay; Nakakalakas ng loob; Nagkaroon ako ng tiwala sa sarili; Nagsilbing stepping stone ko ang ALS paglabas ko; Pwede kong i-apply ang mga natutunan ko paglaya; Magbagong buhay at hindi na bumalik sa kulungan; Nalaman ko ang mga kahinaan at lakas ko; Na-realize ko ang mga pagkakamali ko; Ang pag-aaral ay nagsilbing parte ng routine ko.”*

Learning aspirations among PDL-ALS learners were strongly oriented toward economic independence and meaningful employment. Many participants viewed education as preparation for entrepreneurship and workforce participation. Statements such as *“Pangarap ko makatapos ng ALS, magkaron ng sariling negosyo,” “Magpatayo ng sariling tindahan,”* and *“Makapagtrabaho, magkaron ng maliit na negosyo”* illustrate learners' desire to establish sustainable livelihoods. Others expressed plans for overseas work and skills training, as shown in *“Makapag-abroad,”* and *“Mag-aral din ng TESDA kung mabigyan ng pagkakataon.”* These findings support Rodriguez (2021) and Lange and Houghton (2021), who emphasized the importance of livelihood-oriented education in facilitating reintegration.

Family emerged as a central source of motivation that gave deeper meaning to learners' aspirations. Participants consistently expressed the desire to support their loved ones, stating *“Makatulong sa pamilya,”* and *“Makapagtrabaho, makatulong sa pamilya.”* For many learners, education represented an opportunity to reclaim their role as providers and rebuild dignity within their families. These findings align with Labarrete and Tiopes (2024) and Smith (2022), who emphasized that family ties strengthen commitment to ALS participation and reintegration goals.

Aspirations were also shaped by growing confidence, optimism, and readiness for life after release. Learners shared statements such as *“Manumbalik ang tiwala ko sa sarili ko,” “Dahil sa ALS naniwala ulit ako sa sarili ko,” “Parang bumalik yung dati kong pangarap,”* and *“Nagkaroon ako ng plano sa buhay,”* reflecting renewed self-belief and future orientation. Others highlighted preparedness for reintegration through *“Nagsilbing stepping stone ko ang ALS paglabas ko,”* and *“Pwede ko i-apply ang mga natutunan ko paglaya.”* These responses indicate that education strengthened learners' resilience and readiness to face post-release responsibilities.

Beyond economic and relational goals, some learners viewed education as a deeply transformative process that reshaped their identity and daily behavior. Statements such as *“Magbagong buhay at hindi na bumalik sa kulungan,” “Nalaman ko ang mga kahinaan at lakas ko,” “Na-realize ko ang mga pagkakamali ko,”* and *“Ang pag-aaral ay nagsilbing parte ng routine ko”* show how learning encouraged self-reflection, discipline, and moral growth. These findings support Behan (2014) and Szifris et al. (2018), who emphasized that prison education fosters personal transformation and identity reconstruction.

PDL-ALS learners shared their strong desire for self-improvement, family responsibility, economic independence, and personal renewal. Through career-oriented goals, family-driven motivation, positive outlook, and transformational learning, education became a powerful vehicle for rebuilding dignity, strengthening resilience, and preparing for meaningful reintegration into society.

### Beliefs

The PDL-ALS learners described their beliefs about learning through four major themes: (1) motivation and outlook, (2) personal growth and improvement, (3) value of education, and (4) family-driven purpose. The participants believed that: *“Naniniwala ako na may pag-asa pa sa kabila ng nangyari sa akin; Maniwala ako na kaya ko basta pagtuunan ko ng pansin at magtiyaga; Hindi pa huli ang lahat, may silbi pa ako; May pag-asa pa ako, hindi pa huli ang lahat; Magagamit ko ang mga natutunan ko sa labas; Makakatulong ito sa akin at sa mga anak ko; Hindi pa huli ang lahat; Pagbutihin ko lang at makakahanap din ako ng trabaho pag laya ko; Pwede ako bumangon at bumawi sa mga pagkukulang ko; Kaya ko magbago at ayusin ang sarili ko; Hindi ko akalain na makakatapos ako ng elementarya at ngayon ay nasa high school na; Dahil hindi akalain na makapag-aral ako, dito ako natuto magbasa; Nagkaroon ako ng respeto sa sarili ko; Matututunan ko din ang mga bagay sa pamamagitan ng pagsisikap; May kakayahan at talino din ako; Magsikap dahil ang edukasyon ay hindi mananakaw; Ang mga natutunan ko ay hindi mananakaw at maaari kong ibahagi sa iba; Kapag nakatapos ako, mas marami oportunidad; Magiging gabay ko ito pag laya ko; Natuto ako hindi lang sa libro kundi sa karanasan; Pwede ko ito i-share sa aking pamilya, sa aking anak.”*

