

Lived Realities After Skills Training: a Phenomenological Study of Out-of-School Youth in the Philippines

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Abstract: *This phenomenological study explored the post-training lived experiences of out-of-school youth (OSY) in the Philippines who completed the Alternative Learning System (ALS), Electrical Installation and Maintenance program implemented in partnership with the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) and the ALS Agoo West District. It examined how vocational teaching practices in a non-formal learning environment shaped participants' employment, educational advancement, and socio-economic mobility. Nine ALS completers were purposively selected, and data were gathered through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. Narratives were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis framework, with ethical clearance granted by the Don Mariano Marcos Memorial State University (DMMMSU) Ethics Committee. Findings showed that seven participants secured employment in private industries as electricians, assembly technicians, solar installers, and related technical roles, while two pursued higher education. Participants reported improved technical competence, confidence, and employability, with TESDA certification serving as a key credential for workforce entry. However, barriers remained, including workplace discrimination, limited access to tools and equipment, and financial constraints, particularly bias against ALS completers due to their non-traditional educational backgrounds. The study highlights vocational education's transformative role in promoting social inclusion and advancing Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 4 and 8.*

Keywords: *Alternative Learning System; Employability; Social Inclusion; Phenomenology; Vocational Education*

INTRODUCTION

The Alternative Learning System (ALS) serves as a vital educational pathway for out-of-school youth (OSY) in the Philippines, providing access to basic education and technical skills for individuals unable to participate in formal schooling. As a non-formal education system, ALS promotes inclusive learning opportunities and addresses educational inequities among marginalized populations. Recent studies have highlighted ALS as an effective mechanism for improving literacy, employability, and social mobility among disadvantaged learners (Deponio et al., 2025; Aniasco, 2024; Cagang, 2023). However, while ALS has been widely recognized for expanding access to education, limited studies have examined its deeper experiential impact, particularly within technical and vocational training programs delivered by higher education institutions.

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) plays a critical role in equipping learners with industry-relevant competencies and improving workforce readiness. In non-formal educational contexts, TVET has become a key intervention for marginalized groups, especially OSY, by providing alternative pathways toward employment and economic participation. Across the Asia-Pacific region, community-based vocational programs have been shown to improve employability when aligned with labor market demands (UNESCO, 2021). In the Philippine context, ALS programs integrated with Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) certifications have demonstrated significant potential in bridging education and employment among disadvantaged youth.

Existing literature suggests that vocational training enhances technical competence, self-efficacy, and employability (Asian Development Bank, 2021; Orbeta & Paqueo, 2017). TESDA certification, in particular, serves as an important credential that improves employment prospects by signaling competence to employers. Nevertheless, employability extends beyond technical proficiency. Studies indicate that workplace adaptability, soft skills, and social acceptance also influence long-term employment outcomes (Succi & Canovi, 2020). Despite these findings, previous research has largely

focused on measurable outputs such as certification rates and job placement, with limited attention given to the lived experiences of ALS completers after training.

Phenomenological studies provide a deeper understanding of how individuals interpret and assign meaning to their learning experiences. For OSY learners, vocational training may represent more than skills acquisition; it can reshape identity, confidence, aspirations, and life trajectories. Prior research has shown that skills training contributes to self-efficacy, resilience, and social reintegration among marginalized youth (Maclean & Pavlova, 2019; Atchoarena & Esquieu, 2018). However, persistent barriers remain, including financial limitations, limited access to tools and equipment, unstable employment, and social stigma (UNESCO-UNEVOC, 2020). In many cases, out-of-school youth continue to experience discrimination in hiring and workplace settings due to their non-traditional educational backgrounds, even after acquiring technical qualifications and national certifications.

Teacher quality and pedagogical practices further influence the effectiveness of vocational training. Competency-based, learner-centered instruction has been associated with better technical and soft skill development (Lucas et al., 2012; Wheelahan, 2015). Vocational educators increasingly serve not only as technical instructors but also as facilitators of experiential and transformative learning. In non-formal settings such as ALS, this role becomes more critical because instructors must adapt teaching strategies to diverse learner needs, prior educational gaps, and socio-economic realities.

