



The Effectiveness of the Alternative Learning System (ALS) Program in the Zamboanga City Jail Male Dormitory: An Ethnomethodological Study

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Abstract

This study examined the effectiveness of the Alternative Learning System (ALS) program in the Zamboanga City Jail Male Dormitory using an ethnomethodological approach. Drawing on the works of Garfinkel and Heritage, it explored how Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDL) learners and ALS mobile teachers create and sustain a functioning classroom within a high-security environment through everyday practices. Data were gathered through participant observation, ethnographic field notes, and informal interviews and analyzed thematically using ethnomethodology and Membership Categorization Analysis. Findings revealed that classroom effectiveness emerged from the collective efforts of learners, teachers, and custodial staff through organized learner identities, negotiated social order, peer support, and sustained engagement despite environmental constraints. Multilingual instruction and informal support for learners with disabilities enhanced participation and comprehension. The study recommends dedicated learning spaces, strengthened peer-support systems, specialized staff training, and adequate instructional resources.

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Introduction

Education is globally recognized as a basic human right, a principle that applies to those incarcerated (UNESCO, 2021). The introduction of educational initiatives in correctional institutions is a key strategy for promoting the cognitive and behavioral rehabilitation of Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDL) (United Nations, 2015). Empirical evidence consistently indicates that inmates engaged in correctional education exhibit a considerably reduced likelihood of reoffending when contrasted with their uneducated counterparts (Davis et al., 2013). In the Philippines, the Bureau of Jail Management and Penology (BJMP) is legally obligated to provide developmental opportunities to equip PDLs for their eventual reintegration into society (BJMP, 2015).

The Alternative Learning System (ALS) serves as the primary educational intervention in the Philippines for individuals who cannot access formal schooling (Republic Act No. 9155, 2001). Under the Department of Education (DepEd), this parallel learning system provides basic literacy and functional skills to marginalized sectors, including those in detention (DepEd, 2019), and remains central to national efforts to expand access to functional literacy (Literacy Coordinating Council, 2022). The ALS curriculum in jails is specifically designed to address the unique psychological and logistical needs of adult learners in a high-security environment (Department of Education, 2020). However, the success of such programs is often influenced



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by the quality of instructional delivery and the availability of learning resources.

Related Literature on Correctional and ALS Education

International research on correctional education consistently links participation with reduced recidivism and improved post-release outcomes: incarcerated individuals who take part in correctional education programs are markedly less likely to return to custody than those who do not (Vacca, 2004). Prison sociologists have further argued that inmates experience and adapt to institutional life. The informal social order they build among themselves and with staff shapes whether rehabilitative programming succeeds or merely coexists alongside custody (Crewe, 2009). This body of work provides the international backdrop for the present study's local focus. Within the Philippines specifically, a small but growing body of research has begun documenting ALS implementation inside BJMP facilities. Faa (2023) tracked ALS passers within BJMP Manila between 2016 and 2019 to inform facility-level policy, finding that program-completion data alone offers limited insight into how ALS is actually experienced and sustained day-to-day inside a jail. Complementing this, Labarrete and Tiopes (2025) conducted a phenomenological study of PDL learners enrolled in ALS, documenting participants' subjective struggles and motivations, including a felt tension between the identities of "inmate" and "student," which also emerges independently in the present study's data. Most recently, Sala et al. (2026) examined ALS from the perspective of former inmate-learners after release, finding that program participation was widely perceived by graduates as central to their eventual social reintegration. Taken together, these studies establish that ALS matters to PDLs and to policy, but consistent with the research gap this study addresses, they rely primarily on retrospective accounts, surveys, or interview-based reconstructions of the ALS experience rather than on direct observation of ALS sessions as they unfold. The present study's ethnomethodological design is intended to complement this literature by examining, in real time, the interactional "work" through which the classroom identified in these prior studies is actually built and sustained inside a single facility.



This observational orientation follows a long tradition of ethnomethodologically informed classroom research, most notably Mehan's (1979) study of how the interactional structure of ordinary classroom lessons, turn-taking, questioning sequences, and the negotiation of participation, organizes learning as a jointly accomplished, moment-to-moment activity rather than a simple transmission of content from teacher to student. Extending this tradition into a correctional setting, where the very legitimacy of the "student" identity must be continuously reasserted against the background category of "inmate," is one of the contributions the present study seeks to make.

