



STUDY ORIENTATION AND COLLEGE READINESS AMONG ALTERNATIVE LEARNING SYSTEM GRADUATES IN NORTHEASTERN PHILIPPINES

 **Maria Mamba¹⁺**
Antonio Tamayao²
Rudolf Vecaldo³
Febe Marl Paat⁴
Editha Pagulayan⁵
Jay Emmanuel
Asuncion⁶

¹Associate Professor, College of Arts and Sciences, Cagayan State University, Carig Campus, Tuguegarao City, Philippines.

Email: mariamamba@yahoo.com

²Professor, College of Teacher Education, Cagayan State University, Andrews Campus, Tuguegarao City, Philippines.

Email: toni_tamayao@yahoo.com

³Associate Professor, College of Teacher Education, Cagayan State University, Andrews Campus, Tuguegarao City, Philippines.

Email: rudolfvecaldo@gmail.com

⁴Professor, Graduate School, Cagayan State University, Andrews Campus, Tuguegarao City, Philippines.

Email: febgpaat@gmail.com

⁵Dean, Graduate School, Cagayan State University, Andrews Campus, Tuguegarao City, Philippines.

Email: pagulayaneditha@gmail.com

⁶Instructor, College of Allied Health Sciences, Cagayan State University, Andrews Campus, Tuguegarao City, Philippines.

Email: buds122386@yahoo.com



(+ Corresponding author)

ABSTRACT

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Access to quality basic and tertiary education has been the primary concern of the Philippine government. The World Bank has reported that a high percentage of Filipino Alternative Learning System (ALS) graduates are enrolled in tertiary education. However, little is known on their transition from basic to tertiary education specifically focused on their study orientation and college readiness. Hence, it is imperative to examine these variables among ALS graduates considering its repercussion to their educational outcomes. This descriptive correlational study investigated the interplay of study orientation and college readiness of 143 ALS graduates (77 males and 66 females) enrolled in a public university in Northeastern Philippines. The results revealed that the ALS graduates have unfavorable study orientation and are not college-ready. The study orientation also was found to significantly influence and predict college readiness. The findings imply the need for ALS graduates to enhance their study habits and attitudes as these are essential skills in improving their college readiness.

Contribution/Originality: This study is a preliminary attempt to investigate the relationship between study orientation and college readiness of Filipino ALS graduates. The results of this undertaking hope to broaden knowledge on the current status of ALS graduates with the end view of crafting educational policy reforms and basic-tertiary education interventions for ALS learners.

1. INTRODUCTION

The premium role of education in every country's goal for progress is a proven thought. Education is viewed as a significant catalyst in realizing human supremacy, social solidarity, and economic strength (Global Partnership for Education, 2020; Patrinos, 2016). Thus, nations, regardless of wealth, stand to acquire a decent education (Brende,

2015). The high regard for education emanates from global plans such as Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Education for All 2015, Sustainable Development Goals, Decade for Literacy, and the like that prove that education is indispensable in all areas of global development.

In the Philippines, the Filipinos value education as their pass for poverty alleviation (Asis, 2014). Hence, education is among the Philippine government sectors that consistently get the most significant budget (Department of Budget and Management, 2020) to sustain the government's commitment to providing its constituents the equal opportunity to quality education. Moreover, the Philippines has always been responsive to the different challenges in education such as high rates of school dropouts, out-of-school-youth (OSY), and absence of formal schooling (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2015). In this regard, the Republic Act No. 9155, known as the Governance Act of Basic Education, was decreed to provide an Alternative Learning System (ALS).

ALS is a parallel learning system that provides a viable alternative to the existing formal education instruction. It encompasses both the non-formal and informal sources of knowledge and skills (RA No. 9155, 2011). Supervised by the Department of Education (DepEd), ALS is a program that intends to provide basic education to the deprived, depressed, and underserved (DDUs) Filipinos (Arzadon & Nato, 2015; Lua, 2020). According to World Bank Group (2018), ALS learners rose to 641,584 in 2017 from 537,666 in 2016, and ALS classes are held in about 4 467 community learning centers situated all over the country (Arzadon & Nato, 2015). This scenario shows that ALS is a growing alternative delivery system in the Philippines.