Despite the growing body of literature on ALS and TVET, a significant gap remains in understanding how OSY learners experience technical skills training in localized institutional settings and how these experiences influence their post-training transitions. Specifically, limited studies have examined the lived experiences of ALS completers who underwent technical training in state universities, particularly within rural Philippine communities. This gap highlights the need for context-specific inquiry that captures both the outcomes of training and the meanings learners attach to these experiences.

This study addresses this gap by examining the lived experiences of OSY who completed the Electrical Installation and Maintenance training conducted by the Electro-Mechanical Technology Department of the College of Technology at Don Mariano Marcos Memorial State University in partnership with the ALS Agoo West District from February to March 2023. Guided by Human Capital Theory (Becker, 1964; Schultz, 1971), Transformative Learning Theory (Mezirow, 1991), and Empowerment Theory (Zimmerman, 2000), the study adopts an Input–Process–Output framework (see Figure 1) to analyze learner profiles, training processes, and post-training outcomes, including employment, certification, and continuing education.

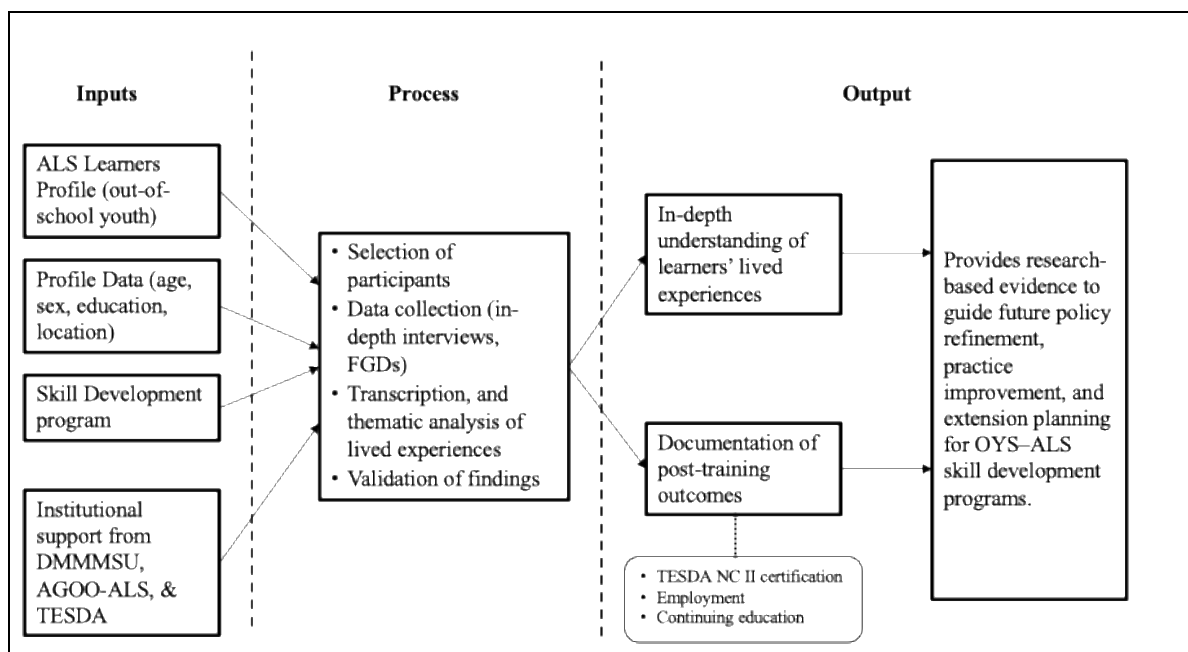


Figure 1. Theoretical Framework of the Study/Scientific Basis

The urgency of this research lies in the need to assess whether non-formal vocational training genuinely translates into economic upliftment, sustained employability, and social inclusion among marginalized youth. Understanding these lived experiences is essential for improving ALS delivery, strengthening pedagogical practices, and informing policies that promote equitable access to technical education. More importantly, this study contributes to the discourse on inclusive and transformative education by amplifying the voices of OSY learners, whose perspectives are often underrepresented in research.

Specifically, this study aimed to explore the lived experiences of ALS completers after participating in technical skills training. It sought to examine how the training influenced their skill development, employment opportunities, educational advancement, and socio-economic conditions, as well as to identify the challenges and barriers they encountered in applying their acquired competencies in real-world settings.

METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological research design to explore the lived experiences of out-of-school youth (OSY) who completed the Alternative Learning System (ALS) Electrical Installation and Maintenance training program. Phenomenology is an appropriate approach for examining how individuals perceive, interpret, and assign meaning to their experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). This design enabled the researchers to gain an in-depth understanding of how ALS training influenced participants' empowerment, personal transformation, employability, and socio-economic conditions following program completion.

Instrumentation and Data Collection

The study utilized a researcher-made questionnaire as the primary data-gathering instrument. The instrument was designed to collect qualitative and contextual data regarding participants' lived experiences and post-training outcomes under the ALS skill development program. It consisted of three major components: (1) a demographic profile survey, (2) an in-depth interview guide, and (3) focus group discussion prompts, integrated into a single comprehensive instrument.

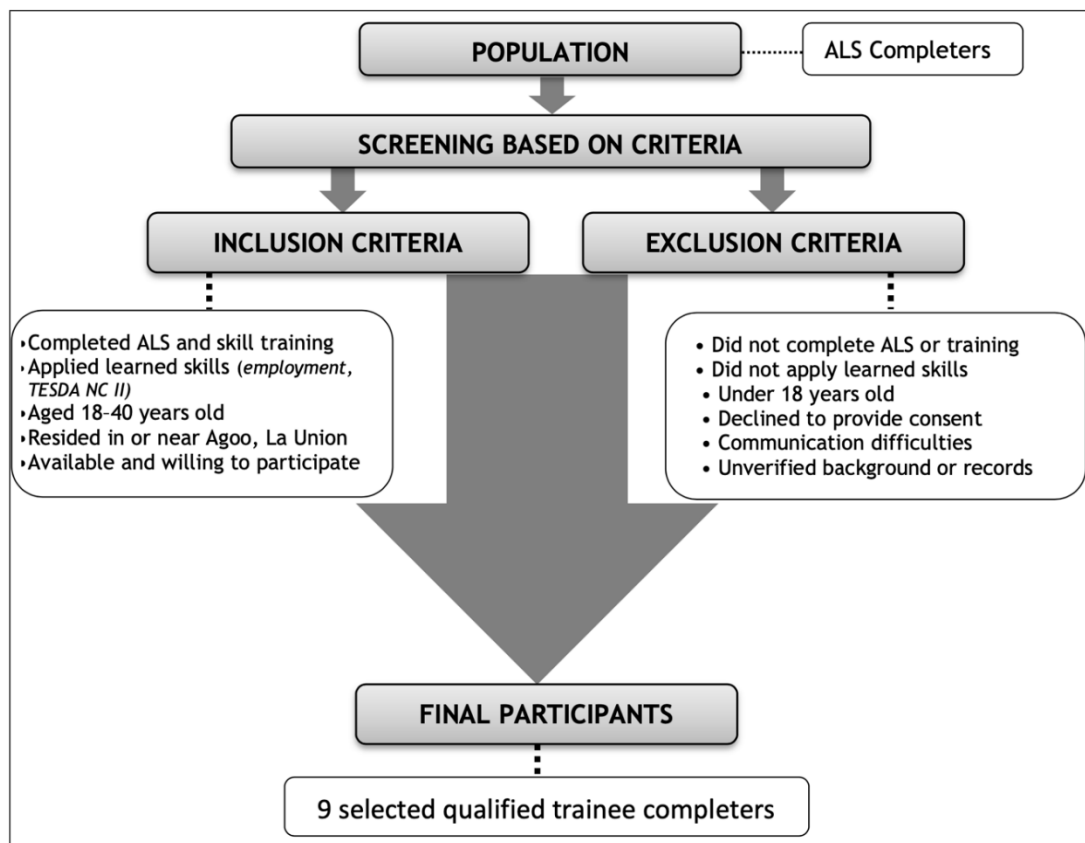
To ensure content validity, the instrument was evaluated by six experts from the fields of education, research, and electrical technology. Their feedback was incorporated to improve clarity, relevance, and alignment with the study objectives.

