

Rebel Returnees' Journey to Alternative Learning System Education

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Abstract. This study used a phenomenological design to explore the stories of rebel returnees' journey to Alternative Learning System (ALS) education. This study was limited to eight (8) rebel returnees from the selected schools in Matanao, Kiblawan, and Bansalan, Davao del Sur, particularly from Alternative Learning System (ALS) graduates or enrollees. Four (4) male and four (4) female participants below and above 18 years old fit our inclusion criteria: the rebel returnees. The findings revealed that the lived experiences were as follows: educational opportunities and regular life challenges, reintegration efforts, time management, and strengthening academic difficulties. Overall, the general theme revolves around the positive encounters and the challenges experienced by rebel returnees in going back to school. The study of rebel returnees' lived experiences highlights important implications for theory, practices, and education: training and Professional Development, Pedagogical Approaches, Research and Policy, and Rehabilitation and Support. To better understand the long-term effects of returning former rebels to school, officials from the Department of Education may undertake longitudinal research. The Alternative Learning System (ALS) program provides students with the education they need to understand the ever-changing nature of work and how it affects pedagogical approaches and career advancement.

Keywords: ALS education; Coping mechanisms; Davao del Sur; Lived experiences; Rebel returnees.

1.0 Introduction

To promote the DepEd's expansion of the Alternative Learning System (ALS), which seeks "to provide caliber education to vulnerable groups and those not reached by formal education that will help realize greater equity in human development outcomes," or to put it another way, to make quality education available 24/7, the Philippine Business for Education (PBE) reportedly looked into possible ALS avenues (Resurreccion et al., 2021). Surges in ALS student participation rates were seen in the first quarter of 2018 to be 8,703 drugs surrendered, 541 youngsters in confrontation with the law, 837 rebel returnees, and 16,572 laborers, which are early markers of program success, according to DepEd (2017). Accompanying the step-up program implementation has been a grade-up curriculum (Pascual et al., 2022).

ALS implementers need a framework for inmate learners; Faa and Lea (2020) examined inmates' program experiences. Interview results show that new values, aims, and ambitions drive most learner-response viewpoint shifts. Participants in the ALS program claim renewed faith in God. This makes a better future more plausible. According to research, students in prison learn from their mistakes, value education, and look forward to starting over (Bhatti, 2010). Based on the data, the Alternative Learning System gives offenders another chance at

education (Sala, 2024). Students can finish elementary and high school and receive excellent supervision. A proper educational program provides fewer hostile conditions and coping techniques to help inmates forget their situation and make the most of their time in prison.

In the global scenario where rebels may legitimately seek to enforce human rights through violence, the three normative pillars of the armed forces only offer a partial picture of the morality of this kind of uprising. First, the Responsibility to Protect serves to obfuscate rather than explain the problem; second, the laws of war and their application to armed conflict; and third, the continual struggle to define the term "terrorism" in international law. Furthermore, the Philippine government and the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP), specifically the National People's Army (NPA), have long clashed. For decades, the government has negotiated a peace treaty and ceasefire with the National People's Army (NPA) in hopes of a surrender.

The rebel organizations affect civilian rebel administrations during the armed conflict at the education level; according to Huang and Sullivan (2021), existing studies focus on rebel authorities' local and domestic politics and two contradictory assertions on rebels' social service efficacy, ignoring foreign intervention's effects on rebel governance. Outside-funded rebels helping their communities are less needed. Rebels' wealth and strength improved social services. In exchange for money, weapons, or training, rebel groups are more likely to improve villagers' lives by opening schools and clinics. However, direct military aid to rebel troops has little impact on the service supply. Since it was one of the first to examine how external support and third-party participation affected rebel social service provision during civil strife, the study has significant implications for civilians in disputed areas.

Hence, the Philippines hypothesized that rebel leaders' personal histories and experiences are as essential as their groups' actions, for academics have stressed the importance of state leaders' biographical qualities in interstate war and diplomacy (Acosta et al., 2023). The organizations' civil war decisions and actions were conducted through the Rebel Organization Leaders (ROLE) database, which contains biographical information on all prominent rebel leaders in civil wars between 1980 and 2011—after introducing new rebel leader descriptions, describing the database's contents and structure, and examining how rebel leaders' traits affect their groups' civil war strategies to demonstrate its efficacy that can motivate and enable a new research agenda that emphasizes individual leaders in contemporary conflict and peace studies rather than rebel organizations and campaigns.

A part of the Mindanao region claimed that the government offers aftercare programs to support former rebels as part of their efforts to reintegrate into society. Reaching out to this group was a top priority for the administration to terminate hostilities or secure their surrender. The findings of the study looked into life's struggle, effective government peace agreement, recruitment process, taste of freedom, value of education, and longevity of family that emerged from the experiences upon their return; ex-rebels consistently made the best possible choices (Cubero et al., 2022).

