



## Literacy Level of Bajau Learners in the Alternative Learning System Program

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### Abstract

This study aimed to determine the literacy level of the 35 Bajau learners of “Bajau School by the Sea”, Tambacan, Iligan City with data gathered from their weekend classes from July to November, 2014.

Findings showed that most of the Bajau learners whose parents’ means of livelihood were begging and those Bajau learners whose major daily activities were begging had the lowest performance in writing and reading but highest in numeracy specifically counting, identifying shapes and sizes but not so good in identifying colors. In addition, those Bajau learners who attended classes in order to learn were in the literacy level of progressing in terms of writing, reading and numeracy.

Furthermore, the volunteer teachers used guided writing and reading, tracing letters and shapes, storytelling, the budding reading strategies, pointing and counting the objects as their teaching strategies. In addition, most problems encountered by the volunteer teachers were regarding the school environment such as garbage not properly disposed, bad smell of the surrounding, lack of personal hygiene, irregular attendance of learners and lack of instructional materials.

**Keywords:** alternative learning system, Bajau, literacy level, numeracy, volunteer teachers

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## Introduction

Education is a basic human right and a significant factor in the development of children, communities, and countries. Opening classroom doors to all children, especially girls, will help break the intergenerational chains of poverty because education is intrinsically linked to all development goals, such as supporting gender empowerment, improving child health and maternal health, reducing hunger, fighting the spread of HIV and diseases of poverty, spurring economic growth, and building peace (Sequeira, 2012).

The Alternative Learning System (ALS) is a program by the Department of Education that seeks to help Out of School Youths (OSY) industry-based workers, people with disabilities, former inmates, rebels, members of cultural minorities, and other people who cannot afford to go through formal schooling. It is a parallel learning system that provides a viable alternative to the existing formal education instruction encompasses both the non-formal and informal sources of knowledge and skills. It can be a community learning center, a multipurpose hall, house, street corner or any place where the learner chooses to study the learning materials. It was first launched in 1984 under the name Non-formal Education and was primarily focused on helping its students acquire technical skills that they can use to earn a living. After getting its name changed into Alternative Learning System in 2004, its focus widened to include literacy classes that are aimed at eventually granting elementary and high school diplomas to deserving students who were forced to drop out of primary and secondary school (Mamaril, 2014).

The study by Bracamonte et al. (2011) presented the major concerns affecting the Bajau in Iligan City included their day-to-day need for food, lack of livelihood, no regular income from street begging, poor health and sanitation. The Bajau's dire condition of poverty and insecurity can be rooted back to their illiteracy that deprived them from social services. No one is literate among the adults. An Alternative Learning System (ALS) was established in May of 2011. Literacy classes were conducted in situ among the adults and young children.

## Statement of the Problem

1. What is the profile of the respondents in terms of
  - 1.1. Parents' means of livelihood?
  - 1.2. Major daily activities?
2. What are the reasons that prompted the Bajau learners to attend classes?
3. What are the strategies used by volunteer teachers in conducting the Alternative Learning System?
4. What are the problems met by the volunteer teacher in conducting the Alternative Learning System?
5. What is the literacy level of the Bajau Learners in the Alternative Learning System?

## Methodology

The respondents of the study were the Bajau learners and the volunteer teachers of the "Bajau School by the Sea" located at Tambacan, Iligan City. They were observed by the researchers during their classes every Saturdays and Sundays from July to November, 2014 and they were also asked to answer the questionnaire, checklist and test prepared by the researchers. The researchers used the descriptive method

of research to determine the literacy level of the respondents in terms of writing, reading, and numeracy, the strategies used by the volunteer teachers, and the problems they encountered in handling the Bajau learners. The instruments used by the researchers in their study are Questionnaire, Checklist, Test for writing, reading and numeracy, Rubrics, and One-on-one Interview to the Respondents.

The gathering of data involves two phases. The first phase include the Administration of the Survey Questionnaire, Checklist, and Test. The questionnaires were used to determine the profile of the respondents, checklists were used to find out the different teaching strategies used by the volunteer teachers, the problems they encountered in handling the Bajau learners and tests were used to measure the literacy level of the Bajau learners. The second phase includes the actual observation. The volunteer teachers and the Bajau learners were observed individually during their classes every Saturdays and Sundays starting July to November, 2014. The researchers also taught the learners personally during classes. Rubrics was used to determine the literacy level of the learners.

Descriptive statistics, such as the mean, standard deviation, frequency counts and percentage distribution was used to describe the proficiency level and the profile of the pupils' performance. Pearson r correlation was used to determine the significant relationship between the respondents' profile and their level of literacy.