PDL-ALS learners' beliefs were deeply anchored in the conviction that education served as a pathway toward hope, dignity, and

readiness for reintegration. Many participants expressed strong optimism and self-belief, as reflected in statements such as *“Naniniwala ako na may pag-asa pa,” “Hindi pa huli ang lahat,”* and *“May silbi pa ako.”* Others emphasized preparedness for life after release through *“Magagamit ko ang mga natutunan ko sa labas,”* and *“Makakatulong ito sa akin at sa mga anak ko.”* These responses show that learners viewed education as a second chance and a means of restoring personal worth and social participation.

These findings align with Davis et al. (2013), Taylor (2014), and Pike (2015), who emphasized that ALS participation strengthens confidence, life skills, and future orientation among incarcerated learners. Despite challenges related to limited resources and institutional constraints (Barrow et al., 2019; Sala, 2024), participants maintained strong beliefs in the transformative power of education. Consistent with Clark (2019) and Behan (2014), supportive learning environments further reinforced learners’ motivation and persistence.

Beliefs about learning were also closely connected to personal growth and character development. Participants viewed education as an avenue for self-improvement and self-reflection, as expressed in *“Pwede ako bumangon at bumawi,” “Kaya ko magbago,”* and *“Nagkaroon ako ng respeto sa sarili ko.”* Others highlighted their academic progress and newly discovered abilities through *“Hindi ko akalain na makakatapos ako,” “Dito ako natuto magbasa,”* and *“May kakayahan at talino din ako.”* These statements indicate that learning strengthened self-efficacy and encouraged learners to confront past failures with renewed determination.

Consistent with Kim (2018), Pike (2015), and Behan (2014), these findings demonstrate that ALS fosters persistence, confidence, and inner transformation. The belief that improvement was possible motivated learners to exert sustained effort, as shown in *“Matututunan ko din ang mga bagay sa pamamagitan ng pagsisikap.”*

Participants also regarded education as a lasting asset that could guide their future decisions and life choices. Statements such as *“Ang edukasyon ay hindi mananakaw,” “Ang mga natutunan ko ay hindi mananakaw,”* and *“Mas marami oportunidad”* reflect the perception of learning as a permanent resource. Others described learning as a moral and practical guide through *“Magiging gabay ko ito pag laya ko,”* and *“Natuto ako hindi lang sa libro kundi sa karanasan.”* These responses suggest that learners viewed education as both a compass and a toolkit for rebuilding their lives.

These findings support Davis et al. (2013), Taylor (2014), and Smith (2022), who emphasized that literacy and skills development empower incarcerated learners beyond confinement. Behan (2014) and Pike (2015) likewise argued that education strengthens self-worth and dignity, reinforcing its long-term value.

Family emerged as a central influence shaping learners’ beliefs about education. Participants emphasized relational responsibility and shared benefit, as reflected in *“Pwede ko ito i-share sa aking pamilya, sa aking anak.”* For many learners, education represented a means of uplifting loved ones and fulfilling their roles as parents and providers. This aligns with DepEd (2019), Arzadon and Nato (2015), and Pike (2019), who highlighted the importance of family and community ties in sustaining motivation and reintegration.

Hence, the participants’ beliefs reflected strong optimism, commitment to self-improvement, recognition of education’s enduring value, and deep relational purpose. Through these beliefs, education functioned as a source of strength, identity reconstruction, and moral grounding, enabling learners to envision meaningful lives beyond incarceration.