Despite the presence of these programs on rebel returnees in some municipalities like Kiblawan, Matanao, Bansalan, and others, National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC) is a task force organized by the government of the Philippines to respond and raise awareness of the ongoing communist rebellion particularly in the Province of Davao del Sur and trace what happened to the rebel returnees after becoming a beneficiaries of the reintegration programs, especially in education. Studying how rebel returnees, particularly those enrolled in Alternative Learning Systems (ALS), have started to normalize as citizens and reflect on their experiences as rebels will aid both local and national government units in the Philippines in evaluating the efficacy of programs and projects aimed at assisting rebel returnees with their reintegration.

This research aimed to learn about the lifestyles and reintegration processes of former rebels who have returned to their communities. Research from this study would shed light on the challenges faced by rebel returnees attending ALS programs, the positive impacts of these programs on the community, the numerous government support and programs, and the present living conditions of these students. To accomplish this, the following objectives are addressed in the study: (1) determine the profile of the rebel returnees in terms of age, gender, civil status, number of immediate family members, number of years in Alternative Learning Systems (ALS); and number of graduates in their batch; (2) determine the experiences of rebel returnees who go back to school; (3) identify the coping mechanisms of rebel returnees applied to address the difficulties encountered; and (4) determine the insight of rebel returnees have in their journey to education.

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Research Design

A phenomenological study design examines people's lived experiences, explores what they encountered, and focuses on a phenomenon (Caballes et al., 2024). Phenomenological studies remove prejudices and preconceptions regarding human behaviors, sensations, and experiences. The study used the research design to explore the viewpoints, understandings, and sentiments of people who have lived the phenomenon or situation, using in-depth interviews to explain participants' perceptions and experiences using phenomenology. A phenomenologist directly investigates and describes events experienced by people living them (Giorgi, 2012).

In addition, according to Creswell (2012), as cited by Alase (2017), qualitative research was described as an effective model that occurs in a natural setting that enables the researcher to develop a level of detail from being highly involved in the actual experiences. In this case, this study used the phenomenological qualitative research method, which helped the researcher explore the complex world of lived experiences of the selected participants. It not only helps to understand a phenomenon or an event at a deeper level of consciousness, but at the same time, it helps to explore nature, bringing a transformation to a personal level. In this way, a researcher can reflect critically and become more thoughtful and attentive in understanding social practices (Qutoshi, 2018).

2.2 Research Locale

In a phenomenological study in which the sample includes individuals who experienced the phenomenon, obtaining participants' written permission to be studied was also essential. This study was limited to eight (8) rebel returnees from the selected schools in Matanao, Kiblawan, and Bansalan, Davao del Sur, particularly from Alternative Learning System (ALS) graduates or enrollees. Davao del Sur is one of the provinces on the main island of Mindanao, Philippines (Diquito & Sangil, 2025). Four (4) men and four (4) women participants below and above 18 years old fit the inclusion criteria: the rebel returnees. The study established that gender research and analysis enable the researcher to examine and challenge social norms around what it means to be a woman or man in society and to pursue justice and equality for all, which should be fundamental facets of development. Njoku (2020) recommended 5-25 participants for phenomenological studies. The researcher used snowball sampling to recruit participants. Based on the data gathered, many rebel returnees surrendered in the Province of Davao del Sur, as per information from the Provincial Social Welfare and Development Office (PSWD) and Provincial Police Office (PPO). Thus, the researcher coordinated with the Davao del Sur unit locals to access the participants. The gathering of data was carried out in the Second Semester of the academic year 2023-2024.

2.3 Research Participants

Two steps were necessary to generate in-depth questions in the study. Quantitative Phase: The participants in this study were the rebel returnees enrolled in the Alternative Learning System for the school year 2023-2024 and those who graduated three (3) years ago. Qualitative Phase: The researcher chose eight informants from the graduates or enrollees of the Alternative Learning System (ALS) in Davao del Sur. Participants were selected using convenient sampling from the Local Government Units (LGU) list.

2.4 Research Instrument

The researcher used semi-structured interviews in this investigation, which Fontana and Frey (2016) called "one of the most effective methods for understanding fellow humans." The information is gathered in a relaxed, conversational manner during this interview style. The researcher used semi-structured interviews to investigate a topic and make sense of the responses. The researcher used questions directed toward research purposes to acquire essential information about the community or a specific research study, as Kumar (2019) outlined in his popularization of the key informant interview method. Experts created this tool to gather information for a needs assessment and then use that information to craft the most effective preventative strategy possible. In addition, it was used to see if the community's requirements have shifted over time. This key informant interview comprised three central questions and had four probing questions. Experts validated these questions before they were utilized in the data gathering.

2.5 Data Gathering Procedure

The researcher of this study went through the following organized procedures to gather and collect reliable data: First, they secured a permit to conduct the research and an endorsement letter from the office of the Graduate School of Davao del Sur State College. Second, a formal request for authorization to perform the study at the Division's office would be filed through a permission letter. Third, the researcher tapped for assistance for the

data of the informants from the following agencies for confirmation: Provincial Social Welfare and Development (PSWD) Davao del Sur, Alternative Learning System (ALS) Bansalan West District, Local Government Units (LGU) of Kiblawan, Matanao, and Bansalan, Barangay Councils, the Philippine National Police (PNP) Davao del Sur, and the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) 39th Infantry Battalion Makilala, North Cotabato, whichever answered the data needed for the study. Fourth, after the confirmation, a communication letter was sent to the enrolled participants to request participation in the study, permission to conduct an interview, and willingness to share their current experiences. Fifth, after the participant's positive response to the authorization letter, the researcher and the ALS teacher went to the exact location where the participant lived. They were invited to an in-person interview and direct participation. To achieve this goal, an audio recorder and interview notes were taken. This study used Key Informant Interviews (KII) to understand civilizations better and research a topic in-depth. Finally, the information acquired and data gathered in the interview were analyzed and interpreted to identify necessary themes for the results and discussions.