Data collection was conducted through online forms, one-on-one interviews, phone interviews, and focus group discussions. The validated instrument served as a guide to facilitate consistent yet flexible discussions, allowing participants to share detailed narratives, reflections, and insights regarding their training experiences and post-training outcomes. Responses were documented through detailed note-taking and interview records to ensure accuracy and ethical compliance.

Sources of Data and Participants

The primary sources of data were the narratives and responses of ALS completers who underwent technical skills training at the College of Technology of Don Mariano Marcos Memorial State University. Participants were selected using purposive sampling based on predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria to ensure relevance to the study objectives (see Figure 2).

Inclusion criteria required that participants: (1) completed the ALS skills training at DMMMSU College of Technology, (2) had applied the acquired skills in employment, livelihood, or further education, and (3) were at least 18 years old. Exclusion criteria included individuals who did not complete the training, had not utilized the acquired skills after training, or declined to provide informed consent. This sampling strategy ensured that only participants with relevant lived experiences were included in the study.



Note. This figure illustrates the inclusion and exclusion screening used to identify qualified ALS graduates who met the criteria for participation in the study.

Figure 2. Purpose Sampling Framework

Data Analysis

The study employed thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework to interpret the collected qualitative data. Data analysis involved systematic familiarization with the responses, initial coding, categorization of recurring patterns, and development of overarching themes.

Manual coding was performed to identify significant statements and meaningful patterns related to employment, TESDA certification, continuing education, socio-economic mobility, and personal transformation. These themes were further analyzed to understand how participants perceived the impact of ALS technical training on their lives.

The phenomenological analysis provided a holistic interpretation of participants' lived experiences, revealing how technical skills training contributed to empowerment, improved employability, and broader opportunities for personal and professional growth.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings reveal that the DMMMSU-ALS training program generated significant post-training outcomes, as reflected in participants' employment, acquisition of TESDA certifications, and pursuit of further education. These outcomes demonstrate the effectiveness of integrating non-formal technical training with labor market demands. Beyond employment, the program contributed to participants' personal transformation, socio-economic mobility, and community engagement through enhanced self-efficacy, improved financial stability, and stronger social participation.

Despite challenges related to limited resources and logistical constraints, the program fostered employability, social reintegration, and sustainable livelihood among out-of-school youth (OSY), highlighting its transformative role in inclusive human capital development. Figure 3 presents the thematic

map illustrating the interrelationship among the study's three major dimensions: post-training outcomes, socio-economic improvement, and overall training effectiveness.

