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Interpreting Alternative Learning System Examination Outcomes after Policy Change: A Community-Service Framework for Learner Support and Remediation

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ABSTRACT

This study examined whether an apparent decline in Alternative Learning System Accreditation and Equivalency examination outcomes reflected lower learner performance or a change in certification policy. A quantitative causal-comparative design analyzed two successive cohorts that received comparable familiarization and mock-testing preparation under different classification rules. Harmonized comparisons indicated improved outright passing, whereas the decline emerged when conditional passers from the earlier cohort were included in the success rate. A counterfactual reconstruction further illustrated the influence of classification policy on reported outcomes. The findings support a community-service framework emphasizing targeted remediation, learner preparedness, transparent assessment interpretation, stakeholder engagement, and school-division support for near-passing learners.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Educational assessment results are frequently used to evaluate learner achievement, instructional effectiveness, and institutional performance. However, comparisons across examination cycles become difficult when certification rules, cut scores, or classification categories change. Apparent improvement or decline may then reflect differences in measurement or reporting rather than corresponding changes in learner competence. Accountability research has long emphasized that assessment trends should be interpreted cautiously when the standards used to classify examinees are modified [1]. Classification decisions around cut scores are particularly important because relatively small differences in test performance can alter whether learners are categorized as successful or unsuccessful [2]. Consistency in standard setting is therefore necessary when examination outcomes are compared across administrations [3], while classification accuracy near decision thresholds remains an important consideration in criterion-referenced assessment [4].

These issues are directly relevant to the Philippine Alternative Learning System (ALS), which provides educational opportunities for out-of-school youth and adults who have not completed conventional basic education. The Accreditation and Equivalency (A&E) examination serves as an important certification mechanism for demonstrating competencies equivalent to formal elementary or junior high school education. Previous studies have examined the alignment and implementation of the ALS-A&E curriculum [5] as well as differences in examination performance among ALS learners [6]. More recent research has highlighted continuing implementation challenges involving access, instructional support, learner participation, and institutional conditions within the ALS [7, 8].

The role of teachers and learning facilitators is also central to the success of ALS learners. Professional preparation, instructional competence, learning-resource availability, and responsiveness to diverse learner circumstances influence the quality of learning support provided within alternative education settings [9, 10]. Qualitative evidence further indicates that both teachers and graduates experience challenges related to flexibility, learner diversity, resources, motivation, and continued educational participation [11]. Learners' decisions to enter, remain in, or discontinue ALS participation are also shaped by personal, educational, economic, and social conditions, emphasizing the importance of sustained monitoring and community support [12].

Assessment preparation represents another important dimension. Intensive learning structures can provide focused opportunities for learners to address competency gaps within limited periods [13]. Retrieval practice and repeated testing can also strengthen long-term retention and improve learning by requiring learners to actively retrieve previously studied information [14]. Experimental evidence has shown that retrieval practice can produce substantial learning benefits compared with some elaborative study strategies [15]. These principles provide a theoretical basis for systematic familiarization and mock-testing activities used to prepare ALS learners for high-stakes examinations.

The present study focuses on two successive A&E examination cohorts in the Schools Division Office of Makati City. Both cohorts received division-wide familiarization and mock-testing preparation, but the certification rules differed. The earlier administration included a conditional-passer category for examinees within a near-passing score band, whereas the subsequent administration used a binary pass/fail classification. In the earlier system, conditional passers were connected with a post-examination remediation pathway. The

removal of this category changed the meaning of the reported success rate because learners previously classified as conditionally successful were subsequently grouped with non-passers.

This change created an important interpretive problem. A lower headline success rate could be interpreted as deterioration in learner achievement, reduced teaching effectiveness, weaker preparation, or less supportive learning conditions. However, such interpretations would be questionable if the apparent decline was primarily associated with a change in classification rules. Nonrandomized comparative designs can identify meaningful differences between naturally occurring groups, but their findings must be interpreted cautiously because they do not establish experimental causation [16].

The issue also has direct community-service implications. ALS operates through relationships among learners, teachers, mobile teachers, learning centers, school-division personnel, families, community organizations, and other stakeholders. Community-based support can contribute to learner participation, sustained engagement, remediation, and preparation for certification. Recent evidence from community learning centers emphasizes the importance of stakeholder participation, teacher support, learning resources, and implementation conditions in supporting ALS delivery [17]. Assessment findings can therefore serve not only as accountability information but also as evidence for organizing practical learner-support activities.