2.6 Data Analysis

Statistical treatment was applied in the quantitative phase of the investigation, while thematic analysis was used in the qualitative phase. Quantitative Phase: The researcher employed descriptive statistics to identify the demographic profile of the participants. Qualitative Phase: This study followed the six-stage process of thematic analysis developed by Braun and Clarke (2012) to analyze the interview data. A few examples are apportioning, finding, analyzing, defining, and creating. First, the researcher comprehends the collected data and encompasses specifics, such as experiences, obstacles, coping techniques, or insights, which are inclusive. Second, implied data with preliminary codes are assigned to represent their content by following the steps. Interviews were performed during the second quarter of the school year, and teachers were interviewed to reach a theoretical level. The 30-minute interviews were video-recorded and transcribed to validate Key Informants Interviews (KII) findings. Third, checking for patterns or recurring themes in the codes across several interviews with primary informants. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis to discover important themes that could help answer the study's objectives. Check for errors, such as repetition or the grouping of unrelated themes, by reviewing the themes that have been generated. Fifth, define and identify the themes, wherein the researcher has the naming of the generated topic and the rule of parallelism. Employing gerunds, infinitives, and verbs that function as nouns should ensure that all themes are written this way. The final stage was carried out to extract the themes from the translated answer, the second stage was carried out to obtain the categories, and the third stage was carried out to obtain the verbatim responses.

2.7 Ethical Considerations

Creswell and Poth (2016) outlined five ethical concerns that were adhered to in this study: informed consent, voluntary participation, doing no harm, confidentiality, anonymity, and only analyzing relevant components. Participants' written consent was obtained by the researcher for this study. The participants received enough information through informed consent to enable them to make an intelligent, voluntary, and sensible participation decision. It contained information on the participant's right to decline or withdraw from the study, their ability to skip questions or stop at any moment, and any hazards, pain, or unfavorable effects. Additionally, the researcher was not pressured or went above and beyond with hesitant participants. During the interview, participants feel uncomfortable taking steps. The action's practicality was involved. People in high-risk groups are commonly used as test subjects (key informants) for a wide range of evaluation questions that should only interest them. While promoting openness, progress, and the State's responsibility to protect people's privacy in public and private networks, the legislation protects citizens' inalienable right to privacy in electronic communications. To protect private data, the researcher took all required measures.

3.0 Results and Discussion

3.1 Profile of the Rebel Returnees

The determination of the age, gender, civil status, number of immediate family members, number of years in the Alternative Learning System (ALS), and number of graduates in their batch is presented in Table 1. Data shows that as to age, the majority of the respondents are 35 and below ($n=3$, $\%=37.50$), followed by 36 to 45 and 51 to 65 years old ($n=2$, $\%=25.00$), and 46 to 50 years old ($n=1$, $\%=12.50$) respectively. In terms of gender, both gender (male ($n=4$, $\%=50.00$) and female ($n=4$, $\%=50.00$)) has equal representation. Regarding civil status, single and married respondents are equally distributed ($n=4$, $\%=50.00\%$). Regarding the number of immediate family members, most respondents have below five ($n=7$, $\%=87.50$), while only one has 6 to 10 ($n=1$, $\%=12.50$). Regarding the number of

years in ALS, all respondents enrolled in less than 1 year (n=8, %=100.00). Regarding graduates in their batch, most have 6 to 10 batch graduates (n=6, %=75.00), while two respondents have 0-5 graduates (n=2, %=25.00).

Table 1. Determine the Profile of the Rebel Returnees (n=8)

Profile	Frequency	Percent (%)
Age		
35 and below	3	37.50
36 to 45	2	25.00
46 to 50	1	12.50
51 to 65	2	25.00
Gender		
Female	4	50.00
Male	4	50.00
Civil Status		
Single	4	50.00
Married	4	50.00
Number of Immediate Family members		
5 below	7	87.50
6 -10	1	12.50
Number of years in Alternative Learning System (ALS)		
0-1 year	8	100.00
Number of graduates in their batch		
0-5	2	25.00
6-10	6	75.00

3.2 Experiences of Rebels who Go Back to School

The results of this section highlighted two positive sub-themes and two negative sub-themes related to the lived experiences of rebel returnees who went back to school. These positive sub-themes include access to education and a developed support system. These negative sub-themes include coping with academic challenges and time management. Overall, the general theme revolves around the positive encounters and the challenges experienced by the rebel returnees who go back to school. The results showed that rebel returnees who went back to school had various experiences and challenges in both positive and negative ways. According to Resurreccion et al. (2021), in order to promote the DepEd's expansion of the Alternative Learning System (ALS), which seeks "to provide caliber education to vulnerable groups and those not reached by formal education that will help realize greater equity in human development outcomes," or to put it another way, to make quality education available 24/7, the Philippine Business for Education (PBEd) reportedly looked into possible ALS avenues.