## Results and Discussion

**Table 1.** Parents' Means of Livelihood

Parents' Means of Livelihood	Frequency	Percentage
Begging	13	37
Selling Pearls	4	11
Fishing	4	11
Selling Bihon and Fishing	4	11
Fishing and Begging	3	9
Begging and Selling cellophane	2	6
Selling fancy jewelry and Pearls	2	6
Fishing and Selling Pearls	1	3
Laundry and Selling fish in the market	1	3
Selling fancy jewellery	1	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 1 shows the parents' means of livelihood. Out of 35 Bajau learners, there are 13 of them whose parents' means of livelihood was begging which ranked first, followed by selling pearl, selling bihon and fishing, and fishing and four (4) respondents with parents' means of livelihood that ranked third. While fishing and begging had a number of three respondents and ranked fifth, begging and selling cellophane and selling fancy jewelleries and pearl had two respondents that ranked 6.5. Laundry and selling fish in the market, selling fancy jewelleries and fishing and selling pearl were the least means of livelihood which had only one respondent each and ranked ninth.

This result can be explained in terms of their displacement from their place of origin that is from the seas to urban life by (Bracamonte et al., 2011). Moreover, their being a mendicant can be traced from illiteracy. Lack of education is the primary factor that compels them to beg as they strive to keep up with the modern way of life in the city. They do not feel embarrassed about begging because they consider it a normal means of survival. They were not equipped with education which would have been their instrument towards self-realization and self-actualization. As pointed out by (Lariba & Formoso, 2011), for many Bajau people, begging is considered a job, a legitimate way to earn a living since they did not know that it is illegal and they have anything else to do. Because of the daily strife of wading in poverty, they went on with their life with little hope of any change in the future. When there's no food to put on the table, they still begged in the streets every now and then.

Only very few (7.50%) among the respondents' parents are engaged in begging. This result can be traced back to their origin and culture. Their livelihood is traditionally totally dependent on the resources of the sea so spear-fishing is vitally important to them. For generations they have lived on the ocean, diving and fishing, and rarely setting foot on land (Langenheim, 2010) thus, many Bajaus retained their seaborne lifestyle.

**Table 2.** Major Daily Activities of Bajau Learners

Major Daily Activities	Frequency	Rank
Begging	19	54
Stay Home	14	40
Begging and selling Cellophane	1	3
Selling Cellophane in the market	1	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 3 presents the Major daily activities of Bajau learners. Out of 35 Bajau learners, 19 were begging money in the street as major daily activity and ranked first. There were 14 who stayed home and ranked second. Meanwhile, one (1) Bajau learner was begging and selling cellophane and another one (1) Bajau learner who was just selling cellophanes in the market. These two major daily activities were in the 3.5 or last rank. The children's daily activities can be attributed to their parents' means of livelihood as many of them are mendicants. Children will follow what their parents are doing.

**Table 3.** Reasons in Attending ALS Classes

Reason	Frequency	Percentage
To learn	23	66
To have snack	4	11
To learn and have Snack	4	11
To avoid begging	1	3
Own will	3	9
<b>Total</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>100</b>



Table 2 shows the reason of Bajau learners for attending ALS classes. There were 23 Bajau learners who attend ALS classes in order to learn- this ranked first. Four (4) of them wanted to learn and at the same time to have snacks which ranked 2.5. Moreover, there were also four (4) Bajau learners who attended ALS classes for the sake of snack only- ranked as 2.5. However, three of them attended classes because of their own will and ranked fourth and one to avoid begging which ranked as fifth.

The result has important implication on the desire of the children to learn. Children generally learn from everything they do. They are naturally curious; they want to explore and discover. If their explorations bring pleasure or success, they will want to learn more. During these early years, children form attitudes about learning that will last a lifetime. Children who receive the right sort of support and encouragement during these years will be creative, adventurous learners throughout their lives. Children who do not receive this sort of support and interaction are likely to have a much different attitude about learning later in life.

Children also engage in some activities because adults tell them to, or in an effort to please another party. These activities are “extrinsically motivated.” When a child is extrinsically motivated, the reward comes from outside the child-it has to be provided by someone else, and has to be continually given for the child to remain motivated enough to continue the activity. It is more difficult for a child to sustain extrinsically motivated activity because of this reliance upon some outside force.