A community-service approach is especially relevant for learners who perform close to the passing threshold. These learners may have sufficient foundational competence to benefit from targeted remediation, additional mock testing, competency-specific review, mentoring, attendance support, and guided preparation. When assessment classifications change, such learners may disappear statistically from a recognizable near-passing category even though their learning needs remain. Educational support should therefore be informed by learner performance patterns rather than determined solely by the labels attached to examination results.

The study consequently addresses both an assessment problem and a practical learner-support problem. Harmonized comparison can help determine whether performance changed when the same success criterion is applied across cohorts. Counterfactual reconstruction can illustrate how reported outcomes might differ under an alternative classification rule, while community-service interpretation can identify how assessment evidence can inform remediation and learner preparedness.

This study aimed to: (i) compare overall and educational-level outright pass rates across the two examination cohorts using a common classification criterion; (ii) examine the apparent change in success when the earlier conditional-passer-inclusive rate is compared with the later binary pass rate; (iii) estimate the later cohort outcome under a counterfactual retained conditional-passer classification; (iv) examine patterns by learning-center type; (v) evaluate policy, teacher, learner, and environmental factors as competing explanations for the observed inter-cohort difference; and (vi) translate the findings into a community-service framework for learner support, targeted remediation, and assessment preparedness. The novelty of the study lies in integrating policy-sensitive examination comparison with practical community-service implications. Rather than interpreting year-to-year changes in A&E results solely from headline success rates, the study distinguishes comparable performance metrics from policy-confounded metrics and uses this distinction to identify support priorities for learners who are close to the certification threshold.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Alternative Learning System and Accreditation and Equivalency Assessment

The Alternative Learning System provides a flexible educational pathway for learners whose circumstances limit participation in conventional schooling. Its effectiveness depends not only on curriculum provision but also on the alignment among instructional activities, learner needs, assessment requirements, and pathways to certification. Evaluation of the ALS-A&E curriculum has emphasized the importance of ensuring that curriculum content and assessment expectations remain aligned with the competencies learners are expected to demonstrate [5]. Outcomes can differ across learner groups and educational settings [6]. These findings reinforce the need to interpret examination results within the broader context of curriculum delivery and learner preparation. ALS operates within diverse learning environments and serves learners with varied social, educational, and economic circumstances [7, 8]. Examination performance should therefore be interpreted together with participation, instructional support, access to learning resources, and the conditions under which learners prepare for certification.

2.2. Assessment Policy and Comparability of Performance Trends

Year-to-year assessment comparisons require reasonably stable definitions of success. If the criterion used to classify examinees changes, an apparent trend may contain both a performance component and a policy component. Accountability research has repeatedly cautioned that assessment results can become misleading when changes in standards or classification procedures are ignored [1]. Classification consistency is particularly important in criterion-referenced testing because learners are assigned to categories according to predetermined thresholds [2]. Changes to these thresholds or categories can alter reported pass rates even when the underlying distribution of learner competence changes little. Research on standard-setting consistency similarly indicates that decisions about performance categories influence the interpretation of assessment outcomes [3]. Classification accuracy becomes especially important around the cut score because learners located near the decision threshold are most vulnerable to changes in classification rules [4]. For ALS assessment, this issue is directly relevant to learners who previously fell within the conditional-passer band. Removing the category changes their classification without necessarily demonstrating a corresponding change in their actual competence.

2.3. Certification Policy Change and Its Interpretive Consequences

The policy change examined in this study concerns the removal of the conditional-passer category from the Alternative Learning System Accreditation and Equivalency examination. Under the earlier certification structure, learners who performed within the near-passing band could be classified separately and linked with a remediation pathway. Under the later structure, examination results were reported using a binary pass/fail classification. This change altered the way success was defined and reported across the two examination cohorts. The interpretive consequence of this policy change is substantial because the same level of learner performance can be categorized differently under the two systems. A learner who would previously have been identified as a conditional passer may later be classified simply as a non-passer, even when the underlying level of competence is similar. For this reason, direct comparison of headline success rates across administrations may combine genuine performance differences with classification effects. Assessment trends should therefore distinguish policy-invariant indicators from policy-dependent indicators when

