

# Morphological Awareness and Literacy Skills Among Alternative Learning System (ALS) Learners: A Gender-Based Analysis of Vocabulary, Reading Comprehension, and Spelling

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Alternative Learning System (ALS) is a parallel learning implemented by the Department of Education (DepEd) in the Philippines that provides opportunities for out-of-school youth and adults to acquire basic education competencies. This program promotes educational equality by allowing marginalize and under privilege Filipinos to attain education. SDG 4, established by the United Nations, aims to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.” It emphasizes access, equity, and improvement of learning outcomes across all levels of education. This study examines the role of morphological awareness in literacy development among Alternative Learning System (ALS) learners.

Using quantitative research design, result showed that majority ALS learners are still in the basic level, female do better than male in vocabulary and spelling, while male do better than female in reading comprehension. However, overall results showed that ALS learners are still in basic level in all elements of morphological awareness. There is a need of intervention to improve their morphological awareness through intervention.

**Keywords:** Alternative Learning System, Gender-sensitive instruction, Morphological awareness, Reading comprehension, Spelling, Vocabulary

## Introduction

Alternative Learning System (ALS) is a parallel learning implemented by the Department of Education (DepEd) in the Philippines that provides opportunities for out-of-school youth and adults to acquire basic education competencies. This program promotes educational equality by allowing marginalize and under privilege Filipinos to attain education. SDG 4, established by the United Nations, aims to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.” It emphasizes access, equity, and improvement of learning outcomes across all levels of education. Through this program, students are able to finish secondary education and allow them to pursue college degree. While government colleges and universities offer free tuition fee, students are required to pass the admission test that would allow them to enroll in the educational institution. With this, ALS learners needs to acquire morphological awareness in order to help them comprehend the test questions and eventually pass the exams.

The concept of morphological awareness, as discussed by Joanne F. Carlisle (1995; 2000), refers to the ability to understand and manipulate morphemes, including roots, prefixes, and

suffixes. Although not a formally named theory, her work highlights that morphological awareness plays a significant role in literacy development, particularly in vocabulary acquisition, spelling accuracy, and reading comprehension.

Research shows a strong relationship between morphological awareness and academic success: Carlisle (2000) found that students with stronger morphological awareness perform better in reading comprehension tasks because they can decode unfamiliar academic words. Nag & Snowling (2012) reported that morphological awareness significantly predicts literacy skills beyond phonological awareness. Apel & Lawrence (2011) highlight that morphological knowledge supports vocabulary growth, especially in academic contexts. While gender differences in literacy performance remain underexplored in ALS settings, Abella et al. (2024) note that morphological instruction can yield varied outcomes depending on learner profiles, underscoring the need for gender-responsive approaches. Understanding how male and female learners differ in their morphological awareness and related literacy skills is therefore crucial for designing inclusive instructional strategies.

Although, there are considerable researches that link morphological awareness to admission test but research rarely investigates the ALS learners. Unlike the regular students where they are being taught accordingly. The ALS program uses flexible, community-based, and learner-centered approaches rather than the rigid structure of formal classrooms. This put the learners into a disadvantage position since the pacing is not the same as the regular students. With this gap, the researchers aim to identify the ALS learners' morphological awareness and come up with intervention to help them acquire this skill.

This study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the morphological awareness of the respondents, by gender, in terms of vocabulary knowledge, reading comprehension, and spelling.
2. What interventions can be implemented to enhance learners' morphological awareness?

## Methodology

This study employed a descriptive quantitative research design. It is appropriate for this study since researchers were using instrument to gather the data. The instrument used was researchers-made. It underwent validation and reliability testing to ensure the alignment between items and research objectives. Each morphological awareness such as vocabulary knowledge, spelling, and reading comprehension had each 15 questions. Percentage distribution was used to calculate the data gathered. There were 70 ALS learners who participated in the study.