### Teaching Strategies Employed By the Volunteer Teachers

Volunteer teachers employed a variety of teaching strategies. Teaching the Bajau learners requires individualized instruction. In writing, the teachers used the guided writing strategy. They taught also the proper holding of pencil. They used the drawing lines and curves in order for the learner to have an idea on how to write letters and draw shapes. In reading, at first they used reading alphabet charts strategy in reading, and reinforced it a strategy by letting the Bajau learners sing the A-Z alphabets. Moreover, volunteer teachers also applied other strategies like Storytelling, The buddy reading strategy and guided reading strategy. For numeracy, the volunteer teachers would draw some objects in the board and let the Bajau learners count them. The teachers wrote numbers 1-20 on the board and VT pointed it one by one and let the Bajau learner read and identify each number.

### Problems Met by the Volunteer Teachers

The volunteer teachers consist of Pre-service teachers and faculty members in the tertiary level of Mindanao State University - Iligan Institute of Technology. The problems they have encountered varies which include noisy environment, lack of instructional materials, misbehaviour of learners, irregular attendance of learners as many of them are in the streets begging. Some will enter the class and sneak out and will be back during the giving of snacks after the class. Many of the learners tagged along their younger brothers or sisters in the class so they could no longer pay attention to the lesson. Learners have very poor personal hygiene and look untidy. Some learners manifest indolence as they won't participate in classroom activities. The environment outside the classroom was not conducive for learning where human wastes are abound at the seashore which created foul smell in the surroundings.

**Table 4.** The Literacy Level of Bajau Learners According to their Category

Indicators	Beginning		Developing		Progressing	
	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%
Can write letters by tracing	5	15	9	27	20	58
Can write upper and lower case without tracing	17	49	16	45	4	12
Can write their names fully	19	53	12	35	2	6
Can count numbers until two digits only	5	14	3	9	27	77
Can identify and draw shapes	6	18	8	24	20	58
Can distinguish sizes	3	9	8	24	23	67
Can distinguish colors	8	24	6	18	20	58

Results have shown that the learners vary in their literacy level. Many of them (58%) can write letters by tracing but very few (12%) can write upper and lower case without tracing and can write their names fully (6%). Majority of them (77%) can count numbers. The result can be attributed to the fact that many of them are begging and they can relate how numbers with how much money they have collected in begging. More than half of them (58%) can draw and identify shapes as well as distinguish sizes (67%) and colours (58%) and categorized as progressing.

This result can be attributed to many factors. For one thing, the schedule of classes for the Alternative Learning System is done on a weekend. Thus, there is no provision to follow up the lessons learned the previous meetings. Another factor is the learning environment. The area is not conducive to learning, though the site is along the coastline with sea breeze but the surrounding is very dirty due to improper disposal of the garbage including human wastes. As part of the learning environment, there is no provision of instructional materials for the learners. Volunteer teachers relied on small donations of papers, pencils, old books. These teachers buy the learning materials from their own pocket. There is no provision as to the prescribed or standard learning module or any material for the Alternative Learning System.

Considering their parents' means of livelihood, the family have relatively disadvantaged socioeconomic status. Their income is enough only for survival. Subsequently, children may have poor nutrition which affects the child's growth and development, including performance in the classroom. The child who doesn't have adequate amounts of key nutrients may not be able to work to his full potential in school. Moreover, parents are not always around to scaffold their children's learning. Some parents forced their children to do begging thus distract the child's academic development because survival becomes a more immediate and pressing priority.

This result poses some challenges for educators and the government. It can be considered as successful inasmuch as children learned something from zero literacy to being at the progressive level despite the challenges encountered by the volunteer teachers and the poor learning environment. However, it is a challenge to sustain the program as it is an intricate schema that involves their culture, politics and the system of education in the Philippines



## Conclusion

Findings show that most of their parents' means of livelihood was begging and children do the same. Though the learners were very eager to learn and parents would like to support them in school but their priority is to survive thus, they are forced to be mendicants. For them, begging was considered a job, a legitimate way to earn a living and they did not feel embarrassed about it because they considered it a normal means of survival.

The literacy level of the Bajau learners is mostly at the progressive stage which posed an important implication on the need to scaffold their learning process through a better learning environment.

## Recommendations

Based on the findings, it is recommended that the government must provide livelihood program that would help the respondents' parents so that they could provide the needs of their young and will not send their children begging on the streets.

More budget and equal opportunity for the education must be given to the Bajau so that these people will be elevated to higher standard of living and escape illiteracy and somehow their lives would change. Literacy is closely linked to indicators reflecting basic needs such as education, capacity building, equity and empowerment. Bajaus are marginalized disadvantaged group of indigenous peoples deprived of these basic needs. A lack of education can lead to a life of poverty, hopelessness, crime and despair. Early intervention and support in literacy skills is vital to keep Indigenous children engaged in education. Life outcomes and opportunities can be dramatically improved if indigenous peoples remain engaged in education.

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