certification categories change [1-4]. The policy change also has practical implications for learner support. The removal of a formal conditional-passer category does not eliminate the educational needs of learners performing near the passing threshold. Instead, these learners may become less visible within a binary reporting system. From a community-service perspective, divisions can continue to identify near-passing learners through mock-test results, diagnostic evidence, and competency-gap analysis, and then provide targeted remediation, mentoring, structured review, and continued preparation for future certification opportunities. The distinction between policy change and performance change is therefore central to this study. The analysis does not assume that one certification model is inherently superior. Rather, it examines how changes in classification rules affect the interpretation of examination outcomes and how assessment evidence can still be used to support learners who remain close to the certification threshold.

2.4. Conditional Passers and Targeted Remediation

Learners immediately below an outright passing threshold may differ meaningfully from learners with substantially lower performance. Rather than treating all non-passers as a homogeneous group, a near-passing category can create an opportunity for targeted instructional support. From an educational perspective, such learners may benefit from focused review, diagnostic feedback, competency-specific remediation, and repeated practice. Intensive instructional formats can provide concentrated opportunities for addressing particular learning needs [13]. Targeted remediation is especially relevant in alternative education because many learners balance study with employment, family responsibilities, and other constraints that limit participation in lengthy conventional interventions. The removal of a conditional category does not remove the educational needs of learners who would previously have occupied that band. A community-service perspective therefore shifts attention from the administrative label itself to the underlying support requirement. Learners near the passing threshold remain a priority group for structured preparation, mentoring, and continued engagement.

2.5. Familiarization, Mock Testing, and Retrieval Practice

Assessment familiarization can reduce uncertainty by introducing learners to examination formats, response requirements, timing, and task expectations. Mock testing adds repeated practice under conditions resembling the actual examination. Such activities may support both assessment preparedness and identification of remaining competency gaps. Research on intensive learning suggests that concentrated instructional structures can be effective when learning objectives are clearly defined, and practice is sustained [13]. Retrieval-practice research further demonstrates that actively recalling previously learned material contributes to long-term retention [14]. Experimental findings also indicate that retrieval practice can produce stronger learning than some elaborative study approaches [15]. For ALS learners, mock examinations can therefore serve dual purposes. They provide practice in retrieving knowledge under test conditions and generate diagnostic information that can identify learners requiring additional support. Community-service activities built around mock-test evidence can consequently be targeted rather than generic.

2.6. Teachers and Learning Facilitators in ALS

Teachers and learning facilitators play a central role in translating assessment information into instructional support. ALS implementation requires responsiveness to learners with

varied educational histories, schedules, motivations, and learning needs. Research on professional-development needs among ALS teachers highlights the importance of instructional strategies, learner facilitation, and continuing professional support [9]. Teachers also experience practical challenges related to learning resources, learner diversity, and literacy instruction [10]. Their work requires flexibility because learners may differ substantially in age, previous schooling, employment responsibilities, and readiness for formal assessment. Accounts from ALS teachers and graduates likewise emphasize the significance of supportive relationships and flexible educational arrangements [11]. Assessment data can therefore become more useful when teachers receive actionable information about learner readiness. Rather than simply reporting who passed or failed, learner-support systems can identify competency gaps and near-passing performance that can guide remediation.

2.7. Learner Participation and Community-Based Support

Participation is a critical dimension of ALS success because registered learners must remain engaged long enough to complete learning activities and sit for the certification examination. Decisions to participate may be influenced by employment, family responsibilities, financial conditions, motivation, prior educational experiences, and perceptions of the relevance of ALS [12]. Learning centers also operate within different community environments. Physical and social conditions can influence learner experience and participation [8]. Stakeholder support within community learning centers can further influence program implementation by connecting learners with educational resources, local institutions, and continuing support [17]. A community-service framework for examination preparedness should therefore include not only academic remediation but also learner outreach, participation monitoring, stakeholder communication, and re-engagement of learners at risk of disengagement.