The second research question's focus on how a "learner with disability" is managed inside the ALS classroom speaks to a broader, unresolved challenge in Philippine basic education. Even in mainstream, non-correctional settings, access to Special Education (SNED) support for learners with disabilities remains inconsistent: a recent nationwide analysis found that Philippine schools continue to face structural barriers, including a shortage of trained SNED personnel, limited assessment tools, and uneven administrative support, that constrain inclusive education in practice even where it is mandated in policy (Factor & Saenz, 2025). If such barriers persist in ordinary public schools, they can be expected to be still more pronounced inside a jail-based ALS classroom, where SNED specialists are rarely, if ever, assigned. This makes the informal, peer- and staff-driven accommodations documented in the present study's findings especially significant: they suggest that inclusion, where it occurs in this setting, is being accomplished by the classroom's own members rather than by the specialized institutional support that policy assumes will be present.

Read together, this literature suggests that ALS in Philippine correctional settings is both consequential, linked to reduced reoffending internationally (Vacca, 2004) and to reintegration locally (Sala et al., 2026), and still poorly understood at the level of everyday classroom practice. Existing Philippine studies capture PDL learners' retrospective accounts (Labarrete & Tiopes, 2025), institutional completion data (Faa, 2023), and post-release perceptions (Sala et al., 2026), while the broader Philippine inclusive-education literature documents systemic barriers to disability support that likely extend, in intensified form, into correctional classrooms (Factor & Saenz, 2025). None



of this literature, however, observes an ALS session as it happens, capturing how PDLs and teachers jointly negotiate identity, authority, language, and disability in real time. This is precisely the gap the present ethnomethodological study is designed to address.

Theoretical Framework

From an ethnomethodological perspective, the effectiveness of a program lies in the “practical accomplishments” of members within that setting (Heritage, 1984; Ten Have, 2004). In a jail-based classroom, this involves how PDLs and teachers interact to transform a high-security dormitory into a recognizable site of learning (Francis & Hester, 2004). The “work” of being a student in a jail requires a unique negotiation of identities, where participants must balance their status as “inmates” with their roles as “learners” (Hester & Eglin, 1997). This localized social order is achieved through everyday conversational turns and shared common-sense knowledge (Lynch, 1993).

The Zamboanga City Jail Male Dormitory operates within a unique socio-cultural landscape, characterized by a diverse population and specific regional security challenges. While the ALS program has been active in this facility, there is a lack of localized empirical data measuring its specific outcomes on male PDLs. Previous studies in other regions suggest that while literacy rates improve, institutional barriers such as overcrowding can hamper the program's overall efficacy (Salazar et al., 2020). Consequently, there is an urgent need to evaluate how these variables interact within the Zamboanga City Jail to determine whether the program is meeting its rehabilitative goals.

Part of this socio-cultural complexity is linguistic. Zamboanga City is widely recognized as one of the Philippines' most linguistically diverse urban centers, with a population that draws on Chavacano, a Spanish-derived creole unique to the area and its most common lingua franca, alongside Tausug, Sama, Yakan, Cebuano/Bisaya, Filipino, and English. A jail population drawn from the same catchment area is therefore likely to be linguistically heterogeneous, which has direct implications for how ALS mobile teachers deliver instruction and for how PDL learners understand



and participate in lessons. This linguistic dimension of the facility's context is directly relevant to the present findings, particularly regarding the multilingual strategies documented in the Results and Discussion sections below.

This study endeavors to assess the efficacy of the Alternative Learning System within the Zamboanga City Jail Male Dormitory. The study centers on evaluating the degree of implementation in instructional quality, facility adequacy, and perceived influence on learners' life skills. By identifying the program's strengths and weaknesses, this research aims to provide evidence-based recommendations for policy improvement within the Bureau of Jail Management and Penology (BJMP). Consequently, the study contributes to the wider discussion regarding the potential of education as a transformative instrument within Mindanao's correctional framework.