### **Relationship between PDLs and teachers**

The PDL-ALS learners described their relationship with teachers through three major themes: (1) supportive care and empathy, (2) persistence and monitoring, and (3) fairness and recognition. The participants stated the following: *“Mabait po si mam. Lagi po nya kami kinukumusta; Maayos po sya makisama. Inuunawa po nya kami. Marunong po sya makibagay. Madali po lapitan si mam. Nilalapitan po nya kami isa-isa; Ginagabayan kami ng may malasakit; Para po syang ina samin. Ang turing po nya samin ay kapatid, kaibigan; Parang nanay na po sa amin si mam; Marunong po sya makisama. Alam po nya pag may pinagdadaanan kami. Nagbibigay po sya ng advice; Bukas po ang tenga at puso nya sa amin. Lagi po nya kami ine-encourage. Isa po sya sa mga nagpapalakas sa amin; Naniniwala po sya na kaya po naming magbago; Nakikinig sya sa concerns naming; Mapagkalinga at approachable; Madali po sila lapitan pag may mga tanong ako; Mabait po si mam; Matiyaga po si mam magpaliwanag pag meron kami hindi naintindihan; Laging pasensyoso sa pagtuturo; Palaging nagpapaliwanag ng malinaw at inuulit kapag nahirapan kami unawain; Pwede ko sabihin na hindi ko naintindihan at tinuturo nya ng may pagpapasensya; Mahaba po ang pasensya ni mam; Tanggap po nya kami. Pag tinatamad po kami, kinukumusta po kami; Pantay-pantay ang pagtrato sa amin; Maayos po sila makisama sa aming lahat; Pinaparamdam nya na mahalaga kami.”*

PDL-ALS learners consistently described their teachers as compassionate, understanding, and emotionally supportive. Participants highlighted that teachers regularly checked on their well-being, listened to their concerns, and guided academic instruction. Statements such as *“Lagi po nya kami kinukumusta,” “Bukas po ang tenga at puso nya,”* and *“Naniniwala po sya na kaya po naming magbago”* illustrate how empathy and encouragement fostered acceptance and trust. Teachers were often described in familial terms, such as *“Para po syang ina samin”* and *“Parang nanay na po sa amin si mam,”* indicating the deep emotional bonds formed within the learning environment. This supportive care transformed classrooms into safe spaces where learners felt valued and motivated to grow.

Li, Kim, and Xiong (2020) and Clark (2019) supported this, emphasizing that teacher empathy, adaptability, and consistent support strongly influence learning outcomes among marginalized learners.

Teachers' persistence and commitment also emerged as central features of positive relationships. Learners described facilitators as patient and dedicated, repeatedly explaining lessons and adjusting instruction to ensure understanding. Statements such as "*Matiyaga po si mam magpaliwanag,*" "*Laging pasensyoso sa pagtuturo,*" and "*Mahaba po ang pasensya ni mam*" reflect this sustained effort. Monitoring and follow-up were interpreted as signs of care rather than control, as shown in "*Kinukumusta po kami.*" This consistent guidance encouraged learners to mirror similar perseverance in their own studies.

These findings align with Clark (2019) and Castolo and Chan (2016), who stressed that continuous support and monitoring strengthen learner engagement and achievement. Razali et al. (2020) further noted that regular feedback fosters both academic progress and emotional security. For PDL learners, teachers' persistence confirmed that their progress mattered, reinforcing education as a relational and motivational process.

Fairness and recognition further strengthened teacher-learner relationships. Participants emphasized being treated equally and respectfully, as expressed in "*Pantay-pantay ang pagtrato sa amin,*" and "*Maayos po sila makisama sa aming lahat.*" Such impartial treatment restored dignity and countered experiences of stigma. Learners also valued appreciation and affirmation, reflected in "*Pinaparamdam nya na mahalaga kami.*" Even small gestures of recognition enhanced learners' confidence and commitment to learning.

Consistent with Clark (2019), Ghavifekr (2020), and Behan (2014), these findings show that fairness and acknowledgment reinforce learners' self-worth and persistence. When teachers recognized effort and treated learners with respect, education became an empowering experience that restored humanity and strengthened motivation.

The relationship between PDL-ALS learners and teachers was characterized by empathy, patience, fairness, and genuine concern. Teachers functioned not only as instructors but also as mentors and emotional anchors. These relationships played a vital role in sustaining learners' engagement, resilience, and personal transformation within the correctional education setting.

### **Relationship between PDLs and PDL peers**

The PDL-ALS learners described their relationships with peers through four major themes: (1) interpersonal understanding and harmony, (2) supportive relationships, (3) social interaction skills, and (4) constructive challenges. The participants stated the following: "*Iba-iba kami pero marunong sila umunawa ganon din ako sa kanila; Natutunan ko unawain ang kahinaan ng iba kong kasama; Iba-iba ang ugali pero natahimik na lang; Marunong makisama ako at sila; Natutunan ko makibagay at umunawa sa kasama ko; Inuunawa po nila ang kahinaan ko; Maayos po sila makitungo; Nagtutulungan sa assignments; Tinutulungan ko sila kapag kaya ko; Masaya, nagtutulungan kami; May pagkakaisa kami; Inuunawa po nila ako, tinutulungan pag kinakailangan; May nagtuturo sa akin kapag di ko alam; Nagbibigayan po kami at naguunawaan; Nakakatuwa dahil may kakwentuhan; May bonding din kahit limitado; Para na kaming pamilya, nauunawaan at nagbibigayan; Share-share sa baon, para kaming magkakapatid; Ilap ako sa tao pero dito unti-unti ko natutunan makisalamuha; Marunong po makisama; Minsan po na cha-challenge ako sa kanila.*"