Table 2. Thematic Analysis showing the positive experiences of rebel returnees who go back to school

Main Theme	Sub-themes	Core Ideas
Educational opportunities	Access to education	I can finish elementary school
		I'm glad I can complete primary school
	Developed support system	Learning many different things
		Gain new acquaintances
Academic Challenges	Proper Management of time	Assistance from knowledgeable individuals
		Loss of fear and anxiety
	Regular Life Challenges	Practice time management in my school life
		Acceptance of school life concerns

Educational Opportunities

As a rebel returnee who returned to school, I found access to education and the development of a support system critical to assimilating into the school community. This approach entails educational opportunities and positive dispositions. The informants conveyed their experiences in the following lines:

"That they came and then my dreams came true, I dream that even though I can only graduate from elementary school, there are many benefits that ALS has given to us." (KII1L11P3)

This claim was also supported by other informants, who expressed the same sentiments:

"My dream even in elementary school." (KII2L149P4)

It was evident that all rebel returnees have access to rigorous, well-rounded academic programs and experiences that enrich their educational career and prepare them for academic and career success.

Furthermore, when given the identical topic, informants signified their own experiences:

"Because of the 39th IB, we could return to school in ALS. When I went to school at ALS, I learned a lot, such as planting trees, taking care of animals, making useful things out of trash thrown away (recycled), and learning to read and write." (KII20, L74, L79, L109, L125P36)

The right to education encompasses entitlements and freedoms, including free and compulsory primary education. The right to available and accessible secondary education (including technical and vocational education and training) should be made progressively free. Some subthemes emerged from the emergent themes on the experiences of the rebel returnees who returned to school. Access to education through the Alternative Learning System (ALS) in the Philippines for out-of-school children, youth, and adults. The program is designed to meet the needs of those who cannot finish formal schooling, and to ensure that every Filipino has access to basic education. Discussion of Sub-Themes under this theme is further discussed below:

Access to Education. The informants conveyed their experiences in the following lines:

"The government is perfect. You can still learn ALS by following the modules even with a low grade. In ALS, you can learn a lot. That they came and then my dreams came true, I dream that even though I can only graduate from elementary school, there are many benefits that ALS has given us." (KII1L11P4)

This claim was also supported by other informants, who expressed the same sentiments:

"I am confident because I now know what I am incapable of. However, I will ask for assistance from my colleagues if I am confused. My colleagues assisted me because some letters were tiny, and I told them, "Please help me." If I cannot understand it, they will help me." (KII2L79P8)

All returning rebels have access to comprehensive educational programs and experiences that enhance their learning and set them up for success in the future. Furthermore, when given the identical topic, informants signified their own experiences:

"The knowledge I gained regarding answering modules in ALS, I can learn in many aspects of wellbeing, and my knowledgeable colleagues particularly assisted me; in times of difficulty, I will ask for help to the army, who is constantly by my side. As for me, I mentioned earlier that there are subjects that I find difficult to manage, and I would ask for assistance with that. ALS is essential to individuals who did not attend school, even if most are already enrolled, they can still not graduate. I attend this school (ALS) because it will truly benefit me in the future." (KII5L86P20)

Developed Support System. The informants conveyed their experiences in the following lines:

"The government is perfect. Even with a low grade, you can still learn ALS by following the modules. In ALS, you can learn a lot." (KII5P1L11P5)

This claim was also supported by other informants, who expressed the same sentiments:

"I met many of my colleagues and new friends when I did a seminar at the ALS program. My anxiety also disappeared when I went back to school. We learned a lot in school that we did not learn when we were in the mountains." (KII4L91P37)

One of the liberties guaranteed by the right to education is the opportunity to complete elementary school at no cost to the individual. Everybody has the right to a free and more universal secondary education that meets their individual needs, including career and technical training. The fight for equal access to education has persisted over the years, as pointed out by Abel (2024). However, some students have departed from the conventional classroom setting, even though many schools and programs aim to broaden participation. The Alternative

Learning System (ALS) is a parallel learning program in the Philippines that helps students who cannot attend regular schools for different reasons. This study investigated the real-life experiences of rebel returnees who are not in school and what caused them to leave the confines of the classroom. The result revealed that ALS students quit the formal education system for reasons including family issues, personal disputes, financial worries, and obstacles to accessibility.