Significance of the Study

Findings from this study are intended to inform BJMP administrators and ALS mobile teachers who design and deliver instruction under correctional security constraints by documenting the concrete, everyday practices that sustain a functioning classroom in a high-security dormitory, rather than only the policies that authorize it on paper. For policymakers, the study provides an evidence base to inform decisions on space allocation, staff deployment, and instructional materials in jail-based ALS implementation. For the broader field of correctional education, the study extends prior work linking education to reduced recidivism (Davis et al., 2013; United Nations, 2015) by showing, at the level of moment-to-moment interaction, how PDLs actively participate in their own rehabilitation rather than merely receive it. Finally, by applying an ethnomethodological lens rarely used in Philippine correctional-education research, the study contributes a methodological perspective that complements the more commonly used survey- and outcome-based evaluations of ALS implementation.

For the emerging local literature on ALS in Philippine jails specifically, the study offers a complementary vantage point: where Faa (2023) and Sala et al. (2026) work from institutional records and post-release perceptions, and Labarrete and Tiopes (2025) reconstruct PDL learners' experience through



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retrospective interviews, this study contributes a direct, session-by-session account of the classroom those other data sources describe from the outside. Read alongside Factor and Saenz's (2025) findings on inclusive-education barriers in mainstream Philippine schools, it also offers correctional-education administrators and Special Education planners a concrete illustration of how classrooms cope, informally and often successfully, when the specialized support that policy assumes is simply not there.

Scope and Delimitation

This study is delimited to the ALS program as implemented in the Zamboanga City Jail Male Dormitory and to the male PDL learners and ALS mobile teachers directly engaged in its sessions; it does not extend to female dormitories, juvenile facilities, or other BJMP jails. Consistent with its ethnomethodological design, the study focuses on describing the observable, in-the-moment practices through which the ALS classroom is carried out, rather than measuring learning outcomes, literacy gains, or program impact in quantitative terms. Findings are therefore interpretive and context-specific rather than statistically generalizable to other correctional facilities or ALS implementations.

The study is likewise delimited in the categories of “effectiveness” it addresses: it speaks to instructional quality, facility adequacy, and identity/social-order dynamics as these are observably accomplished within sessions, but it does not evaluate curriculum content, teacher certification standards, or administrative compliance with DepEd's ALS policy framework, each of which falls outside the scope of an ethnomethodological classroom study and would require separate lines of inquiry.

Statement of the Problem

This study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How do the participants (PDL learners and ALS teachers) categorize themselves and one another during educational sessions to establish and maintain a “classroom environment” within a high-security dormitory?



2. In what ways is the category of “learner with disability” negotiated, acknowledged, or de-emphasized to maintain the social order and progress of the lesson?
3. What localized “common-sense” strategies do ALS mobile teachers employ when specialized Special Education (SNED) resources are unavailable within the jail facility?

Methods

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative research design anchored in ethnomethodology (Garfinkel, 1967). This approach is utilized to investigate the “practical accomplishments” and “everyday methods” used by PDLs and ALS implementers to establish an educational environment within the Zamboanga City Jail (Heritage, 1984). Instead of focusing on subjective feelings, this design examines the visible, localized practices, such as how participants negotiate authority, space, and time, that make the ALS program a recognizable social reality in a correctional setting (Rawls, 2002). Before the data gathering commenced, a letter was sent to the Principal seeking for approval. Afterwards, an informed consent was secured from the parents’ of the learners explaining the nature of the study. Then, learners were fully informed about the purpose of the research and their voluntary participation. Lastly, no names were written on the paper to maintain anonymity and confidentiality of the essay.

Research Locale and Informants

The study is situated within the Zamboanga City Jail Male Dormitory, specifically during active ALS sessions. The informants are considered “members” of the setting, comprising PDL learners and ALS mobile teachers who are actively engaged in the program's daily “work.” A purposive sampling technique is used to identify “key members” who are deeply embedded in the social structure of the jail-based classroom, ensuring the data reflects the actual methods of social interaction used in the facility (Patton, 2015). Consistent with the aims of purposive sampling, informants



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were selected not to be statistically representative of the facility's PDL population, but to be information-rich cases capable of illuminating in detail how the ALS classroom is implemented in practice.