PDL-ALS learners consistently described their peer relationships as grounded in mutual understanding, patience, and respect. Despite differences in personality and background, participants emphasized their efforts to accept one another and maintain harmony. Statements such as "*Marunong sila umunawa,*" "*Natuto akong makibagay,*" and "*Maayos po sila makitungo*" illustrate how empathy and self-control helped prevent conflicts. Learners learned to manage emotions and practice patience, recognizing that cooperation was necessary for maintaining a peaceful learning environment.

These findings are consistent with Barrow et al. (2019) and Ghavifekr (2020), who found that collaborative learning and peer support reduce isolation and promote belonging in correctional education. Pickering (2013) and Kauppi et al. (2020) likewise emphasized that peer networks create informal learning communities that sustain engagement. Auty and Liebling (2019) further explained that positive prison climates built on trust and respect encourage personal growth and learning persistence.

Collaboration and supportive relationships further strengthened peer interactions. Learners frequently described helping one another with assignments and lessons, as reflected in "*Nagtutulungan sa assignments,*" "*May nagtuturo sa akin,*" and "*Tinutulungan ko sila kapag kaya ko.*" Expressions such as "*Masaya, nagtutulungan kami*" and "*May pagkakaisa kami*" show that cooperation fostered motivation and emotional comfort. Many participants also described friendships and familial bonds, stating "*Para na kaming pamilya,*" and "*Para kaming magkakapatid,*" which helped ease loneliness and reinforced collective responsibility for learning.

Consistent with Auty and Liebling (2019), who likewise noted that trust and care within prison communities promote openness to growth and transformation. Peer relationships also contributed to the development of social interaction skills. For some learners, participation in group learning helped overcome shyness and social withdrawal. One participant shared, "*Ilap ako sa tao, pero dito unti-unti ko natutunan makisalamuha,*" while another stated, "*Marunong po makisama.*" These responses suggest that ALS classrooms served as training grounds for communication, cooperation, and social adjustment, which are essential for reintegration.

Learners acknowledged that peer interactions were not always smooth but viewed challenges as opportunities for personal growth. One participant shared, "*Minsan po na cha-challenge ako sa kanila,*" reflecting how disagreements and differences required patience and adaptation. Rather than becoming sources of conflict, these challenges encouraged learners to practice understanding and resilience. These findings support Auty and Liebling (2019), Ghavifekr (2020), and Pickering (2013), who emphasized that constructive handling

of peer tensions strengthens cooperation and learning persistence. Kauppi et al. (2020) further highlighted that social support helps learners remain motivated even in difficult environments.

Through mutual understanding, collaborative support, social skill development, and constructive conflict management, peer interactions transformed the classroom into a community of learning and growth. These relationships played a vital role in sustaining engagement, emotional stability, and readiness for reintegration within the correctional education setting.

### ***Overall Assessment of the PDLs ALS Learners During their Educational Journey***

Overall, the educational journeys of Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDLs) enrolled in ALS at Lucena City District Jail reveal how resilience becomes the cornerstone of transformation. Despite being confronted with systemic barriers such as confinement, limited resources, and a constrained environment, the PDL learners do not perceive these challenges as insurmountable. Instead, they draw upon personal motivation, faith, and social support to turn adversities into opportunities for self-growth. Their resilience is not passive endurance but an active process of adapting and finding meaning in learning within a context marked by deprivation.

This main theme, Resilient Learners Transforming Challenges into Growth, illustrates that education behind bars is more than acquiring literacy or passing equivalency exams—it is a humanizing process that restores dignity, strengthens agency, and nurtures hope. The learners' stories demonstrate that the ALS program becomes a transformative platform: from restoring confidence to rekindling aspirations for reintegration. Within this context, resilience does not simply mean surviving hardship; it signifies growth and renewal, turning the limitations of incarceration into avenues for personal transformation.