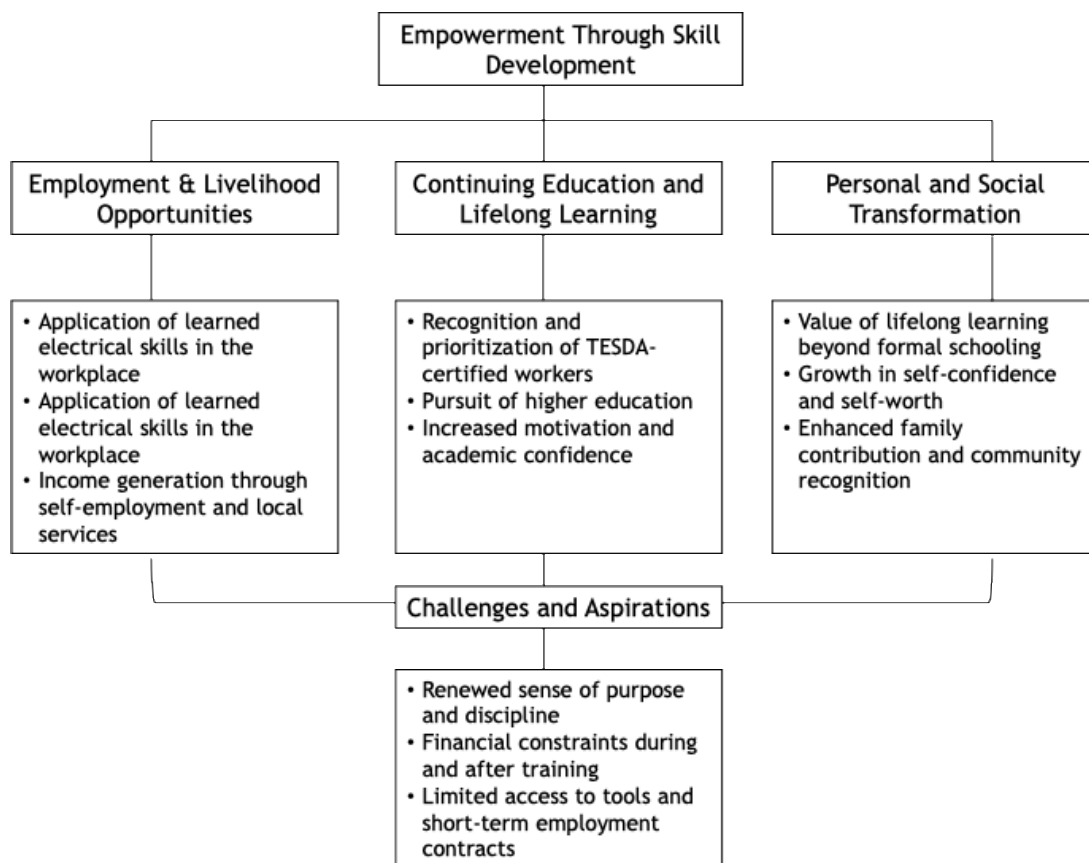


Figure 3. Thematic Maps of Key Findings

1. Post-Training Outcomes: Employment, Certification, and Continuing Education

The successful completion of the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority National Certificate II (NC II) in Electrical Installation and Maintenance represented a major outcome of the training program. As shown in Figure 4, the certification pathway progressed from DMMMSU-led community-based training to TESDA competency assessment and eventual recognition as certified skilled workers.

All nine participants obtained the TESDA NC II certification, resulting in a 100% certification rate. This confirms that the training successfully met TESDA competency standards for electrical installation and maintenance. Certification served not only as validation of technical competence but also as an important employment credential that strengthened participants' credibility in the labor market.

As shown in Table 2, among the nine participants, seven secured employment in private industries as electricians, assembly technicians, solar panel installers, electrical terminators, CCTV installers, and electrical motor repair specialists. The remaining two participants pursued higher education, with one enrolling in Bachelor of Science in Electrical Engineering at Don Mariano Marcos Memorial State University–Mid La Union Campus and another pursuing Bachelor of Science in Marine Transportation.

Participants emphasized the practical value of the training:

“Laking tulong ng training dahil nakapag-assessment kami sa TESDA.” (“The training was a great help because it allowed us to undergo TESDA assessment.”)

“Gamit na gamit ko ngayon sa trabaho ko ang natutunan sa training.” (“I’m now applying what I learned from the training in my current job.”)

Table 1. Post Training Status of ALS Graduates after the DMMMSU Skill Development

Participant No.	Current Status	Field/ Position	Institution/ Engagement	Remarks
1	Employed	Electrician	Private Institution	Applying EIM skills in electrical installation and maintenance
2	Employed	Assembly Technician	Private Institution	Performs assembly and wiring-related tasks
3	Employed	Solar Panel Installer	Private Institution	Utilizes training in renewable energy installation
4	Employed	Electrical Terminator	Industrial Contractor	Involved in wiring and termination works
5	Employed	CCTV Installer	Private Security Systems Firm	Installs and maintains CCTV systems
6	Employed	Electric Motor Repair Specialist	Local Workshop	Self-employed; provides repair and maintenance services
7	Employed	Electrician	Private Institution	Applies EIM skills in building projects
8	Student	B. S. Electrical Engineering	DMMMSU-MLUC	Pursuing higher education aligned with training background
9	Student	B.S. Marine Transportation	Private School	Continues education; uses technical background as foundation

These findings demonstrate the dual function of ALS-TVET integration—as a pathway to both employment and academic progression. This supports findings from the World Bank (2023), DepEd Region I (2022), and Vizcarra (2022), which reported that ALS programs with technical components improve employment and academic reintegration among OSY. The results also align with Human Capital Theory (Becker, 1964), which posits that investment in education and training enhances productivity and employability.

The two participants who pursued higher education further illustrate how technical training can strengthen academic confidence and clarify career direction.

“Mas advance ako sa mga electrical topics.” (“I’m more advanced in electrical topics.”)

“Training also helped me find the major I want to take in college.” (“The training helped me discover the major I want to pursue in college.”)