There were a total of 68 PDLs who belonged to the elementary level, among whom 2 PDLs were with special needs, with hearing impairment, 3 were visually impaired, and 7 were dyslexic (based on a standardized teacher-based assessment tool).

Data Collection Procedure

Data collection focuses on naturally occurring interactions and participant observation within the jail's learning center. The researchers act as observers, taking detailed ethnographic field notes (Emerson et al., 2011) that document how PDLs “do” being students while also being PDLs. To capture the nuances of these interactions, the study uses audio or video recordings of ALS sessions, where permitted by BJMP security protocols, to provide a microscopic look at the conversational turns and social cues used by members. Brief, informal “interviews-to-the-purpose” are also conducted to clarify specific social actions observed during class.

Data Analysis

The analysis follows an ethnographic, thematic approach informed by the sensibilities of ethnomethodology and Membership Categorization Analysis (MCA) (Sacks, 1992; Ten Have, 2004), applied to the researchers' detailed field notes and running records of ALS sessions. Rather than formal Conversation-Analytic (CA) transcription using Jefferson notation, the analysis works directly from these ethnographic records to identify recurring “methods” participants use to manage classroom order, such as how a PDL uses humor or specific jail-slang to bridge the gap between their criminal identity and their student identity (Hester & Eglin, 1997). The goal is to describe the indexicality of the context-specific meaning of actions within the Zamboanga City Jail (Garfinkel, 1967).

Ethical Considerations

Strict adherence to the National Ethical Guidelines for Health and Health-Related Research is maintained, particularly given the power imbalance



inherent in a jail setting (Philippine Health Research Ethics Board [PHREB], 2017). Informed consent is treated as an ongoing process, and the right to withdraw is emphasized to ensure PDLs do not feel coerced into participation. All data is anonymized to protect the identity and legal safety of the members within the BJMP system (BJMP, 2015). This study did not undergo review by a separate institutional ethics review board; data collection instead adhered to the National Ethical Guidelines for Health and Health-Related Research (PHREB, 2017) and to BJMP's institutional security and confidentiality protocols governing research access to its facilities and personnel.

Results and Discussion

Ethnomethodological Running Records: ALS Session

1. **Spatial Transition:** As the ALS mobile teacher enters the designated area, PDLs shift from relaxed “jail-mode” postures to an organized seating arrangement. This physical movement is a visible, localized practice that transforms the dormitory into a recognizable site of learning.
2. **Negotiating Authority:** The teacher initiates the session by opening a folder. A PDL learner immediately silences a nearby group not involved in ALS, using a mix of jail slang and a directive. This act helps maintain the local social order necessary for the lesson to progress.
3. **Identity Duality:** During the roll call, PDLs respond with “Present, Ma'am/Sir,” adopting the category of “learner.” However, the background noise of heavy steel gates and security commands serves as a constant “indexical” reminder of their status as “inmates.”

Managing the “Learner with Disability” Category

1. **Negotiated Progress:** When a learner with a perceived disability struggles with a writing task, the surrounding PDLs do not explicitly highlight the disability. Instead, they de-emphasize the category of “disabled” by treating the struggle as a routine learning hurdle common to all adult learners.



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2. Collective Interaction: The social order is maintained through conversational turns in which the teacher provides additional time without halting the group's progress, acknowledging the need for help while preserving the student's dignity as a "learner."
3. Maintaining Focus: During mid-session, the on-duty custodial officer conducts a headcount nearby. The participants exhibit "practical accomplishments" by maintaining their focus on the whiteboard, effectively ignoring the security protocol until it directly interferes with their physical space
4. Closing the Session: As the session ends, the "learner" identity is discarded as PDLs help store learning materials and prepare to return to standard dormitory routines, marking a clear shift back to their primary status within the BJMP system.
5. Resource Negotiation and Peer Scaffolding: Because materials are limited, PDLs are seen sharing writing tools. When a learner struggles with forming a specific letter, a nearby PDL provides a whispered cue. This interaction maintains the lesson's social order without requiring formal SNED resources.
6. Confidence Building and Closing: The facilitator reviews the PDLs' names written on their papers. Learners exhibit visible pride (e.g., smiling, showing papers to peers) as their basic writing skills are validated. This "practical accomplishment" of literacy contributes to their rehabilitative goal.