## Results and Discussions

The result of the data in morphological awareness is shown below. In terms of vocabulary knowledge, there were 36 females who are in basic level, 15 with intermediate level, and zero in advance level. While 9 males are in basic level, 10 obtains intermediate level, and zero in advance level. Overall, 45 of the ALS learners are in basic level, 25 are intermediate. This implies that although women do better in vocabulary knowledge than male, 64.28% of them fall under the basic level which is concerning. According to Kuo and Anderson (2006), they explain that morphological awareness develops gradually and is often weak in learners with limited print exposure or academic language experience. erfetti (2007). Lexical Quality Hypothesis

explains that weak word representations (including morphological structure) lead to poor vocabulary performance and reading comprehension. Carlisle (2010) further confirms that learners with limited morphological knowledge struggle with academic vocabulary growth. Reilly, Neumann, & Andrews (2019) found that females often outperform males in language-related tasks such as vocabulary and spelling during early and middle education. Voyer & Voyer (2014) conducted a meta-analysis showing that females generally perform better in verbal ability and language-based tasks, including vocabulary. However, Halpern (2012) notes that differences are context-dependent and may vary depending on instruction, exposure, and learning environment.

In terms of reading comprehension, 44 females are in basic level, 5 are in intermediate level, and zero in advance level. While 7 males obtain basic level, 8 obtains intermediate level, and zero in advance level. This implies that male perform better in reading comprehension. However, the overall result show that majority of them (72.85%) are in basic level which also raise a concerns for improvement. This result (majority in basic level) is strongly supported by research showing that learners with limited formal schooling or literacy exposure often demonstrate low reading comprehension proficiency.

Perfetti (2007) explains that reading comprehension depends on “lexical quality,” meaning weak vocabulary and word knowledge directly lead to poor comprehension performance. Snow (2002) emphasizes that reading comprehension is a complex process requiring vocabulary, decoding, and background knowledge, which are often underdeveloped in learners with limited literacy exposure. Kendeou et al. (2014) found that learners with weak foundational language skills consistently perform at lower levels in comprehension tasks. Voyer & Voyer (2014) (meta-analysis) found that females generally outperform males in verbal abilities, including reading comprehension, but the difference is small and context-dependent. Logan & Johnston (2010) found that females tend to outperform males in reading comprehension in school-aged populations, although differences narrow in older or non-traditional learning contexts. OECD (2019, PISA report) shows females typically outperform males in reading literacy across countries, but gaps vary depending on educational exposure and socioeconomic background.

In terms of spelling, 28 females are in basic level, 21 females are in intermediate level, and zero in advance level. While 14 males are in basic level, 5 in intermediate level, and zero in advance level. This implies that female do better in spelling than male. However, overall results show that 60% of the ALS learners are in the basic level that also raise a concern. Results show that most learners are in the basic level is consistent with literacy research: Ehri (2000) explains that spelling development depends on strong word recognition and orthographic knowledge; learners with limited exposure to print often remain at early spelling stages. Treiman (2017) found that spelling errors are common in developing readers because they lack consistent knowledge of letter–sound and morphological patterns. Apel & Masterson (2001) emphasize that weak morphological awareness leads to difficulties in spelling derivational and complex words. Voyer & Voyer (2014) (meta-analysis) found that females generally outperform males in verbal tasks, including spelling, across educational settings. Reilly, Neumann, & Andrews (2019) reported that females show stronger performance in language-based skills such as spelling and writing. Halpern (2012) explains that gender differences in language skills are influenced by both biological and environmental factors, including exposure to reading and writing activities.

**Table 1. Frequency and percentage distribution of overall morphological awareness (vocabulary knowledge, reading comprehension, and spelling) by gender.**

| Morphological | Gender | 1- 5 | 6-10 | 11-15 |
|---------------|--------|------|------|-------|
|---------------|--------|------|------|-------|

| <b>Awareness</b>         |         | <b>(Basic Level)</b> | <b>(Intermediate Level)</b> | <b>(Advance Level)</b> |
|--------------------------|---------|----------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Vocabulary knowledge  | Female  | 36                   | 15                          | 0                      |
|                          | Male    | 9                    | 10                          | 0                      |
|                          | Overall | 45 (64.28%)          | 25 (8.57%)                  | 0                      |
| 3. Reading comprehension | Female  | 44                   | 5                           | 2                      |
|                          | Male    | 7                    | 8                           | 4                      |
|                          | Overall | 51 (72.85%)          | 13 (18.57%)                 | 6 (8.57%)              |
| 3. Spelling              | Female  | 28                   | 21                          | 2                      |
|                          | Male    | 14                   | 5                           | 0                      |
|                          | Overall | 42 (60%)             | 26 (37.14%)                 | 2 (2.84%)              |