Nevertheless, the implementation of ALS in the Philippines was never spared from a variety of issues. Igarashi (2018) identified some gaps needing reforms as follows: (1) low participation and passing rates, (2) lack of skills training for procurement of better jobs in the future, (3) shortage of budget, and (4) mixture of participants exhibiting different states and drives. The latest and equally perplexing ALS concerns to date are its correspondence to the new K-12 curriculum and the enrollment of its graduates to Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). In effect, DepEd issued the DepEd Order No. 13, s. 2019 or the Guidelines on the Implementation of the Enhanced Alternative Learning System 2.0 on the 2019 ALS K-12 Curriculum sets the provisions in ensuring strategic, efficient, and effective management of the implementation of enhanced ALS 2.0. On the other hand, the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) issued CMO No. 10, s. 2018 which guided public and private HEIs in admitting ALS completers.

1.1. Research Gap

The foregoing scenarios present ALS's status as a system catering to the needs of marginalized groups in the Philippines. Experts claim that most of the results of previous studies were centered on general and quantitative concerns but failed to consider the learners' experiences and psychological makeup (Arzadon & Nato, 2015; Atilano, Desipeda, Domingo, Garbin, & Omanito, 2016). Little is grasped about ALS learners' academic dispositions, essential in achieving formal educational pursuits beyond their completed informal basic education. The World Bank Group (2018) appreciates that a high percentage or an average of 60 % of ALS completers and passers of the Accreditation & Equivalency (A&E) exam are enrolled in tertiary education. Hence, it is imperative to examine ALS learners' transition from non-formal to formal educational settings considering its repercussion to their educational outcomes.

According to Omwirhiren and Ibrahim (2016) exposing students to an approach different from what they have been accustomed would cause numerous difficulties. For instance, students may find difficulty identifying effective methods of teaching and learning, prioritizing subjects to learn, and adjusting to control mechanisms of teachers. These difficulties may play havoc with their ability to participate in school activities, associate with their teachers, and perform well in school (Ameah & Dantani, 2012). At present, little is known on the basic to tertiary education transition of ALS graduates focused on their study habits, attitudes, and college readiness.

1.2. Research Objectives

It is in the aforesaid contexts that research on study orientation and college readiness among ALS graduates is being embarked, with the following objectives: (1) determine the study orientation of ALS graduates; (2) ascertain the college readiness of ALS graduates; and (3) examine significant association and predictive value of study orientation to college readiness. This undertaking hopes to broaden knowledge on ALS graduates' current status focusing on their pedagogical adjustment and cognitive potential with the end view of crafting educational policy reforms and basic-tertiary education interventions for ALS learners.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Status of ALS in the Philippines

The ALS is one of DepEd's leading platforms in attending to the out-of-school Filipinos' scholastic predicaments. It has provided several programs geared for the enhancement of its general instructive methods and practices. The latest of these are the implementation of the enhanced ALS curriculum from the 2019 ALS K-12 curriculum (Department of Education, 2019; Llego, 2019); the development of new ALS modules parallel to K-12 basic formal education (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2019); and mobile learning delivery mode (Department of Budget and Management, 2020; Villenes, Iglane-Villenes, & Alcaraz, 2017). In terms of its target recipients, ALS has also expanded to those children and adults behind bars (Mateo, 2019), indigenous peoples (IPs), rebel returnees, and domestic helpers (Egcas & Garganera, 2019). In DepEd's 2018 report, the ALS program has reached 823, 301 enrollees (Malipot, 2019).

Notwithstanding its major expansions, ALS is still tied with a range of problems. Current statistics show that about 3.7 million youth and 3.1 million young adults did not graduate in junior high school (World Bank Group, 2018) which means that at most, 88% of these groups are not yet covered by ALS plus the 34% non-completers of the program itself (Montemayor, 2018). In terms of monetary allocation, the World Bank Group (2018) has recommended the mitigation of ALS' fiscal and operative bottleneck since its budget has endured below 1% of the public basic education expenditure. Furthermore, ALS learners' varied topographical and socioeconomic situations, and their motives for learning are perennial setbacks (United Nations Children's Fund, 2012) that warrant critical attention until these times.

To date, ALS graduates are admitted to HEIs under CHED Memorandum Order No.2, series of 2018 (Montemayor, 2018). This order mandates all government and private tertiary institutions to admit ALS completers from 2017 to the present. While this government's move holds allegiance to its vision of making the tertiary education sector more accessible to all its people (Oxford Business Group, 2020) this too visibly posts challenges to the ALS learners. Though no evidence yet is ascertained regarding such apprehension among ALS students per se, experts implicate all school transition facets as factors to their academic difficulties (Lim, de Ramos, Marikit, Gabaca, & Yao Jr, 2017). This tension may be attributed to the different learning settings and pedagogical approaches of their ALS program to the higher education teaching-learning landscape.