2.8. Policy Change and Interpretation of Near-Passing Performance

The transition from a multi-category certification system to a binary pass/fail system creates an interpretive discontinuity. Under a conditional-passer arrangement, learners within a specified near-passing range can be recognized separately and linked with additional support. Under a binary model, the same performance range is absorbed into the non-passing category. This does not necessarily mean that one classification system is inherently superior. Rather, comparisons across the two systems require careful harmonization. A valid comparison should distinguish outcomes that are defined consistently across both administrations from outcomes that depend on policy-specific classification rules [1-4]. This distinction is especially important for public accountability. If policy-induced reclassification is interpreted as deterioration in teaching or learner competence, educational institutions may direct improvement efforts toward the wrong problem. Conversely, harmonized analysis can identify where performance has genuinely changed and where the reporting framework has changed.

2.9. Community-Service Framework for Learner Support

Assessment findings can be translated into community-service priorities by linking observed learner needs with practical forms of support. The framework should focus on activities that can be implemented through the existing ALS network of teachers, mobile teachers, learning centers, school-division personnel, and community stakeholders. The relationship among assessment evidence, target groups, proposed activities, and expected contributions is summarized in **Table 1**. Assessment interpretation should lead to

differentiated support rather than remain solely an administrative reporting exercise. This framework positions community service as an assessment-informed support process. Examination evidence identifies learner needs; teachers and stakeholders translate those needs into targeted activities, and subsequent monitoring can determine whether learners remain engaged and prepared for future certification opportunities.

Table 1. Community-service framework for assessment-informed ALS learner support.

ASSESSMENT-RELATED NEED	COMMUNITY-SERVICE PRIORITY	TARGET PARTICIPANTS	PROPOSED ACTIVITY	EXPECTED CONTRIBUTION
Learners approaching the passing threshold	Targeted remediation	Near-passing ALS learners	Competency-focused review and intensive learning sessions	Strengthened readiness for subsequent certification
Uneven examination preparedness	Structured familiarization	ALS learners	Guided orientation and mock-testing activities	Greater familiarity with examination requirements
Declining examination participation	Learner re-engagement	Registered non-participants and at-risk learners	Outreach, follow-up, and participation support	Improved continuity of examination participation
Variation across learning-center settings	Implementation support	Teachers, mobile teachers, and learning-center personnel	Collaborative review of effective learning conditions	Stronger consistency of learner support
Changing certification classifications	Assessment communication	Learners, teachers, administrators, and stakeholders	Clear explanation of performance categories and policy changes	More accurate interpretation of examination outcomes
Continuing competency gaps	Data-informed professional support	Teachers and learning facilitators	Review of mock-test and competency-gap evidence	More targeted instructional preparation

3. METHOD

3.1. Research Design

The study employed a quantitative causal-comparative, or ex post facto, design to compare two successive ALS A&E examination cohorts. Because cohort membership and certification policies had already occurred before the analysis, the design was used to examine associations and plausible explanations rather than establish experimental causation [16].

3.2. Data Sources and Participants

The analysis used aggregated official A&E examination records from the Schools Division Office of Makati City, Philippines. The earlier cohort included 426 examination takers, while the later cohort included 403 examination takers. Records were examined by educational level and, where available, by learning-center type and sex. No personally identifiable information was used.

3.3. Comparison Framework

Three analytical frames were applied. Frame A compared outright passing using a criterion defined consistently across both cohorts. Frame B compared the earlier conditional-passer-inclusive success rate with the later binary pass rate and therefore represented a policy-confounded headline comparison. Frame C used a counterfactual reconstruction to estimate the later cohort outcome under a retained conditional-passer classification based on the earlier cohort distribution.

3.4. Statistical Analysis

Raw frequencies were used to recompute comparable rates. Two-proportion z-tests examined differences between cohorts, with statistical significance evaluated at $\alpha = 0.05$. Two-proportion z-tests examined differences between cohorts, with statistical significance evaluated at $\alpha = 0.05$. Cohen's h was used to describe the magnitude of proportional differences. Counterfactual estimates were interpreted as model-based projections rather than observed outcomes. Counterfactual estimates were interpreted as model-based projections rather than observed outcomes.

3.5. Community-Service Interpretation

The findings were interpreted to identify practical community-service priorities related to learner remediation, examination preparedness, participation, teacher support, stakeholder communication, and learning-center monitoring. Proposed activities were derived from observed assessment patterns and were treated as future applications of the findings rather than as interventions already implemented.