The results of the study showed that PDLs in the Lucena City District Jail used resilience as a way to transform themselves, turning hardships into opportunities for growth and regaining dignity. This finding is consistent with earlier studies that emphasize the rehabilitative role of correctional education. Davis et al. (2013) and Pike (2015) found that education inside prisons reduced reoffending and built self-esteem, while Azarcon (2024) reported that ALS participation improved both literacy and social reintegration. Similarly, Castolo and Chan (2016) highlighted that strong support systems and facilitation are essential for sustaining ALS programs, and Barrow et al. (2019) noted that peer mentoring and positive learning environments help learners cope with stress. These studies confirm the experiences of the participants, who emphasized the importance of teacher guidance and peer support in their ability to continue learning. In this sense, the study reinforces previous findings and provides further evidence that ALS is not only about academic learning but also about personal transformation and resilience.

However, the findings also challenge some of the traditional measures of ALS success. Reports from the World Bank (2018) and DepEd often highlight Accreditation and Equivalency (A&E) exam pass rates and attendance as the main indicators of effectiveness. In contrast, this study showed that PDL learners valued restored dignity, self-discipline, and renewed aspirations even when they struggled in subjects like Math and English. The difference may be explained by methodology and context. Large-scale surveys such as those of the World Bank (2018) measure quantitative outputs, while this study used a phenomenological approach that focused on lived experiences. Moreover, challenges such as overcrowded cells and limited materials, noted in Boyle et al. (2020) and Barrow et al. (2019), did not weaken motivation but instead encouraged perseverance among PDLs. This highlights that resilience is both a coping mechanism and an outcome of jail-based ALS, which may not be captured through exam-based indicators alone. By showing this contrast, the study extends current literature and stresses that the transformative value of ALS lies not just in test results but in its ability to humanize and empower learners under conditions of deprivation.

### ***PDL ALS Learners' Specific Challenges During Their ALS Educational Journey***

The PDL-ALS learners described their challenges in learning through three major themes: (1) family-related emotional struggles, (2) academic learning barriers, and (3) emotional and motivational difficulties. The participants stated the following: *“Pagka-miss sa pamilya; Minsan may dalaw, minsan wala; Minsan hindi ko nakakausap ang pamilya ko, nakakapag-alala; Mahirap ang malayo sa pamilya; Nakakainip, nami-miss ko ang pamilya ko; Pagkasabik sa pamilya, ang hirap o walang gana kumilos; Nakakaya naman ang aralin, pero yung pagkalungkot, iyon ang mahirap; Pag may problema ang pamilya, mahirap mag-aral; Hindi ako makapag-pokus pag may problema sa pamilya; Hindi ako sanay magbasa ng matagal; Nahihirapan ako sa pag-aaral, pagbabasa; Nahihirapan ako kasi matagal na akong hindi nag-aral; May pressure minsan; Challenge yung pagka-buryong; Pagkainip minsan; Ang pagkalungkot minsan, mahirap mag-aral; May araw na nawawalan ako ng gana pumasok; Kapag hindi naintindihan ang lesson, parang nakakawala ng gana; Minsan malungkot ka na lang; Malungkot yung sitwasyon mismo.”*

Family emerged as both a major source of emotional strength and a profound challenge for PDL-ALS learners. Many participants expressed deep longing for their loved ones, stating *“Pagka-miss sa pamilya,” “Minsan may dalaw, minsan wala,”* and *“Mahirap ang malayo sa pamilya.”* Limited communication heightened anxiety and distraction, as reflected in *“Minsan hindi ko nakakausap ang pamilya ko,”* and *“Hindi ako makapag-pokus pag may problema sa pamilya.”* These responses indicate that emotional separation created psychological burdens that often interfered with learning engagement. The challenges described by the PDL-ALS learners—missing their families, struggling with academic gaps, and dealing with low motivation—match what earlier studies have also found in jail-based education. Barrow et al. (2019) and Boyle et al. (2020) explained that the jail environment often makes learning harder because of overcrowding, poor spaces, and very limited resources, which is the same situation described by the participants in Lucena City District Jail. Labarrete and Tiopes (2024) also showed that many PDL learners feel sadness, lack of energy, and a strong longing

for family, which makes it difficult to focus on lessons. These similarities show that the difficulties in this study are not unique but are part of common experiences faced by jailed learners in other contexts. At the same time, Pike (2015) and Davis et al. (2013) stressed that learning in jail is not just about academics—it is also about emotions, relationships, and the hope to change one's life. The present findings support that view because learners described their challenges as emotional and personal, not just academic. These findings are also consistent with Barrow et al. (2019), Boyle et al. (2020), and Labarrete and Tiopes (2024), who reported that family separation, emotional distress, and institutional limitations hinder learning in correctional settings. Pike (2015) and Davis et al. (2013) likewise emphasized that prison education involves emotional and relational struggles alongside academic development.