2.2. College Readiness in the Philippine Context

College readiness has its different use in both secondary and tertiary schools. According to Wignall (2020) college readiness is among the indicators in determining quality education; curriculum appropriateness; and workforce competence in high schools. In contrast, college readiness in HEIs is a vital consideration in senior high school graduates' admission. Premised on these concepts, it steers critical inquiries to the present status of the Philippine education system. A newly revolutionized educational program known as the K-12 curricula, Filipino K-12, and ALS graduates are essentially involved in college readiness. To date, very limited researches have been undertaken in the country on these groups of graduates and focused on Philippine College Readiness Standards (CRS) (Mamba, Tamayao, & Vecaldo, 2020; Tamayao et al., 2020).

While college readiness of K-12 graduates is an obvious concern among HEIs, a more evident pressure is experienced along with the college readiness of ALS graduates who did not undergo the K-12 programs. This discernible difficulty in the transition of ALS graduates in their immersion to the formal higher education is implied in the so-called transition pedagogy concept (Gale & Parker, 2014; Kift, 2009; Kift, Nelson, & Clarke, 2010). Accordingly, exposure to a different learning environment to include variety, model, engagement, assessment, and supervision standards can have an overwhelming impact on students' academic performance (Nath, 2002; Shohel & Mahruf, 2010). This change in the learning environment necessitates exploration in the Philippine context focused on ALS graduates.

2.3. Relationship between Study Orientation and College Readiness

Previous researchers have claimed that study orientation exerts a considerable effect on students' learning performance and success (Aquino, 2011; Memis & Kandemir, 2019; Odiri, 2015). Study orientation refers to learners' collective dispositions and routines applied to their coursework (Nieminen, Lindblom-Ylänne, & Lonka, 2004). This construct is a perceptive structure that is molded over time through interaction with the academic milieu (Credé & Kuncel, 2008; Honkima" ki, Tynja" la", & Valkonen, 2004; Khoo & Ainley, 2005). Certain studies indicate that students determine and develop their study orientation in different fashions (Memis & Kandemir, 2019; Shahi & Maiyo, 2015) relative to their social experiences in varied school settings (Candeias, Franco, Rebelo, & Mendes, 2010).

In general, study orientation may be good or bad, favorable or unfavorable, and positive or negative, which may influence students' academic performance. A favorable study orientation employs effective learning tactics (Ogbodo, 2010) and becomes effective when complemented by a degree of pleasure and willingness (Atanasova-Pacemska et al., 2015). Unfavorable study orientation, on the other hand, is characterized as having weak academic engagement and convictions. Students in this predisposition are inclined to practice delay and avoidance of academic tasks, use ineffective study methods, and display negative attitudes toward teachers and requirements that impede their academic growth and achievement (Leithwood & Riehel, 2003). However, such realities about study orientation, particularly among ALS learners, are yet to be proven.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design

A descriptive correlational design was devoted to this study to verify the significant correspondence between the different study orientation and college readiness scales. The study orientation was the independent variable in the study, while the college readiness was the dependent variable. Scores of the respondents in the different scales of study orientation such as delay avoidance; work methods; teacher approval; and education acceptance were individually correlated with their scores in the College Readiness Test. Further, the design was also used to ascertain the predictive value of the overall study orientation scores to college readiness scores. Such design is utilized since it aids in investigating the assumed connections between variables and declaring predictions (Stangor, 2011).

3.2. Respondents

This study's respondents were the 143 ALS graduates or 1.67% of the 8,601 first-year enrollees in a public university for School Year 2019-2020. Of these respondents, 66 or 46.2% were females, and 77 or 53.8% were males. The majority of them were single, and the mean age was 20.

3.3. Locale of the Study

The study was carried out in a public HEI in the northern part of the country. The university has eight (8) campuses strategically situated in the province. It offers different programs consistent with the tracks and strands of the K-12 programs. It is also known for its niche programs in engineering, public health, teacher education, accountancy, agriculture, fishery, and industrial technology.