This highlights the role of vocational training in promoting lifelong learning, consistent with Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education).

2. Contribution to Personal and Socio-Economic Improvement

Thematic analysis generated three major themes related to socio-economic improvement: (a) personal transformation, (b) economic upliftment, and (c) social recognition and community integration.

Personal Transformation

Participants reported substantial improvements in confidence, self-worth, and future orientation. The training enabled them to see themselves as capable and productive individuals.

“Kami ang ina-assign ng instructor para mag-assist sa mga classmates namin.” (“We were assigned by the instructor to assist our classmates.”)

“Nakita ko ang kahalagahan at future ko sa ganitong skill set.” (“I saw the value and my future in this skill set.”)

These narratives indicate that the training fostered empowerment and identity formation. This supports Transformative Learning Theory (Mezirow, 1991), which explains how learning can reshape self-perception and worldview.

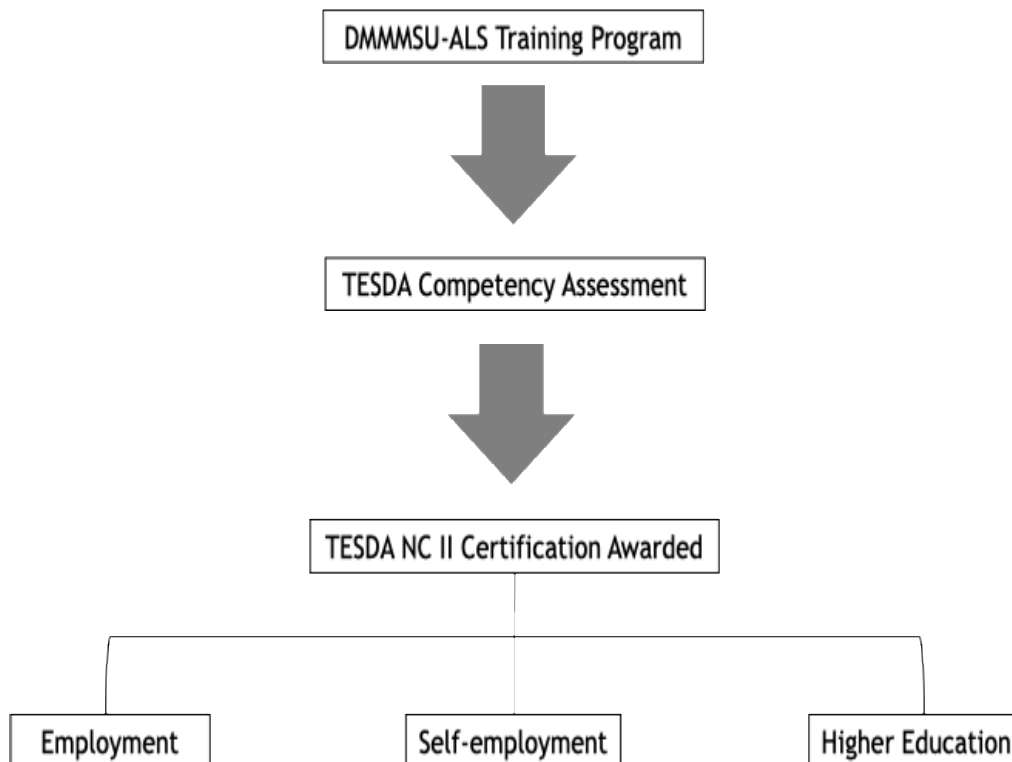


Figure 4. TESDA National Certification Pathway

Economic Upliftment

Employment and livelihood opportunities improved participants' economic conditions. Several participants reported earning stable income or generating supplemental livelihood through repair and maintenance services.

"May income na dahil sa training." ("I now earn income because of the training.")

"Nakakapag-raket kung may tawag sa mga kapitbahay para sa repair at maintenance." ("I take small jobs from neighbors for repair and maintenance.")

These findings suggest that the training directly contributed to income generation and economic resilience. This supports TESDA (2022), which reported that most NC II holders secure employment or self-employment within six months of certification.

Social Recognition and Community Integration

Participants shared that their acquired skills enabled them to assist neighbors and contribute to community needs, resulting in trust, recognition, and social reintegration.