Academic learning barriers also emerged as significant challenges. Participants reported difficulties in reading and comprehension, as shown in “Hindi ako sanay magbasa ng matagal,” and “Nahihirapan ako sa pag-aaral, pagbabasa.” Interrupted schooling further affected learning continuity, as expressed in “Matagal na akong hindi nag-aral.” Some learners also experienced pressure to keep pace with lessons, reflected in “May pressure minsan.” These responses indicate uneven educational foundations that required additional effort and adjustment.

Emotional and motivational struggles further compounded academic difficulties. Learners described boredom and monotony through statements such as “Challenge yung pagka-buryong,” and “Pagkainip minsan.” Loss of motivation was reflected in “May araw na nawawalan ako ng gana pumasok,” and “Kapag hindi naintindihan ang lesson, parang nakakawala ng gana.” Feelings of sadness and emotional heaviness were evident in “Minsan malungkot ka na lang,” and “Malungkot yung sitwasyon mismo.” These findings support Barrow et al. (2019), Pike (2019), Mielke et al. (2022), and Sala (2024), who highlighted how restrictive routines and limited stimulation increase psychological strain and reduce sustained engagement among incarcerated learners.

The challenges faced by PDL-ALS learners were multidimensional, encompassing emotional separation from family, academic gaps, and persistent motivational difficulties. These barriers significantly affected learners' concentration, confidence, and persistence. The findings demonstrate that effective ALS implementation in correctional settings must address not only instructional needs but also emotional and psychosocial concerns to better support learners' sustained participation and academic progress.

### ***PDL ALS Learners' Coping Strategies to Address the Challenges During their ALS Educational Journey***

The coping strategies of PDL-ALS learners reflected their capacity to adapt, endure, and find meaning despite adversity. The participants described their coping experiences through (1) spiritual grounding, (2) positive mindset, (3) social support, and (4) meaningful engagement in daily activities. The participants stated the following: “Nagdadasal tuwing nahihirapan; Nagdadasal, humihingi ng tulong pag di na kaya; Pagdadasal ang nagsilbing sandigan ko; Nagdadasal, maging positibo; Tinutulungan ko ang sarili kong maging disiplinado; Iniiwasan maging negatibo o panghinaan ng loob; Maging positibo araw-araw; Pinipilit kong i-motivate ang sarili ko; Pinipilit ko maging masaya kahit na may lungkot; Tinatanggap ko na lang ang sitwasyon ko, pero hindi sumusuko; Sa tulong ng mga kasama ko nalalampasan ko yung moral support; Kinakausap ko ang iba kong kasama pag nalulungkot; Nakikipagkwentuhan ako sa kapwa ko PDL; Nag-cro-cross stitch; Naglilinis na lang, pampalipas-oras; Ginagawa kong inspirasyon ang aking pamilya sa labas.”

Many learners relied on prayer, faith, and inner discipline as primary sources of strength. Statements such as “Nagdadasal tuwing nahihirapan,” “Pagdadasal ang nagsilbing sandigan ko,” and “Nagdadasal, maging positibo” show how spiritual practices were intertwined with optimism and emotional regulation. Prayer offered comfort during distress, while self-control, reflected in “Tinutulungan ko ang sarili kong maging disiplinado,” helped learners remain focused on personal growth. Alongside spirituality, participants deliberately cultivated positive thinking and self-motivation, as seen in “Iniiwasan maging negatibo,” “Maging positibo araw-araw,” and “Pinipilit kong i-motivate ang sarili ko.” Acceptance of their situation further strengthened resilience, as expressed in “Pagtanggap sa mga nangyayari,” and “Tinatanggap ko na lang ang sitwasyon ko, pero hindi sumusuko.”

These findings are parallel with Barrow et al. (2019), Boyle et al. (2020), Pike (2015), Clark (2019), and Labarrete and Tiopes (2024), who emphasized that spiritual grounding, emotional regulation, and positive self-belief are essential in sustaining persistence in correctional education. The results of this study further suggest that spirituality and mindset functioned together as emotional stabilizers that supported both well-being and academic engagement.