3.4. Research Instruments

The questionnaires used in the study were the Survey of Study Habits and Attitudes (SSHA) and the College Readiness Test (CRT). The SSHA is a standardized test measuring the study methods, motivation for studying, and certain attitudes toward scholastic activities. The SSHA Forms C and H, which were the primary forms administered to ALS respondents, have four (4) basic scales namely: (1) Delay Avoidance (DA); (2) Work Methods (WM); (3) Teacher Approval (TA); and (4) Education Acceptance (EA). Adding the scores obtained from DA and WM scales produce the Study Habits (SH) scale while the scores obtained from TA and EA scales result in the Study Attitudes (SA) scale. Combining the scores obtained from both SH and SA or the four basic scales gives the Study Orientation (SO) scale, which is the main variable of interest in this instrument. In terms of SSHA's psychometric properties, the reflected average validity coefficients obtained from Fisher's z-function were .42 and .45 for men and women, respectively, and the reliability coefficients computed using Kuder-Richardson Formula 8 for the four basic scales ranged from .87 to .89 (Brown & Holtmam, 1967).

Meanwhile, the CRT is a locally designed and validated criterion-referenced test that measures K-12 graduates' learning competencies based on the Philippine CRS in the following areas: English, Filipino, Literature, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, and Humanities. The test items in these learning areas were 30% content standards measuring knowledge and comprehension and 70 % performance standards measuring application, analysis, evaluation, testing assumptions, hypotheses, and relevant information. This instrument exhibits 65.64 difficulty index, 0.22 discrimination index, 68.91% distractor efficiency, and 0.796 inter-item consistency (Tamayao et al., 2020).

3.5. Data Gathering Procedure

The approval to gather data was sought from the officials of the university. Test administrators composed of teachers, guidance counselors, and psychometricians were oriented on the ethical standards and testing procedures to secure the test takers' rights and welfare. Free and prior informed consent was obtained from the respondents who were also apprised of the study's rationale. Additionally, the respondents were also assured of the confidentiality of their identities and of the information gathered from them. The CRT was first administered to the respondents, followed by the SSHA with two months gap. To ensure the data's veracity, the researchers strictly followed standard testing procedures with the technical assistance of eight (8) registered guidance counselors and eight (8) licensed psychometricians. The respondents manifested that they were able to comprehend the directions found in both tests which generally made them finish the tests with ease. There was also a hundred percent retrieval rate of answer sheets both from the CRT and the SSHA.

3.6. Data Analysis

Frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations were used to describe the data of the study. Due to the violation of bivariate normality, Kendall's tau-b statistic was used to determine the association of students' study orientation and their college readiness. In determining the effect of study orientation on college readiness, a simple linear regression was conducted. Prior to the analysis, the data on college readiness was log-transformed to satisfy regression assumptions (i.e., linearity, normally distributed errors, and uncorrelated errors). All statistical analyses were tested at 0.05 level of significance using IBM SPSS version 23.

The college readiness categories, such as college-ready and college-unready, were derived from the respondents' CRT scores. The college-ready students obtained at least 100 correct responses from the 200 items in the CRT while the college-unready students scored below 100. On the other hand, the study orientation categories, such as favorable and unfavorable, were based on the equivalent percentile of the SO domains' scores. The scores obtained by the students falling within the 50th percentile and above were considered favorable, while scores that are below the 50th percentile were considered unfavorable.

4. RESULTS

4.1. Study Orientation of the ALS Graduates

Table 1 reveals that the majority of the ALS graduates have unfavorable study orientation (130 or 90.9%). Only a nominal percentage (13 or 9.1%) has manifested favorable study orientation. This finding means that most of them do not have a positive approach in dealing with the basic elements of study orientation.

Evidently, the respondents tend to demonstrate disadvantageous academic conduct and unsound views on pedagogic principles because they scored low in the two (2) categories of study habits. Their low score in delay avoidance (DA) means that they are not punctual in carrying out their academic responsibilities while their low scores in work methods (WM) suggests that they do not use efficient study techniques and do not perform academic tasks well.

On the other hand, the respondents tend to be irresponsive to educational stimuli because they also scored low in the two (2) categories of study attitudes. Their low scores in teacher approval (TA) indicates their unfavorable perceptions on instructors' classroom behavior and methods while their low scores in education acceptance (EA) reveals their disbelief on educational goals and systems as well as their own obligations. In sum, the study orientation of the ALS graduates shows unpromising study practices and mindsets. Owning and utilizing these unproductive study orientations in their academic career may negatively impact their academic performance (Capuno et al., 2019; Ogbodo, 2010).