The three narrative accounts underlying these running records, illustrating the spatial transition into "learner" identity, the improvised support given to a learner with a hearing impairment, and the multilingual instruction delivered on an improvised outdoor court, are presented in full as Appendix A, to keep the Results section focused on the coded observations while preserving the researchers' original ethnographic detail.



Discussion

This section interprets the findings from the observations conducted at the Zamboanga City Jail Male Dormitory. Using an ethnomethodological lens, the effectiveness of the Alternative Learning System (ALS) is understood not through test scores alone, but through the “practical accomplishments,” the visible, everyday actions taken by learners and teachers to create a classroom within a high-security facility.

The Creation of a “Classroom”: Identity and Social Order

One of the most significant findings is the learners' ability to shift their identities. In Narrative 1 (Appendix A), PDLs are seen transitioning from relaxed “jail-mode” to an organized seating arrangement the moment the teacher arrives. This shift confirms that the PDLs themselves are active participants in creating the learning space. They negotiate their authority by silencing peers who disrupt the lesson, using a mix of jail-slang and direct commands. This suggests that the program's effectiveness depends on learners' willingness to collectively maintain social order, demonstrating that they can temporarily set aside their status as “inmates” to become “students.”

This finding is consistent with Lynch's (1993) and Rawls's (2002) account of ethnomethodology's central premise: social order is not imposed from outside a setting but is continuously produced, moment by moment, by its own members through their ordinary, observable conduct. Here, that premise takes on additional weight given the setting's coercive character; the PDLs' shift from “jail-mode” to “learner” is not required by any formal classroom rule, yet it is enacted and policed by the PDLs themselves. This active, self-organized participation aligns with the broader correctional-education literature's finding that engagement in education is associated with reduced reoffending (Davis et al., 2013) and with the rehabilitative aims set out in the Nelson Mandela Rules for the treatment of prisoners (United Nations, 2015): here, the mechanism of that engagement is made visible at the level of everyday interaction rather than inferred from post-program outcomes alone.



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This pattern also echoes Mehan's (1979) foundational observation that a classroom's interactional order is not given in advance but built turn by turn by its participants. Here, however, ordinary classroom achievement is layered onto a further, more consequential negotiation: PDLs must actively hold open a "student" category against the ever-present, institutionally reinforced category of "inmate." This extends Labarrete and Tiopes's (2025) phenomenological finding that PDL learners experience a felt tension between these two identities, by showing concretely how that tension is resolved, moment to moment, through the PDLs' own policing of classroom conduct rather than through any formal rule.

Overcoming Environmental Barriers

The study reveals that the physical environment of the jail is characterized by the clanging of metal gates, sirens, and overcrowding, a constant challenge. However, the learners and teachers practice "practical accomplishments" by actively working around these distractions. In Narrative 3 (Appendix A), the teacher successfully turned a damp, noisy basketball court into a place of learning simply by remaining calm, using a steady voice, and utilizing multiple languages (Filipino, English, and local dialects such as Chavacano, Tausug, Yakan, and Bisaya, among others) to bridge gaps in understanding. This shows that the program is effective because the educators use common-sense knowledge to adapt to the facility's limitations, ensuring that the environment does not hinder the lesson.

Crewe's (2009) account of prison social life similarly emphasizes that inmates and staff continuously negotiate informal accommodations within a formally rigid institutional structure; the present findings extend this insight to the specific challenge of sustaining an educational activity inside that structure. The teacher's fluid code-switching among Filipino, English, and Zamboangueño, meanwhile, aligns with what García and Wei (2014) describe as translanguaging: the flexible, strategic deployment of a learner's full linguistic repertoire rather than adherence to a single, formally sanctioned language of instruction to make meaning accessible. In a facility housing PDLs from diverse linguistic backgrounds, this translanguaging practice appears to function as a further, language-specific instance of the same common-sense adaptability documented throughout the findings.