Peer relationships also played a vital role in coping. Learners depended on their fellow PDLs for encouragement and companionship, as reflected in “Sa tulong ng mga kasama ko nalalampasan ko yung moral support,” “Kinakausap ko ang iba kong kasama pag nalulungkot,” and “Nakikipagkwentuhan ako sa kapwa ko PDL.” Informal conversations and shared experiences reduced feelings of isolation and strengthened a sense of belonging within the learning community.

These findings support Kauppi et al. (2020), who highlighted that social support networks sustain motivation and reduce emotional strain in correctional learning environments. Peer interactions served as protective factors that enabled learners to manage stress and remain committed to their studies.

Meaningful engagement in daily activities further supported learners' coping efforts. Participants engaged in purposeful tasks to manage boredom and emotional tension, as reflected in “Nag-cro-cross stitch,” and “Naglilinis na lang, panglipas-oras.” These activities provided structure and a sense of accomplishment beyond formal lessons. Family also served as a powerful source of

inspiration, as shown in “Ginagawa kong inspirasyon ang aking pamilya sa labas.” Purposeful engagement and family-oriented motivation strengthened learners’ resolve to persist in learning.

Consistent with Taylor (2014), Pike (2015), and Azarcon (2024), these findings indicate that meaningful activities and family connections help sustain persistence and future orientation among incarcerated learners.

PDL-ALS learners employed various coping strategies rooted in spirituality, positive thinking, social connection, and purposeful engagement. Through these practices, they were able to regulate emotions, preserve hope, and sustain motivation despite highly restrictive conditions. The findings demonstrate that coping in ALS settings is not merely about enduring hardship but about actively constructing resilience, meaning, and direction in their educational journey.

### ***Comments and Suggestions Given by PDL ALS Learners to Make Their Educational Journey More Meaningful***

When asked how their ALS journey could be made more meaningful, PDL-ALS learners expressed clear, practical suggestions that reflected their desire for a more supportive and holistic learning environment. Their responses pointed to areas where the program could evolve, not only in instruction but also in the conditions that sustain participation and personal growth. The learners’ comments clustered into four major themes: (1) teacher and classroom support, (2) varied learning activities, (3) health and well-being support, and (4) technology access and aids. The participants stated the following: *“Additional teacher para kahit everyday ang klase; Karagdagang guro; Magkaroon ng eksklusibong silid para sa ALS; Maraming activities tulad ng sports fest, mga training sa livelihood tulad ng paggawa ng basket, wallet, etc, may cooking class din. May spiritual worship din every day; Mas maraming pang activities; May mga activities naman po dito, marami kami ginagawa; Sana everyday may available na mental health professional; Television, projector, computer na magagamit; Magkaron ng computer, TV, projector, gamit sa pagaaral; Access sa technology.”*

Learners emphasized teacher availability and a more conducive learning space as foundational to improving their ALS experience. They recommended “Additional teacher para kahit everyday ang klase,” “Karagdagang guro,” and “Magkaroon ng eksklusibong silid para sa ALS,” reflecting the need for increased staffing and an organized classroom separate from distractions. Greater teacher availability was viewed as essential for providing individualized guidance and reducing instructional strain. These suggestions mirror studies noting that inadequate staffing and weak facilities limit ALS delivery in correctional settings (Barrow et al., 2019; Boyle et al., 2020; Castolo & Chan, 2016) and align with findings that safe, structured learning spaces sustain motivation and engagement (Mielke et al., 2022). Learners emphasized the importance of having more teachers and exclusive spaces for learning. Greater teacher availability was seen as a way to reduce workload pressures and provide more individualized guidance, echoing Espejon et al. (2024), who reported that insufficient support services for ALS teachers hinder program effectiveness. Borela (2020) similarly observed that systemic gaps and teacher workload limit ALS reach, reinforcing the call for stronger staffing. The need for a dedicated classroom also reflects broader evidence on learning environments: Boyle et al. (2020) showed that overcrowding and poor spaces reduce concentration, while Mielke et al. (2022) emphasized that safe, organized environments sustain motivation. These studies affirm that both teacher support and physical space are central to improving the quality of ALS delivery in correctional settings.

Learners also highlighted the importance of varied and engaging learning activities beyond routine lessons. Their suggestions included “Maraming activities tulad ng sports fest,” livelihood training such as “pagawa ng basket, wallet,” as well as “may cooking class din” and “May spiritual worship din every day.” Others emphasized the need for “Mas maraming pang activities,” while another noted that “marami kami ginagawa.” These preferences indicate that learners value experiential and skills-based activities that address boredom, promote practical competence, and support values formation. This finding is consistent with Behan (2014), Lange and Houghton (2021), and Rodriguez (2021), who emphasized that holistic and experiential learning enhances engagement and personal development in correctional education.