Table-1. Study orientation of ALS graduates.

	Unfavorable		Favorable	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Delay Avoidance	121	84.6	22	15.4
Work Methods	119	83.2	24	16.8
<i>Study Habits</i>	120	83.9	23	16.1
Teacher Approval	129	90.2	14	9.8
Education Acceptance	129	90.2	14	9.8
<i>Study Attitude</i>	131	91.6	12	8.4
Study Orientation	130	90.9	13	9.1

4.2. College Readiness of the ALS Graduates

Table 2 shows that a small percentage of ALS graduates are college-ready. Only 24 or 16.8% of the 143 respondents had demonstrated proficiency in the content and performance standards being tested in the CRT. This finding implies that these are the only students who have the aptitude essential for admission in college. They, too, have a higher advantage to succeed in their general education subjects in college. On the other hand, the greater population of the study group, which is 119 or 83.2%, comprises the marginally and academically college-unready ones. These students lack the general academic knowledge and skills needed in pursuing college coursework in different academic areas.

Table-2. College readiness of the respondents.

Categories	Frequency	Percentage
College-ready	24	16.8
College-unready	119	83.2

4.3. Relationship between Study Orientation and College Readiness of ALS Graduates

Table 3 presents the means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations of the variables considered in this study. All dimensions of study orientation yielded a significant positive association with college readiness except for teacher approval (TA). This result means that respondents' academic behavior plays a significant factor in their preparedness to hurdle college coursework. ALS graduates who display more favourable study orientation have higher college readiness.

Specifically, the ALS graduate who are more prompt in completing academic tasks (DA), are more capable of using effective study procedures (WM). They are also more responsive to educational goals and systems (EA) and are more capable of passing the general academic requirements of college learning.

Furthermore, the overall contribution of study orientation to college readiness is explained in the result of a simple regression analysis shown in Table 4.

Table-3. Descriptive statistics and intercorrelations of SSHA scale and college readiness score.

	Mean	Standard Deviation	r
1. CRT	84.1	20.6	-
2. DA	17.7	6.5	0.148*
3. WM	18.0	7.8	0.124*
4. TA	19.9	8.9	0.067
5. EA	21.4	7.9	0.198**
6. SH	35.7	13.2	0.139*
7. SA	41.3	16.0	0.138*
8. SO	77.0	27.3	0.153**

Note: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$.

Table-4. Simple regression analysis summary for SO and college readiness.

Parameters	B	SE(B)	B
(Constant)	1.85	0.026	
SO	.001	0.0003	0.189*

Note: $R^2=0.036$; $F(1,141)=5.210$, $p=0.024$.

* $p < 0.05$.

The simple regression results show that study orientation (SO) predicts college readiness as it was found to be statistically significant, $F(1,141)=5.210$, $p<0.05$. The R squared value was 0.036, indicating that 3.6% of the college readiness score variance was explained by SO. The Beta coefficient implies that the college readiness score increases by about 0.07% for every one-unit increase in the SO score. This finding illustrates the vital role of having good study habits and attitudes in increasing one's cognitive abilities, such as readiness for college coursework (Sarwar, Bashir, Khan, & Khan, 2009). In contrast, disparaging study orientation components would lead to students' poor school performance (Kaur & Pathania, 2015).

5. DISCUSSION

One major finding is that ALS graduates have unfavorable study orientation. This insight reveals that ALS graduates seemingly failed to develop coherent study habits and behaviors required for effective learning, such as being participative, independent, and accountable in their education (Pace, 2015). This reality could be associated with poverty since most ALS learners come from low-income families (David, Albert, & Vizmanos, 2018). In this light, there is enough evidence supporting the effects of low economic status to learners' quality of school behaviors (Bhat & Joshi, 2016; Carlisle & Murry, 2015; Jensen, 2009; Slocumb & Payne, 2000) such as failure to complete

home works, lack of study preparations for exams, inability to pay attention, and inept at interrelating with people effectively (Technology, 2020; Vale, 2016). This unfavorable study orientation could also be attributed to the following reasons. First, the diversity of ALS learners makes them the most difficult groups to handle (Arzadon & Nato, 2015). Besides being marginalized, the group is composed of unschooled adults, OSYs, indigenous communities, and the like. Second, the learning process in ALS is less intense because it is more relaxed and more self-paced. It also lacks academic rigor because it requires shorter time of completion. This set-up may not have nurtured the study habit and attitude essential for ALS graduates to better prepare them for college (Aron, 2006; Yousaf, 2018). Third, some ALS learning centers are underdeveloped and inaccessible because they are positioned in the remote and hard-to-find locations (Arzadon & Nato, 2015). In effect, ALS graduates are discouraged from completing their modules and activities which are necessary for their learning. All of these undesirable educational scenarios in the ALS program may have contributed to the poor study orientation of its graduates.