3.6. Ethical Considerations

The study analyzed aggregated institutional records generated through routine examination administration. No personally identifiable information was accessed or reported. Results were presented at cohort or learning-center-type level to protect learner and institutional confidentiality.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Profile of the Two Examination Cohorts

The two examination cohorts were broadly comparable in size and educational-level composition, although participation differed between administrations. The earlier cohort included 426 examination takers, whereas the later cohort included 403. Junior high school learners constituted the majority in both cohorts, accounting for 77.93% and 78.41%, respectively. Both cohorts received division-wide familiarization and mock-testing preparation, while the principal structural difference concerned the certification scheme. The earlier administration recognized passers, conditional passers, and non-passers, whereas the later administration used a binary pass/fail classification. Registration increased from 475 to 532 learners, but examination participation declined from 89.68 to 75.75%. This decline was statistically significant ($z = -5.79$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that learner participation represents a separate issue from examination performance. Participation was particularly low in institutional settings and was also lower at the elementary level than at the junior high school level. These patterns reinforce the importance of learner outreach and continued engagement in ALS implementation [12]. The cohort characteristics are summarized in **Table 2**. The table highlights the relatively similar composition of examination takers while also

showing the change in certification policy and the decline in participation. The two cohorts were sufficiently similar in educational-level composition to support comparative analysis, but the reduction in participation should be considered when interpreting cohort differences. Participation barriers are particularly important in alternative education because employment, family responsibilities, motivation, and other conditions can affect continued engagement [12].

Table 2. Profile of the A&E examination cohorts.

CHARACTERISTIC	EARLIER COHORT	LATER COHORT	REMARKS
Registered learners	475	532	Registration volume increased
Test takers	426	403	Examination participation decreased
Participation rate	89.68%	75.75%	Decline of 13.93 percentage points
Elementary takers	94 (22.07%)	87 (21.59%)	Comparable share
Junior high school takers	332 (77.93%)	316 (78.41%)	Comparable share
Preparation strategy	Familiarization and mock testing	Familiarization and mock testing	Comparable preparation approach
Certification scheme	Pass / Conditional Pass / Fail	Pass / Fail	Classification policy changed
Remediation linkage	Post-examination and certification-bearing for conditional passers	Pre- and post-examination support without same-cycle conditional certification	Certification pathway changed

4.2. Descriptive Examination Outcomes

The descriptive results show an important distinction between outright passing and conditional success. In the earlier cohort, 173 learners passed outright, and 95 were classified as conditional passers. The outright pass rate was 40.61%, while the combined success rate increased to 62.91% when conditional passers were included. In the later cohort, 199 of 403 learners passed under the binary pass/fail classification, corresponding to a pass rate of 49.38%. The earlier-cohort results by educational level are presented in **Table 3**. Junior high school learners showed a higher outright and combined success rate than elementary learners. The later-cohort results are summarized in **Table 4**. Junior high school learners again represented the majority of test takers, while pass rates varied moderately across educational levels and learning-center types. Interpretation depends strongly on whether the comparison is based on outright passing alone or on a combined success measure that includes conditional passers. This distinction provides the basis for the three-frame analysis.

Table 3. Earlier A&E examination results by educational level.

LEVEL	REGISTERED	TAKERS	PASSERS	CONDITIONAL PASSERS	OUTRIGHT PASS (%)	COMBINED SUCCESS (%)
Elementary	115	94	32	15	34.04	50.00
Junior high school	360	332	141	80	42.47	66.57
Total	475	426	173	95	40.61	62.91

Note. Combined success includes outright and conditional passers.

Table 4. Later A&E examination results by educational level, center type, and sex.

LEVEL / CENTER TYPE	MALE	FEMALE	TAKERS	PASSERS	PASS RATE (%)
Elementary – BJMP	17	3	20	12	60.00
Elementary – Community-based	39	28	67	28	41.79
Elementary subtotal	56	31	87	40	45.98
Junior high school – BJMP	19	8	27	13	48.15
Junior high school – Community-based	164	125	289	146	50.52
Junior high school subtotal	183	133	316	159	50.32
Total	239	164	403	199	49.38

Note. BJMP = Bureau of Jail Management and Penology institutional learning centers.