Academic Challenges

Based on the result, as rebel returnees returned to school, the informants felt a positive disposition. Rebel returnees started with an optimistic outlook and attitude towards life, even when faced with challenges. It can help you stay motivated, achieve goals, and have better relationships with others. Furthermore, as returnees in the school who form relationships with their schoolmates and observe their growth and success, they frequently experience a strong feeling of joy knowing that they are helping each other to learn and develop. This statement was confirmed by the informant below:

"For my part, I am glad that ALS has emerged since I surrendered to the authorities, since I have gained much knowledge and am acquainted with numerous government personnel." (KIIP3L27, L35, L93, L115P7)

Furthermore, other informants also expressed their thoughts in the following manner:

"The knowledge I gained regarding answering modules in ALS, I can learn in many aspects of wellbeing, and my knowledgeable colleagues particularly assisted me; in times of difficulty, I will ask for help from the army, who is constantly by my side." (KIIP3L36, L88, L101)

If rebel returnees are positive about things, they are hopeful and confident and think of the good aspects of a situation rather than the bad ones. In this statement, the informant signifies her own experience:

"My anxiety also disappeared when I went back to school. I learned a lot in school that I did not learn when I was in the mountains." (KIIP4L94, L118)

The sub-theme resulted in proper management of time and regular life challenges.

Proper Management of Time. The informants conveyed their experiences in the following lines:

"I divided the time to answer the module. When I get home in the afternoon and I am not tired yet, I will call my high school-aged grandsons to assist me with answering. However, if I feel particularly exhausted, I will rest and respond later." (KII6L241P38)

This claim was also supported by other informants, who expressed the same sentiments:

"For me, it is challenging, but I am working hard and being dedicated to finishing my ALS coursework. Owing to our challenges, it appears that this is all we can do to help our kids in the future when they start school with their limited reading and writing skills. When I have trouble answering the module, understanding can be more challenging. I also approach my coworkers for assistance. I took that action in order to continue my studies." (KII8L258)

Additionally, another informant experienced the same and shared:

"Time management issues due to work and schooling. I only practice time management in my school life. I cannot complete the module because I am busy at work every morning, but I will if I have time. If I am still having problems, I will ask for assistance, and we will share our knowledge to help each other as much as possible." (KIIP3L162, L181, L190, L203, L222)

The results found that rebel returnees value the power to give time purpose and maximize their time, which is the essence of time management. Its primary application in the corporate world is to lay out the ground rules for how workers and employers should interact. Workers who can efficiently manage their time are more likely to accomplish their objectives and provide high-quality results. This implies that the rebel returnees regained the process of organizing and planning how to divide their time between different activities, which means that the idea of collaboration is in their concepts and ideas.

The findings established that a sense of positive dispositions is independence, curiosity, concentration, creativity, responsibility, resilience, patience, perseverance, playfulness, imagination, being interested in things, enjoying problem-solving, being a good listener, assessing and taking risks, being friendly, wanting to know concepts, and the like. This implies that during school, there is a sense of evident dispositions within that made the rebel returnees follow their curiosity and try new things, build strong neural connections that will play a key role in learning and behavior throughout life and by igniting little one's curiosity and allowing the time and opportunities to satisfy their need to explore the new society that they live into.

The experiences of rebel returnees, according to Mamba et al. (2021), have ensured access to high-quality basic and postsecondary education. The World Bank found that many Filipino students who graduated from the Alternative Learning System (ALS) are now attending college. The results revealed that the ALS graduates have unfavorable study orientation and are not ready for college. The study orientation was also found to influence and predict college readiness significantly.

Regular Life Challenges. The informants conveyed their experiences in the following lines:

"Responding to the math and English modules, sir. Being an elderly woman, I know it will be challenging for me, and then what is my only grade back when we are in the mountain." (KII6L243)

This claim was also supported by other informants, who expressed the same sentiments:

"Other times I feel drowsy, sluggish, or like my class is going to start. Certain tendencies come and go, such as "But I am trying to go to school for ALS, as some people say that this is very important for the time will come, even if we grow old, as long as we have education." (KII5L234)

As one of the emerging themes, informants confirmed these statements in their responses below:

"Struggle to understand the lessons. As I experienced in ALS, I struggled particularly with the new lessons that our teacher from PSWD and ALS is teaching. Also, I will still ask for assistance from my companions because I have not finished my education." (KIIP3L146, L153, L169, L198).

The findings also corroborated the perspectives of rebel returnees, as described by Cubero et al. (2022), who are experienced educators with five years of classroom experience or less. They have gained life lessons from their experiences that may be invaluable to them in the future. While the government has never infringed on their right to life or freedom, it has offered them unique opportunities to begin anew.

3.3 Coping Mechanisms of Rebel Returnees in the Journey to Education

In today's ever-changing educational scene, a coping technique is essential for rebel returnees who return to school as they navigate the diverse educational terrain. In this discussion, the researcher looked at some of the coping methods employed by the informants to deal with the issues faced, allowing them to improve their learning experience despite the obstacles effectively. In the results of this study, the emergent themes are reintegration efforts, time management, and strengthening academic challenges. The four sub-themes are reconnecting with family and community, attending government programs, practicing time management, and strengthening one's faith.