Meanwhile, ALS graduates are not also academically prepared for college life because they lack the entry level competencies necessary to succeed in their GEC. This finding could be explained by their transition from a very lenient to a highly structured learning system (Ruiz, 2020). According to the consequential transition in sociocultural theory, students' previous learning and educational engagement intervene in their higher education expectations, thus, ensuing in adaptation to their new learning environment (O'Donnell, Kean, & Stevens, 2016). In the ALS graduates' case, their prior learning comfort zones may have surmounted their adjustment to the new learning context, which did not complement the study skills required in formal schooling. This situation negatively affected their academic performance. Another cogent reason for the ALS graduates' poor academic inclination is their unintentional deficiency of the concepts and skills needed for tertiary education. This reality stemmed from the absence of the senior high school program offered them. Through CMO No. 10 S. 2018, ALS completers, who only obtained the Grade 10 equivalent level in the K to12 program were allowed to enroll in higher education. This move undoubtedly means a miss of the compulsory time for mastery of learning competencies and lifelong learning development. This sort of skipping grades tendered tradeoffs as well as risks. According to experts, individuals who breezed through the most challenging courses available in high school may abruptly be confronted with university pressures for which they were unready (Lupkowski-Shoplk, 2017; Shore, 2020). The building out of unproductive study habits, the distraction of study programs, social relations, and lower marks were accounted for as adverse effects of passing over certain grade levels (Kuo & Lohman, 2011; Lupkowski-Shoplk, 2017; Shore, 2020).

Lastly, the significant correlation and predictive value of study orientation on college readiness found in the present study adds to the extant literature explaining the statistically significant contribution of study orientation on academic constructs like academic performance and academic achievement or success (Capuno et al., 2019; Credé & Kuncel, 2008; Labarrete, 2019; Memis & Kandemir, 2019; Mendezabal, 2013; Nieminen et al., 2004; Yu, 2011). Indeed, a favorable study orientation, composed of similarly favorable study habits and study attitudes, plays a critical function in the learners' lives. It serves as a practical means to engage the learners in the multi-faceted demands of schooling appropriately and facilitate their academic success. In the case of the ALS graduates, their unfavorable study orientation tends to usher their being college-unready. This context only reveals that ALS graduates need immediate academic attention and intervention to improve their study orientation and college readiness.

6. LIMITATION AND FURTHER STUDIES

This study was endeavored to augment the scarce investigations about Filipino ALS graduates. Results exclusively portray the study orientation and college readiness of ALS completers enrolled in a state university in the northeastern part of Philippines. The concept of study orientation was understood as the combination of study habits and study attitudes, while understanding of the college readiness was limited to the expected entry competencies in tertiary education based on the CRT scores.

Parallel studies may be conducted to consider the study orientation and college readiness of ALS graduates in the Philippines to increase the data's generalizability. Other variables pertaining to transition adjustments, study behaviors, and academic performance may be worthwhile exploring to raise awareness of these individuals' emerging learning conditions. The DepEd schools are suggested to conduct action research with specific focus on intervention measures that may enhance the study habits, study attitudes, and college readiness of ALS students.

7. CONCLUSION

This study has shown that ALS graduates admitted in the university need some help in overcoming college academic rigors, as demonstrated by their unfavorable study orientation and college un-readiness. It does not only affirm that study orientation is significantly related to college readiness but it also proves that study orientation is considered a good predictor of college readiness. Hence, the development of effective study habits and attitudes is an essential requirement for one's college preparation and future academic success. Further, the study results show that non-cognitive variables like study orientation work hand in hand with cognitive abilities in preparing students to be college ready. In this regard, DepEd needs to strengthen the study orientation of ALS students to provide their seamless transition from basic to tertiary education.

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