4.3. Frame A: Harmonized Comparison of Outright Passing

Frame A provides the most directly comparable inter-cohort measure because it applies an equivalent definition of success to both administrations: attainment of the outright passing standard. Under this harmonized metric, performance increased rather than declined. The overall outright pass rate rose from 40.61 to 49.38%, representing an increase of 8.77 percentage points. The difference was statistically significant ($z = 2.54$, $p = 0.011$), although the effect size was small ($h = 0.18$). Junior high school performance increased from 42.47 to 50.32% and reached statistical significance, while the elementary increase from 34.04 to 45.98% did not reach statistical significance despite a larger absolute difference. The harmonized comparison is presented in **Table 5**. The harmonized analysis does not support an interpretation of general deterioration in learner attainment. Instead, the later cohort demonstrated a higher outright passing rate. This finding should nevertheless be interpreted as an inter-cohort association rather than proof that the preparation strategy caused the improvement. The design was nonexperimental, and other cohort-level factors could also have contributed [16]. The finding is educationally relevant because both cohorts received comparable familiarization and mock-testing activities. Retrieval practice and repeated testing can support knowledge retention and assessment preparedness [14, 15], while intensive learning structures can help learners focus on specific competency gaps [13].

Table 5. Frame A: Outright pass-rate comparison using a policy-invariant metric.

GROUP	EARLIER OUTRIGHT PASS	LATER PASS	DIFFERENCE (pp)	z	p	COHEN'S h
Elementary	34.04% (32/94)	45.98% (40/87)	+11.93	1.64	0.101	0.24
Junior high school	42.47% (141/332)	50.32% (159/316)	+7.85	2.00	0.045	0.16
Overall	40.61% (173/426)	49.38% (199/403)	+8.77	2.54	0.011	0.18

Note. Two-proportion z-tests were two-tailed; pp = percentage points.

4.4. Frame B: Policy-Confounded Headline Comparison

A contrasting pattern appears when the earlier combined success rate, including conditional passers, is compared directly with the later binary pass rate. Under this headline comparison, the success rate decreases from 62.91% to 49.38%, a difference of 13.53 percentage points. The overall difference was statistically significant ($z = -3.93$, $p < 0.001$), with a small-to-moderate effect size. The comparison is shown in **Table 6**. The difference

between Frames A and B illustrates why assessment trends should not be interpreted without considering classification rules. When the comparable outright standard is used, the later cohort performs better. When the earlier conditional-passer category is included only for the earlier administration, the direction of the trend reverses. This pattern is consistent with measurement literature emphasizing that changes in classification procedures can alter reported performance independently of changes in underlying achievement [1-4]. The finding therefore supports cautious interpretation of accountability indicators when certification standards change.

Table 6. Frame B: Combined success-rate comparison using a policy-confounded metric.

GROUP	EARLIER COMBINED SUCCESS	LATER PASS	DIFFERENCE (pp)	z	p	COHEN'S h
Elementary	50.00% (47/94)	45.98% (40/87)	-4.02	-0.54	0.588	-0.08
Junior high school	66.57% (221/332)	50.32% (159/316)	-16.25	-4.20	<0.001	-0.33
Overall	62.91% (268/426)	49.38% (199/403)	-13.53	-3.93	<0.001	-0.27

Note. Earlier combined success includes outright and conditional passers; pp = percentage points.

4.5. Effect of Certification Policy Change on Reported Examination Outcomes

The comparison between Frames A and B demonstrates that the certification policy change materially altered the interpretation of examination outcomes. Under the harmonized outright-passing metric, the later cohort showed improved performance. In contrast, when the earlier conditional-passer-inclusive success rate was compared with the later binary pass rate, the reported trend appeared to decline. The difference between these two analytical frames indicates that part of the observed year-to-year change was associated with the classification structure rather than with a corresponding decline in learner competence. The policy change therefore created an interpretive discontinuity. Learners who would previously have been recognized within the conditional-passer band were absorbed into the non-passing category under the later binary system. As a result, the reported success rate became less directly comparable across administrations. This pattern is consistent with measurement literature showing that changes in classification rules can alter reported performance trends even when underlying achievement does not decline [1-4]. From an educational perspective, the removal of the conditional-passer category also changed the visibility of near-passing learners. The absence of a formal classification does not mean that these learners no longer require targeted support. Their needs can still be identified through mock-test performance, competency-gap analysis, and other diagnostic evidence. This has direct community-service implications because targeted remediation, mentoring, guided review, and learner re-engagement can continue even under a binary certification system. The findings therefore support a distinction between policy change and performance change. The first concerns how examination outcomes are classified and reported, while the second concerns actual learner attainment. Separating these two dimensions is essential for valid accountability reporting and for directing learner-support efforts toward the areas that most require intervention.