Health and well-being support also emerged as an important recommendation, particularly in relation to mental health services. One learner stated, “Sana, every day may be available na mental health professional,” highlighting the need for accessible counseling and psychosocial support. This reflects learners’ awareness that emotional stability is closely linked to learning success. These findings align with Cortez and Dioso (2023), United Nations (2021), and Sala (2024), who emphasized that psychosocial interventions are essential in correctional settings to sustain motivation, reduce distress, and support reintegration readiness.

Participants further emphasized the need for technology access and learning aids. They suggested resources such as “Television, projector, computer na magagamit,” “Magkaron ng computer, TV, projector, gamit sa pagaaral,” and “Access sa technology.” Technology was viewed as a means to improve comprehension, strengthen independent learning, and prepare learners for reintegration into a digitally driven society. This finding supports Barrow et al. (2019) and Lange and Houghton (2021), who highlighted the role of ICT and digital literacy in enhancing relevance and employability in prison education.

Their comments and suggestions put to the fore a strong desire for a more responsive, supportive, and future-oriented ALS program. Their recommendations highlight the importance of adequate staffing, conducive learning spaces, diverse learning activities, accessible mental health services, and technology integration. These findings demonstrate that learners view themselves not as passive recipients of instruction but as active partners in shaping an educational program that restores dignity, strengthens resilience, and prepares them for successful reintegration into society.

## Conclusions

Based on the summary of findings, the following conclusions were drawn:

PDL ALS learners in Lucena City District Jail described their ALS educational journey as a meaningful and life-changing learning journey that is shaped by interconnected physical, instructional, and emotional factors, where the classroom, relationships, teaching approaches, and emotional support worked together to help them regain hope, rebuild their sense of self, and prepare for life beyond incarceration despite existing limitations. PDL ALS learners' specific challenges during their ALS educational journey include having struggled with noise, heat, and limited facilities, emotional pain from family separation, and learning gaps caused by disrupted schooling, all of which affected their focus, confidence, and ability to stay engaged in learning. PDL ALS Learners' coping strategies to address the challenges involve facing them by drawing strength from supportive teachers, positive peer relationships, flexible teaching methods, and purposeful daily activities, which helped them manage emotions, stay motivated, and remain resilient while in confinement. The comments and suggestions given by PDL ALS learners to make their educational journey more meaningful are about the need for stronger teacher support, proper learning spaces, more practical and skills-based activities, accessible mental health services, and better technological access to make their learning experience more supportive and relevant to their future. Considering the adversities and challenges that PDL ALS learners go through, the study therefore concludes that educational access alone is insufficient; holistic psychosocial support through a localized guidance counseling program is essential in ensuring that ALS truly becomes a bridge to rehabilitation rather than merely a compliance program. Ultimately, strengthening guidance services within the jail's ALS program contributes not only to academic completion but also to reduced recidivism risk, improved self-concept, and successful community reintegration.

Based on the conclusions, the following recommendations are forwarded:

Since PDL ALS learners' educational journey is shaped by interconnected physical, social, instructional, and emotional factors, DepEd, school heads, and jail management may strengthen inter-agency coordination and integrated planning to institutionalize ALS as a holistic rehabilitation and reintegration program. Considering the physical, social, emotional, educational, and motivational challenges, the jail management, school heads, and stakeholders may improve and maintain dedicated ALS classrooms with better ventilation, sound control, and adequate learning facilities. Given that supportive teachers, positive peer relationships, and flexible teaching methods enhance learners' confidence and academic performance, ALS teachers and school administrators may continuously implement learner-centered, collaborative, and culturally responsive instructional practices. In view of learners' challenges, emotional distress, academic gaps, and motivational difficulties alongside their demonstrated resilience, DepEd, jail authorities, and partner agencies may institutionalize psychosocial, guidance, and spiritual support services integrated with academic interventions.

Considering the responses given by the PDL ALS learners, DepEd, school heads, and stakeholders may mobilize additional funding and partnerships to address the educational issues and other related problems. In view of the educational, social, and other related adversities surrounding the PDL ALS learners, Dep Ed and other stakeholders may adapt a holistic, learner-centered program for PDL ALS learners. For future researchers, if possible, they may conduct tracer studies on the reintegration outcomes of PDL ALS graduates to assess the program's long-term impact and inform continuous improvement.

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