Managing Learning Difficulties and Disabilities

The research highlighted how the ALS program deals with suspected learners with disabilities, even without specialized equipment. In Narrative 2 (Appendix A), the teacher and a jail officer with sign language skills developed a customized approach to help a student with a hearing impairment. This demonstrates that the program works through the following:

1. Peer Scaffolding: PDLs help one another with tasks, such as forming letters or sharing tools, without making the struggling student feel “different” or “less than.”
2. De-emphasizing Disability: When a learner struggles, the group does not highlight it as a failure; instead, they treat it as a “routine learning hurdle.”
3. Localized Support: Because specialized tools are unavailable, the “method” becomes a human connection using gestures, simple drawings, and patience.

The group's tendency to treat a learner's difficulty as an ordinary “learning hurdle” rather than naming or dwelling on a disability resonates with Goffman's (1963) classic analysis of stigma management: by declining to make the discrediting attribute the interactional focus, PDLs and teachers collectively protect the struggling learner's identity as a capable student. The peer scaffolding observed throughout the running records is also consistent with the broader peer-learning literature, which finds that reciprocal, informal peer assistance can improve both the helper's and the recipient's understanding and confidence even without formal training or curricular structure (Topping, 2005). That such scaffolding emerged spontaneously among PDLs, in the near-total absence of SNED resources, suggests it functioned here as an improvised but effective substitute for structured inclusive-education support.

These improvised accommodations also point to a broader systemic gap. Factor and Saenz (2025) similarly found that Philippine teachers in



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mainstream classrooms often rely on their own informal adaptations, rather than on formal SNED referral systems, simply because specialized support is not reliably available. The present findings suggest that this reliance on informal, member-driven accommodation is even more pronounced inside a correctional ALS classroom, where a formal disability-support infrastructure is effectively absent, making the peer- and officer-led improvisation documented here not an exception but, plausibly, the primary mechanism by which inclusion is achieved in this setting.

Literacy as a Tool for Rehabilitation

Finally, the findings suggest that the ALS program serves a purpose beyond basic academics. The visible pride learners show when they write their names or complete a task indicates that literacy is a key rehabilitative goal. By validating the learners' skills, the program provides a temporary "moment of order and purpose." The shift from being just an "inmate" to being a "student" who can learn and succeed is a practical demonstration of rehabilitation in action.

This reading of literacy as a rehabilitative, identity-transforming practice rather than a purely academic outcome resonates with DepEd's (2020) recognition that learning opportunities must remain available even under constrained circumstances, and with the Literacy Coordinating Council's (2022) ongoing national push to expand access to functional literacy. What the present findings add to this literature is a close-up view of how that access is actually accomplished inside a jail dormitory: not through a curriculum alone, but through the visible, moment-to-moment cooperation of PDLs, teachers, and jail staff in sustaining, however briefly, an "order and purpose" that competes with the surrounding institutional environment.

This finding is also consistent with Vacca's (2004) widely cited observation that educational participation is linked to reduced reoffending, and with Sala et al.'s (2026) finding that former PDL-learners themselves credit ALS participation as central to their social reintegration after release. What the present study adds to this outcome-oriented literature is a mechanism: the visible pride and validation documented in the running records suggest that this rehabilitative effect may begin to take hold well before release, at the level of a single completed writing task.



Conclusion and Recommendation

In conclusion, the ALS program in the Zamboanga City Jail is effective because it is a “social accomplishment,” a classroom built not with bricks and mortar, but through the shared focus, patience, and cooperation of the PDLs, teachers, and jail staff.