Table 3. Thematic Analysis showing the coping mechanisms of rebel returnees in The Journey to Education

Main Theme	Sub-themes	Core Ideas
Reintegration efforts	Reconnecting with family and community	Asking for assistance in academic work
Time Management and Strengthening on Academic Challenges	Attending government programs	Attending government-enabled programs
	Practicing time management on school and work	Applying time management
	Strengthening one's faith	Praying to God

Reintegration Efforts

Reintegration refers to the process of assisting individuals in recovering from significant life events by reestablishing social, financial, and psychological ties. It refers to the process of assisting individuals in regaining their independence, dignity, and quality of life while simultaneously re-engaging in society.

Reconnecting with family and community can mean making time to nurture relationships, feeling a sense of belonging, and having a support network. These approaches were narrated with the lines of the informants stated below:

"As I already stated, I will seek my companions for assistance with math and English because my grades are so low, and if I still need help, I will go to the troops who are detaining us." (KII3L291, L298, L323, L333, L340, L345, L352, L359, L369, L385, L391, L396, L425)

Moreover, this was supported by other informants who shared the same experience:

"I am thankful that God made them instruments for me to achieve my dream through ALS. During my baccalaureate in church, I cried. I am thankful to 39thIB, DSWD, and ALS that I received a diploma." (KII1L433, L440, L447, L455, L464, L471, L489)

Reconnecting with Family and Community. These approaches were narrated with the lines of the informants stated below:

"I study the modules they have provided, sir. If things get tough, I ask for assistance from my colleagues at home, from Tata and Daling. Moreover, those of us who are in Mount Carmel, the 39thIB, are there to support and help us, especially the soldier who detained us." (KII4L290, L298, L323, L333, L340, L345, L352, L359, L369, L385, L391, L396, L425)

Few social institutions influence individuals' growth and well-being more than their primary and extended families and communities. All of these things, taken as a whole, educate us about the world, our values, the boundaries between right and wrong, and the limits of what is possible. The result revealed that increased student achievement is linked to family and community engagement, faster rates of reading acquisition, higher rates of advancement to secondary education, and lower rates of school dropout are all substantially correlated with increasing involvement of families and communities in schools.

The Family Code of the Philippines, also known as Executive Order No. 209, is the legal basis for support between family members. It outlines the rights, obligations, and sources of support for family members (Republic of the Philippines, 1987). The Family Code also provides the basis for government support to protect and enforce the rights of spouses and children to receive financial support.

Attending Government Programs. These approaches were narrated with the lines of the informants stated below:

"The government has given us much help, sir. PSWD gives us financial and livelihood support. Also, the 39th IB and the ALS, Sir, they support us and are the ones that push me to complete my education so that I can learn." (KII6L470, L471, L472, L473)

According to Bacal and Ormilla (2021), the Alternative Learning System (ALS) aims to eradicate illiteracy among out-of-school children, youths, and adults who are school dropouts and those who are deprived of education in order to complete elementary and secondary education outside the formal school system. The author perceived the implementation of the ALS program generally as very good. The data showed that most of them revealed that the relevance of instructional materials used during ALS sessions was outstanding. They affirmed that facilities and equipment were always available, enough, relevant, of high quality, accessible, and safe in the learning centers. They also perceived financial resource appropriation, availability, and sufficiency in the ALS program implementation. Moreover, most respondents revealed that establishing linkages, participation of stakeholders such as parents and government officials, and the attitude of ALS implementers were outstanding.

Time Management and Strengthening Academic Challenges

Practicing time management and strengthening academic challenges is crucial to a learner's role in the modern educational landscape. Rebel returnees must build rapport with the school community to achieve high-quality education. The informants attested this with their statements below:

"Applying time management in school and work, I learned to divide my time between school and work." (KII3L307, P4L363, P5L399)

As supported by Mohzana (2024), adapting new students to an academic environment can be a serious challenge. The new student orientation program is an effort to facilitate their adaptation. The results show that the new student orientation program has a positive impact on their adaptation process and that students who take part in this program tend to have a better level of academic performance compared to those who do not take part in the orientation program. Social integration, academic knowledge, and psychological support have been shown to play an important role in successful adaptation. This research concludes that the new student orientation program is important in improving their adaptation process and academic performance. It was recommended that improvements to the orientation program be identified, such as increased interactive content and increased post-program support, to ensure the sustainability of positive effects in the long term.

Practicing Time Management at School and Work. These approaches were narrated with the lines of the informants stated below:

"As I already stated, I will seek my companions for assistance with math and English because my grades are so low, and if I still need help, I will go to the troops who are detaining us." (KIIP3L291, L298, L323, L333, L340, L345, L352, L359, L369, L385, L391, L396, L425)

Salendab and Cogo (2022) used time management practices to determine the impact of Alternative Learning Systems graduates facilitated by the mobile teachers and district ALS supervisors. The ALS program was found to be successful in meeting the basic learning needs of its beneficiaries, with the majority of rebel returnees passing the A&E test and earning a diploma at a secondary level. In addition, a strong and dynamic curriculum responsive to the community's needs is essential to provide crucial experiences for learners' holistic development (Diquito, 2024). Financial support may be prioritized to support the ALS program's implementation. The textbook should be given to the recipients so rebel returnees can review the lesson at home in preparation for the accelerated examination. More training, seminars, and workshops for the teachers may be conducted to develop their competency further. Buildings or classrooms may be provided to enhance the teaching-learning process as a time management technique for the learners.