## Conclusion

Based on the result of the study, majority ALS learners are still in the basic level in morphological awareness. Female do better than male in vocabulary and spelling, while male do better than female in reading comprehension. However, overall result shows that ALS learners are still in basic level in all elements such as vocabulary, spelling, and reading comprehensions. This, there is a need of intervention to help improve the morphological awareness of the ALS learners by providing a special class intervention, interactive discussion, and gender-sensitive instructional materials to help both gender develop their skill in vocabulary, spelling and reading comprehension.

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## COMPREHENSIVE READING DEVELOPMENT PLAN FOR ALS LEARNERS

| Section                         | Key Components                                  | Details / Focus                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | Measurable Indicators                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>I. Introduction</b>          | Literacy Gaps & Objectives                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Limited morphological awareness</li> <li>- Vocabulary (64.28%), Comprehension (72.85%), Spelling (60%)</li> <li>- Goals: enhance literacy, address gender-specific strengths, align with SDGs 4, 5, 10</li> </ul>                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 10–15% increase in overall literacy scores within 1 year</li> <li>- Equal improvement rates across genders</li> </ul>                                                           |
| <b>II. Assessment Framework</b> | Pre-, Formative, Post-Assessment & Gender Focus | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Pre: baseline literacy levels</li> <li>- Formative: reading logs, oral exercises, peer activities</li> <li>- Post: summative evaluation</li> <li>- Gender Focus: Males → spelling support; Females → comprehension scaffolds</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 100% of learners undergo baseline assessment</li> <li>- Quarterly formative reports</li> <li>- Post-assessment shows ≥75% of learners progressing at least one level</li> </ul> |

| Section                                 | Key Components                                                            | Details / Focus                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | Measurable Indicators                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|-----------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>III. Learner-Centered Curriculum</b> | Vocabulary, Comprehension, Spelling, Cultural Relevance, Progression Goal | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Vocabulary: affixes &amp; root words</li> <li>- Comprehension: guided reading with morphological analysis</li> <li>- Spelling: orthographic drills</li> <li>- Cultural relevance: local literature, functional literacy</li> <li>- Goal: move learners to intermediate/advanced levels</li> </ul>     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Vocabulary proficiency: +20% improvement</li> <li>- Comprehension proficiency: +15% improvement</li> <li>- Spelling proficiency: +20% improvement</li> <li>- 50% of learners reach intermediate level within 2 years</li> </ul> |
| <b>IV. Teaching Strategies</b>          | Interactive, Collaborative, Differentiated, Gender-Responsive             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Interactive: visual aids, digital tools, word-part games</li> <li>- Collaborative: peer tutoring, group discussions, reading circles</li> <li>- Differentiation: Males → spelling drills; Females → comprehension scaffolds</li> <li>- Gender-responsive: tailored instructional materials</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- At least 80% of sessions use multisensory tools</li> <li>- 70% of learners participate in peer/group activities</li> <li>- Gender-specific support improves target skill by ≥15%</li> </ul>                                     |
| <b>V. Partnership Guidelines</b>        | Parents, LGUs/NGOs, Community Stakeholders                                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Parents: home-based reading activities</li> <li>- LGUs/NGOs: resources, literacy workshops</li> <li>- Community: reading camps, mentoring programs</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 60% of parents engaged in home reading logs</li> <li>- 2 workshops per quarter by LGUs/NGOs</li> <li>- 3 community reading camps annually</li> </ul>                                                                            |

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| Section                | Key Components                         | Details / Focus                                                                                                                                                                                                                | Measurable Indicators                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|------------------------|----------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| VI. Funding – GAD Fund | Resource Allocation & Teacher Training | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Allocate resources for gender-responsive literacy programs</li> <li>- Teacher training on morphological instruction</li> <li>- Monitor equitable distribution of materials</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 100% of teachers trained in morphological instruction</li> <li>- Annual audit shows equitable resource distribution</li> <li>- 90% of learners shows improvement in morphological awareness</li> </ul> |