Taken as a whole, these findings position the present study as a bridge between two bodies of literature that have so far developed separately. On one side sits the outcome-oriented correctional-education literature, which establishes that programs like ALS matter for reducing reoffending and supporting reintegration (Vacca, 2004; Sala et al., 2026) but says comparatively little about how that effect is produced day-to-day. On the other hand, the ethnomethodological tradition of classroom and institutional research (Garfinkel, 1967; Mehan, 1979; Rawls, 2002) has rarely been applied specifically to correctional education. By showing that the Zamboanga City Jail Male Dormitory's ALS classroom is continuously, visibly built by its own members through spatial repositioning, authority negotiation, disability de-emphasis, and multilingual bridging. This study suggests that “program effectiveness” in a correctional setting cannot be fully captured by completion rates or post-release outcomes alone; it is also, irreducibly, an accomplishment of everyday interaction among PDLs, teachers, and jail staff.

Based on these findings, the following recommendations are offered to improve the program's effectiveness in the Zamboanga City Jail Male Dormitory:

1. **Establish a Quiet Zone for Learning:** Because the jail environment is naturally noisy and filled with distractions such as clanging gates and shouting, the BJMP should consider designating a more permanent, quiet area for classes. Moving away from shared spaces like the damp basketball court, even if only through temporary partitions, could help students maintain their focus.



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2. **Formalize a Buddy System for Peer Support:** The study showed that PDLs naturally help one another when someone is struggling with a task. The program should formalize this by establishing a peer tutoring system in which advanced students assist those who are just starting out or have learning difficulties. This makes learning more inclusive and builds confidence for both the tutor and the student.
3. **Identify and Utilize Hidden Staff Skills:** Skilled individuals exist within the jail staff, such as the officer who knew sign language and helped the hearing-impaired student. The BJMP should conduct a survey or inventory of current staff to identify those with teaching backgrounds, Special Education (SNED) training, or other specialized skills who can support the ALS program.
4. **Encourage Multilingual Instruction:** The teacher's success was largely due to switching between Filipino, English, and the local dialect, Zamboangueño. The ALS program should officially encourage mobile teachers to use the local dialect as a bridge, making complex lessons feel more personal and accessible to learners who may not be fluent in formal English or Filipino.
5. **Standardize the “Student Shift” Routine:** The transition from “jail-mode” to “learner-mode” is key to the program's success. The facility should support teachers in maintaining this structured routine, including clear start times and designated learning areas, because this mental shift helps students disconnect from the stress of being an inmate and focus on their personal growth.
6. **Provide Basic Instructional Materials:** While teachers are currently improvising well (e.g., drawing on the floor or writing on paper), the BJMP and Department of Education should ensure a steady supply of basic tools such as whiteboards, markers, and visual aids. This would relieve teachers of the burden of constantly improvising under difficult conditions, allowing them to focus more on student engagement.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research



This study is limited by its single-site, single-dormitory scope: the findings describe how the ALS classroom is implemented specifically within the Zamboanga City Jail Male Dormitory and should not be read as representative of ALS implementation at other BJMP facilities, female dormitories, or juvenile detention settings. The ethnomethodological design, by focusing on observable, in-the-moment practice, does not measure literacy gains or other quantitative learning outcomes; it therefore complements, rather than replaces, outcome-based evaluations of correctional ALS programs. The purposive, small-scale sampling typical of this approach (Patton, 2015) also means the specific interactional “methods” documented here, while analytically rich, cannot be assumed to occur with the same frequency or form in other facilities. Future research could usefully pair this ethnomethodological approach with longitudinal or outcome-based measures within the same facility, extend comparable observation to female and juvenile BJMP dormitories, and examine whether the peer-scaffolding and multilingual-bridging practices identified here can be deliberately cultivated through staff training rather than arising only informally.

Future work could also fruitfully combine this study's ethnomethodological approach with the retrospective and survey-based methods used elsewhere in the Philippine ALS-in-corrections literature (Faa, 2023; Labarrete & Tiopes, 2025; Sala et al., 2026). For instance, by pairing direct observation of ALS sessions with post-release follow-up on participants' outcomes, we can connect the moment-to-moment interactional mechanisms documented here to the longer-term reintegration outcomes that this literature has begun to document. Similarly, a follow-up study designed explicitly around Jefferson-transcribed Conversation Analysis, using audio or video recordings where BJMP security protocols permit, would allow the more fine-grained turn-by-turn claims associated with CA to be tested directly against transcribed data, building on the ethnographic groundwork laid here.

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