"Sana may next batch pa kasi may barkada kaming gusto rin sumali sa training para makapag-TESDA certificate." ("I hope there's another batch because my friends also want to join and get a TESDA certificate.")

The program's benefits therefore extended beyond individual outcomes, generating ripple effects within communities through peer motivation and knowledge sharing. These findings support Empowerment Theory (Zimmerman, 2000), emphasizing how skill acquisition enhances both personal agency and community participation.

However, socio-economic advancement was not without challenges. Participants reported barriers such as financial constraints, limited access to tools and equipment, and workplace discrimination. A notable finding was the presence of bias against ALS completers due to their non-traditional educational backgrounds. Some participants perceived that employers favored applicants with formal educational credentials despite equivalent technical competence. This finding reveals that employability is influenced not only by skills and certification but also by social perceptions and structural inequalities.

3. Overall Effectiveness of the ALS Training Program

Participants generally described the training as highly effective, practical, and transformative. They particularly valued its hands-on approach, accessible delivery, and competent instructors.

“Free training, sobrang sulit at more trainings to come.” (“Free training, very worthwhile, and we hope for more trainings to come.”)

The program’s alignment with industry standards and community needs enabled immediate application of acquired skills. This reflects the importance of contextualized and learner-centered pedagogy in TVET.

Nevertheless, participants identified several logistical and instructional concerns. These included transportation expenses, lack of meal allowance, and limited practical sessions.

“More actual sana, less theory.” (“More practical sessions, less theory.”)

“Sana may allowance, hira pamasahe sa training.” (“I hope there’s an allowance; transportation is difficult.”)

These findings suggest the need for stronger learner support mechanisms, particularly for economically disadvantaged participants. Increasing practical exposure and providing logistical assistance may further improve training effectiveness.

Despite these challenges, participants expressed high satisfaction and willingness to recommend the program.

“Recommended 10/10. Sobrang thank you DMMMSU.” (“Highly recommended.

Thank you very much, DMMMSU.”)

The ALS–TESDA–DMMMSU partnership effectively promoted inclusive education by integrating technical-vocational training with employability development, confidence building, and community engagement. These findings support the Philippine Development Plan (2023–2028) and Sustainable Development Goals 4 and 8, demonstrating that short-term, community-based technical training can produce lasting social and economic value.

Implications

The findings underscore the critical role of vocational educators in creating transformative learning experiences for out-of-school youth in non-formal contexts. Beyond technical instruction, trainers function as mentors who cultivate learners’ confidence, agency, and readiness for employment or further education.

The study also highlights the need for stronger alignment among teacher education, industry standards, and community needs. Given the importance of TESDA certification in facilitating employment, vocational educators must possess updated industry knowledge, strong assessment competencies, and adaptive teaching strategies. Teacher education programs should therefore emphasize not only technical expertise but also relational pedagogy, contextualized instruction, and socially responsive practice.

Future interventions should strengthen practical training components, provide transportation or meal assistance, and establish post-training tracking and mentorship systems to sustain employability and lifelong learning. Addressing workplace discrimination against ALS completers should also become a policy priority to ensure that technical competence and certification are valued regardless of educational pathway.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the DMMMSU–ALS skill development training effectively achieved its goal of equipping out-of-school youth (OSY) with employable technical competencies and recognized qualifications. The participants’ post-training experiences demonstrated positive outcomes, including successful employment, acquisition of TESDA certification, and pursuit of higher education, confirming the program’s capacity to bridge educational gaps and support meaningful workforce participation

among marginalized learners. The findings further revealed that the training contributed significantly to participants' personal and socio-economic development. Beyond technical skill acquisition, the program enhanced self-confidence, strengthened motivation, improved financial stability, and increased community engagement. However, the study also identified persistent challenges, including financial constraints, limited access to tools and equipment, and workplace discrimination against ALS completers due to their non-traditional educational backgrounds. Collectively, the findings establish the ALS–TESDA partnership with DMMMSU as an effective community-based model for inclusive and transformative education. By promoting employability, lifelong learning, and social inclusion, the program contributes to the advancement of Sustainable Development Goals 4 and 8. Strengthening learner support, post-training mentorship, and employer awareness may further enhance long-term outcomes and reduce barriers faced by ALS graduates.

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