4.6. Frame C: Counterfactual Reconstruction

Frame C estimates how the later cohort might have appeared if the earlier conditional-passer classification had remained available. This analysis is explicitly counterfactual and should not be interpreted as an observed result. The later cohort contained 204 non-passers. Applying the earlier cohort's conditional-passer share among non-outright passers produced an estimated 77 learners who might have occupied the conditional-passer band. Under this base-case reconstruction, the projected combined success rate would be 68.39%. Sensitivity estimates using lower and upper assumptions produced projected rates ranging from 64.57% to 72.16%. The counterfactual estimates are summarized in **Table 7**. The apparent decline is highly sensitive to classification policy. However, because individual score distributions for the later cohort were unavailable, the estimated conditional-passer count cannot be treated as an observed number. Exact reconstruction would require learner-level score information. From a community-service perspective, the estimated near-passing group remains important even without a formal conditional-passer category. These learners represent a potential target for competency-focused remediation, mock-test follow-up, mentoring, and re-engagement before subsequent examination opportunities.

Table 7. Frame C: Counterfactual later-cohort outcomes under a retained conditional-passer policy.

SCENARIO	ESTIMATED CONDITIONAL PASSERS	PROJECTED COMBINED SUCCESS RATE
Conservative assumption	61	64.57%
Base case based on earlier empirical distribution	77	68.39%
Upper-bound assumption	92	72.16%
Earlier combined success benchmark	95 observed conditional passers	62.91%

Note. Counterfactual values are model-based estimates rather than observed outcomes.

4.7. Learning-Center and Participation Patterns

Learning-center patterns provide additional information about the context in which learners prepared for the examination. In the later cohort, the overall difference between institutional and community-based centers was not statistically significant. The available evidence therefore does not indicate a general deterioration associated with either learning-center type. Nevertheless, participation differed substantially across settings. Institutional learners showed lower examination participation than community-based learners, while elementary participation was also lower than junior high school participation. Preparedness should not be evaluated solely through pass rates. Participation itself is an important community-service concern because learners cannot benefit from examination preparation if they disengage before assessment. Research on ALS implementation and community learning environments indicates that participation and educational continuity are shaped by learning conditions, stakeholder involvement, learner circumstances, and access to support [7, 8, 12]. Outreach, attendance monitoring, and re-engagement may therefore complement academic remediation.

4.8. Interpreting Policy, Teacher, Learner, and Environmental Factors

The three comparison frames permit a cautious evaluation of the competing explanations for the observed headline decline. The evidence is most consistent with a classification-policy effect rather than a broad decline in learner achievement. The apparent decline emerges when policy-dependent categories are compared, while the direction of the trend changes when an equivalent outright passing criterion is applied across cohorts. The teacher factor does not provide evidence of general deterioration. Both cohorts received comparable familiarization and mock-testing preparation, and the later cohort demonstrated a higher outright pass rate. However, the nonexperimental design does not permit the improvement to be attributed solely to teacher practice or maturation. Learner composition remains a plausible secondary influence. Registration increased while participation declined, and the later cohort may have differed from the earlier backlog cohort in ways not captured by aggregated records. Individual demographic and educational-history data were unavailable, limiting direct evaluation of these possible differences. The environmental evidence likewise does not indicate a division-wide deterioration. Institutional and community-based settings continued to produce comparable overall outcomes, although local implementation conditions may still matter. The headline decline should not be interpreted as equivalent to a decline in learner competence. The analysis instead demonstrates the importance of separating measurement-policy changes from educational-performance changes.