Strengthening One's Faith. These approaches were narrated with the lines of the informants stated below:

"As previously stated, it takes work and devotion, as well as praying to our Lord, who can give us more strength so that we can continue, and asking for assistance from my colleagues when I find it difficult to answer. In our day-to-day work and to survive our schooling, so that in the future, we can find a job that can help our family." (KII8L487, L488, L499)

According to the statement by Komariah and Nihayah (2023), the formation of a person's personality is greatly influenced by their religious education. Guidance and direction are religious beliefs intended to instill in individuals a deep-seated faith in the presence of God and religion and a willingness to comply with religious instructions in the form of worship and a high moral code. A deep conviction in God and religion, a moral code, and a willingness to obey religious instructions in worship and other kinds of worship are all things that want to be instilled in people by the religious beliefs of guidance and direction. Some of the most important things people might take away from their religious views are a strong sense of morality, a firm belief in God and religious principles, and the desire to follow religious instructions during liturgy and other forms of devotion.

3.4. Insights Gained by Rebel Returnees in the Journey to Education

The results of this study could help local government units better understand the economic, psychological, political, and social concerns of political rebels who have returned to their units. This understanding will put them in a better position to implement a reintegration program that meets their needs. The efficiency of government programs may then be reevaluated. As they readjust to society, former rebel returnees may find this a safe space

to talk about their difficulties. This implies that Local government units (LGUs) can better understand the concerns of political rebels who have returned to their units by implementing programs that address their economic, psychological, political, and social needs. These safe havens provide a space for former rebels to rehabilitate and reintegrate into society. They also offer legal assistance, job training, housing services, peace agreements, community-based assistance, and socioeconomic, psychosocial, and political reforms. LGUs can implement reforms to address the root causes of insurgency. Rebel governance is often conceptualized as a wartime system of mutual dependence between rebel rulers and the ruled. Rebel groups provide social services and establish order and security in exchange for the loyalty and support of civilians.

The results of this study reveal an emergent theme of realizing the value of education, the Importance of earning a degree, and education as a tool for successful reintegration. Two sub-themes are a better future through education and the Importance of earning a degree.

Table 4. *Thematic Analysis showing insights gained in the Journey to Education*

Main Theme	Sub-themes	Core Ideas
Realizing the value of education	Better future through education	There is an opportunity for a better future through education
Importance of earning a degree and education as a tool to successful reintegration	Importance of earning a degree	Opportunity to contribute to family and community

Realizing the Value of Education

A quality education equips students with the tools they need to contribute positively to society as they mature into contributing adults. Successful implementation of this plan depends on strong partnerships among parents, educators, and students. The informants asserted that they need to look for a better future through education by helping people develop skills and knowledge to help them in many areas of life, like career and professional growth. This was confirmed by the statements stated in the statement below:

"We will go to school if we are allowed to go to school, it is for our good, and that is all." (P6L516, L528, L592, L619, L665, L673)

Importance of earning a degree. A degree can make you more competitive in the job market, where many employers require a bachelor's degree or higher. A degree can also help you get promoted or move to a new role within your company. The same experience was narrated with the lines of the informant stated below:

"First and foremost, you must have faith in balancing employment and education. Partitioning the work time and responding to the module is the second step. Third, read or learn; fourth, do not forget to pray." (P6L538, L544, L552)

A study by Yecla et al. (2022) examined the effectiveness of ALS education programs in the Banga municipality of Aklan, Philippines. To gauge how well the respondents understood the program or service, we looked at their levels of awareness, enrollment, satisfaction, and urgency to take action. Also, to get a feel for the respondents' mental processes, actions, and points of view, we interviewed them. Those who took part were former rebels who enrolled in special education or an alternative learning system; the findings suggested ways in which student aid programs, such as scholarships, can be improved. Citizens strongly urge more easily accessible scholarship programs and other student financial aid options.

Better Future Through Education. The Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) is a commitment to ensure that all people have access to quality education and lifelong learning opportunities. The goal is to create a more sustainable and equitable world by ensuring that all children complete free primary and secondary education, improving access to pre-primary, vocational training, and higher education, eliminating gender disparities in education, increasing the number of people with relevant skills for employment and entrepreneurship and ensuring that all youth and adults achieve literacy and numeracy.

Moreover, rebel returnees recognized that reconnecting with family and community can foster a supportive atmosphere that promotes academic accomplishment, social-emotional well-being, and overall student progress. Another informant also shared the same statement below:

"Return to the government and make positive changes in their lives, even though I believe it is too late for me to feel remorse. As far as I can tell, our administration has an excellent plan for us to get back on the right track, so there is still time to make changes. If given the opportunity, we will attend school; it is only for us, nothing more." (P6L612, L634, L664)

This implies that education is important, and age should not hinder an individual from acquiring it. It is the only solution for us to get fair opportunities, for us to achieve our dreams, and the advantage of ALS to former rebels as they acquired their certificate in a short period compared to a formal education, as establishing a better person plays a vital role for the rebel returnees. Moreover, a journey of personal growth involves developing positive qualities and habits. This remark was also confirmed by one of the informants, who stated the following lines:

"As soon as I descended the mountain, the 39th IB came to our aid. We are quite appreciative of the 39th IB and the PSWD since they are the individuals who encourage us to attend school. It enables us to learn more as a government returnee. After all, we are earning a livelihood." (P6L559, L642, L768, L777, L784)

The findings revealed by Pascual et al. (2022) are that more organized and flexible basic education programs might then be made available to underprivileged communities, adult non-schoolers, and communities impacted by crises or wars. The purpose of this follow-up research was to identify the challenges that students encountered while attending university. Many students who have amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) think about how important it is to take care of themselves, how hard it is to juggle work, family, and housework, how few opportunities there are to continue your education, and how much change there is in life as a result of becoming a parent.

Education as a Tool for Successful Education

Another informant also shared the same statement below:

"As a rebel returnee, I concluded that attending school, even elementary school, is crucial for us. So we can acquire the skills necessary to read, write, and calculate numbers to prepare for the time. We should not be ashamed to study even when we are old, even if we only finish elementary school." (KII4L612, L634, L664)

This demonstrates that obtaining a degree is extremely important and that age should not prevent one from doing so. The only option for former rebels to acquire the opportunity we deserve and make our ambitions come true is through the American Liberation Army (ALS). Throughout a shorter period than it would take for them to earn a conventional degree, the program assists them in developing into superior individuals. In addition, it is a way to accomplish self-improvement, including developing positive habits and character characteristics.

As a result of receiving a degree and restricting their chances for future education and work prospects, this frequently results in employment with low levels of ability and lower income. The government of the Philippines has developed the Philippine Alternative Learning System (ALS), a parallel learning system to offer a second opportunity to adults and children not currently enrolled in school. However, despite recent advancements, autism spectrum disorder (ALS) continues to encounter chronic obstacles, which are further confounded by the varied environments in which its students are educated that provide valuable insights into the prevalent issues and concerns, serving as a foundation for the development of an effective support system to empower ALS learners. The study explores the current conditions of ALS students by determining their status, needs, and challenges to address their unique circumstances by objectively describing the experiences of the participants in order to address their unique circumstances (Catyong et al., 2023).

Importance of Earning a Degree. The rebel returnees recognized that the importance of earning a degree and education as a tool of successful reintegration in the community can foster a supportive atmosphere that promotes academic accomplishment, social-emotional well-being, and overall student progress. Another informant also shared the same statement below:

"Supporting our security and offering ALS education to give our rebel returnees free education so they can complete their education and obtain a diploma." "Numerous organizations have helped us since we returned under the government's protection. The NTF-ELCAC and DSWD are two organizations that have helped us by providing aid and teaching us how to cultivate and raise animals, among other things. 39th IB for supporting our security and offering ALS education to give our rebel returnees free education so that we can complete our education and obtain a diploma." (P8L612, L634, L664)

This remark was also confirmed by one of the informants, who stated the following lines:

"Earning a degree is essential to us. A lot, sir, I returned to school because of OPLAN TUPAD PANGAKO of ALS. 39th IB offers us protection, employment, and assistance. I thank E-CLIP, PSWD, and many other agencies for the assistance programs they provided and taught us." (P4L129, L342, L48, L177, L584)

The findings revealed by Albert et al. (2023) that the global goal of ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all promotes equality in access to quality learning, supports economic development, improves health outcomes, empowers women and girls, and fosters global citizenship and peace. Reducing inequities in education, both in terms of access and quality, helps build a more equitable, prosperous, and sustainable world (Villamor et al., 2023). This study provides a detailed examination of the progress of the Philippines in achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) on quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all. The country has policies to enhance access to affordable technical, vocational, and higher education, but the quality and alignment of these programs with future skills need improvement. Inclusive education initiatives exist, such as programs for learners with disabilities and Indigenous communities, but challenges persist in ensuring universal quality education.

4.0 Conclusion

In conclusion, studying the lived experiences of rebel returnees in the context of their positive encounters, challenges faced, coping mechanisms, and insights gained has several implications for theories, practice, and education. First, Training and Professional Development: Rebel returnees may need further training and professional development opportunities to improve their skills. This can increase their confidence and competence when inside the school and completing school reports and other responsibilities. Educational institutions may offer personalized training programs to meet the specific demands of the rebel returnees' learners. Second, Pedagogical Approaches: Rebel returnees feel overwhelmed or concerned about government institutions, contributing to stress and exhaustion. Educational institutions can support pedagogical flexibility by giving returnees various skills and ideas to heighten their expertise. Third, Research and Policy: The experiences of rebel returnees underscore the relevance of workplace research and policy creation for training on government practices. Research should focus on understanding the precise elements that contribute to the issues that rebel returnees face and discovering effective techniques for dealing with them by allocating resources for their professional growth. Fourth, exploring the lived experiences of rebel returnees was critical for the successful rehabilitation of education by recognizing their unique challenges and providing appropriate support. Education stakeholders can improve theories, practices, and education as a whole to lead future leaders of the nations.

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