4.9. Community-Service Implications for ALS Learner Support

The findings have direct implications for community service because assessment information can be used to identify learners requiring different types of support. Community service should therefore extend beyond general examination preparation and use assessment evidence to guide targeted learner assistance. Near-passing learners constitute an especially important group. Even when no formal conditional-passer category exists, mock-test and competency-level information can identify learners who are close to the certification standard. Intensive review and retrieval-practice activities can then be directed toward the competencies in which these learners require additional support [13-15]. The decline in examination participation also indicates a need for outreach. Registered learners who do not sit for the examination may require follow-up from teachers, mobile teachers, learning-center personnel, families, and community stakeholders. Community-service strategies can therefore combine academic remediation with participation monitoring, communication, and learner re-engagement [12]. The major findings and corresponding community-service priorities are summarized in **Table 8**. The practical response to policy change need not depend on restoring a particular certification category. Even within a binary pass/fail system, divisions can identify learners requiring intensified support before subsequent examination cycles.

4.10. Integrated Assessment-Informed Community Service

An integrated community-service approach can connect assessment, learner identification, remediation, participation support, and monitoring. Examination preparation begins with identifying learner readiness through diagnostic activities and mock testing. Learners requiring additional assistance can then receive competency-specific review, mentoring, and structured practice, while non-participating learners can be followed through outreach and re-engagement. Teachers and mobile teachers remain central to this process because they interpret learner performance and translate assessment evidence into instructional support. Professional support for ALS implementers is therefore also relevant [9,

10]. Community learning centers and other stakeholders can complement teacher efforts through learner communication, logistical support, protected learning time, and participation monitoring. This approach transforms examination data from a retrospective accountability indicator into a practical resource for community service. Assessment results can identify who requires support, the type of support required, and where implementation difficulties may be concentrated.

Table 8. Community-service priorities derived from the examination analysis.

RESEARCH FINDING	COMMUNITY-SERVICE PRIORITY	TARGET PARTICIPANTS	PROPOSED ACTIVITY	INTENDED CONTRIBUTION
Near-passing learners remain educationally identifiable despite removal of the formal category	Targeted remediation	Near-passing learners	Competency-focused intensive review and mock testing	Improved preparedness for subsequent certification
Examination participation declined	Learner re-engagement	Registered non-participants and at-risk learners	Outreach, follow-up, and attendance support	Increased continuity of participation
Harmonized passing improved	Sustain effective preparation practices	Teachers and learners	Structured familiarization and practice testing	Continued examination preparedness
Learning-center patterns vary	Center-level implementation support	Teachers, mobile teachers, and center personnel	Collaborative review of learning conditions and implementation practices	More consistent support across settings
Certification rules changed	Assessment communication	Learners, teachers, administrators, and stakeholders	Orientation on classification rules and reporting	More accurate interpretation of performance trends
Counterfactual analysis identifies a potentially recoverable near-passing group	Precision learner support	Teachers, learning facilitators, and near-passing learners	Data-informed remediation planning	Better targeting of limited instructional support

4.11. Limitations

The findings should be interpreted within several limitations. First, the analysis relied on aggregated records, and individual score distributions for the later cohort were unavailable. The counterfactual conditional-passer estimate is therefore model-based rather than observed. Second, participation differed between cohorts, creating the possibility of differential self-selection into examination taking. Third, the causal-comparative design does not establish causation. Fourth, some earlier summary percentages differed from rates recomputed from pooled frequencies; consequently, frequency-based calculations were used consistently in the analysis.

5. CONCLUSION

The apparent decline in Alternative Learning System Accreditation and Equivalency examination success should be interpreted with caution because the two cohorts were evaluated under different certification classifications. When a harmonized measure of outright passing was applied, the later cohort demonstrated improved performance rather than deterioration. In contrast, the lower headline success rate emerged when the earlier conditional-passer-inclusive outcome was compared with the later binary pass/fail result. The counterfactual analysis further suggested that a meaningful group of near-passing learners may remain educationally recoverable even when no formal conditional-passer category is available. These findings highlight the importance of separating policy-related classification effects from changes in learner competence. From a community-service perspective, examination evidence can be used to guide targeted remediation, mock-test-informed preparation, learner re-engagement, teacher support, stakeholder communication, and center-level monitoring. Such an approach can help ensure that assessment data are used not only for accountability reporting but also for practical learner support, continued participation, improved preparedness, and future certification opportunities.

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7. AUTHORS' NOTE

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article. The authors confirmed that the paper is free from plagiarism.

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