



## PROJECT TALINGHAGA AS A CATALYST OF LITERACY AND SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT

Alternative Learning System Learners Who Are Persons Deprived of Liberty in the City Jail of Malolos

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### ABSTRACT

Project Talinghaga is a ten-day literacy and values-oriented intervention for Alternative Learning System learners who are Persons Deprived of Liberty at the City Jail of Malolos. It combines reading and writing activities with storytelling, metaphorical analysis, reflection, and creative expression. This qualitative phenomenological study examined how participants understood the program's contribution to literacy, spirituality, personal development, resilience, and rehabilitation.

Ten ALS-PDL participants were purposively selected for in-depth inquiry from the larger group enrolled in the project. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews, focus-group discussion, observation, and review of participant outputs. The responses were coded and organized into recurring themes.

Findings showed perceived gains in reading comprehension, writing, critical thinking, and confidence in self-expression. Participants also described spirituality as self-reflection, forgiveness, inner peace, and renewed purpose. Storytelling and metaphor helped them relate lessons to their own lives, while writing and drawing provided safe ways to communicate difficult experiences. These combined effects supported hope, emotional regulation, resilience, and a stronger belief in personal change.

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The study concludes that literacy instruction becomes more meaningful for incarcerated learners when academic learning is connected with reflection and creative expression. Continued implementation should include structured monitoring, stronger post-program support, and careful assessment of literacy outcomes.

**Keywords:** *Project Talinghaga, literacy development, spiritual growth, Alternative Learning System, Persons Deprived of Liberty, rehabilitation*

## CONTEXT AND RATIONALE

ALS learners in correctional settings often have interrupted schooling, uneven literacy skills, and limited access to sustained learning opportunities. Confinement may also intensify isolation, regret, anxiety, and uncertainty about the future. A useful intervention in this context must therefore respond not only to academic needs but also to participants' need for meaning, dignity, and constructive self-expression.

Project Talinghaga addresses these concerns by using stories, metaphors, reflective dialogue, writing, and art as pathways to learning. The approach treats literacy as more than decoding text. Learners interpret ideas, connect lessons with lived experience, organize thoughts, and communicate personal insights. Spiritual development is likewise understood broadly as reflection on values, choices, relationships, responsibility, forgiveness, and purpose.

The program is grounded in the view that literacy and spirituality can reinforce each other. Reading a story invites interpretation; metaphor encourages deeper analysis; writing supports emotional processing; and discussion allows participants to reconsider their choices. Together, these activities may strengthen both communication skills and readiness for rehabilitation.

The study focused on the participants' lived experiences rather than making a causal claim. Its value lies in showing how learners perceived the intervention and which features

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they considered most meaningful. These insights can guide the refinement of educational programming for PDLs and support more humane, learner-centered rehabilitation practices.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS SIGNIFICANCE AND SCOPE

### Research Questions

How do ALS learners who are PDLs perceive their experiences with Project Talinghaga in terms of literacy development?

What are their lived experiences regarding the spiritual aspects of participation?

How do they perceive the role of storytelling, metaphorical analysis, and creative expression in learning?

What effects do they perceive on personal development, resilience, and potential for rehabilitation?

**Significance.** The findings may inform BJMP personnel, ALS teachers, school leaders, and policy makers in planning educational and rehabilitation programs that recognize the voices and needs of incarcerated learners. The study also provides a basis for improving instructional strategies and for future inquiry on literacy, spirituality, and rehabilitation.

**Scope.** The inquiry covered Project Talinghaga participants at the City Jail of Malolos. It examined experiences and perceptions associated with the program, not long-term recidivism or post-release outcomes.

**Limitations.** The small purposive sample and single-site design limit transferability. Findings are self-reported and may reflect social desirability or the immediate program context. The study does not establish that the intervention alone caused the reported changes. Longitudinal and outcome-based evidence is still needed.

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## METHODOLOGY

| Component    | Description                                                                                                          |
|--------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Design       | Qualitative phenomenology focused on participants' lived experiences.                                                |
| Setting      | Alternative Learning System program at the City Jail of Malolos.                                                     |
| Participants | Ten ALS-PDL learners purposively selected from the program population.                                               |
| Data sources | Semi-structured interviews, focus-group discussion, observation, and participant outputs.                            |
| Analysis     | Coding, comparison of recurring meanings, and organization into themes aligned with the four research questions.     |
| Ethics       | Voluntary participation, informed consent, confidentiality, respectful interviewing, and secure handling of records. |

**Sampling.** Participants were included when they were enrolled in the ALS-PDL program, had joined Project Talinghaga activities, could communicate their experiences, and voluntarily consented. Individuals who did not meet these conditions or withdrew were excluded.

**Trustworthiness.** Triangulation across interviews, group discussion, observation, and outputs strengthened interpretation. The researcher compared accounts for convergence and differences and retained representative statements to preserve participant voice.

**Analytic caution.** The results describe perceived change. They should be read as evidence of participant experience and program relevance, not as standardized measurement of literacy growth or proof of long-term rehabilitation.

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#### Project Talinghaga Intervention

The intervention consisted of ten sessions designed to build a culture of literacy while encouraging reflection and spiritual growth. Activities were adapted to the correctional setting and to varied educational backgrounds.

| Core element          | Learning purpose                                                          |
|-----------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Guided reading        | Build comprehension, vocabulary, interpretation, and confidence.          |
| Storytelling          | Connect lessons with real-life experiences and make texts memorable.      |
| Metaphorical analysis | Move beyond literal meaning and strengthen critical reflection.           |
| Creative writing      | Organize ideas, communicate feelings, and practice written expression.    |
| Drawing and art       | Provide an alternative, safe channel for difficult emotions and insights. |
| Reflective dialogue   | Examine choices, relationships, responsibility, forgiveness, and purpose. |
| Sharing of outputs    | Develop voice, listening, mutual respect, and a sense of achievement.     |

The approach positioned participants as meaning makers rather than passive recipients. Literacy tasks were linked with personally relevant questions, enabling learners to apply reading and writing to self-understanding. The spiritual component remained connected to dignity, accountability, healing, and hope rather than being limited to ritual practice.

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## Finding 1 Literacy Development

Participants consistently described improved confidence in reading, writing, comprehension, and oral or written self-expression. Several entered the program with limited formal education or previous frustration with literacy. They reported that stories and creative exercises made difficult ideas more accessible and reduced the feeling that learning was merely a school requirement.

Three related patterns emerged. First, learners felt better able to understand texts and identify meanings beyond surface-level words. Second, they became more willing to write and share ideas. Third, literacy gained practical and personal value because it helped them communicate, reflect on their past, and imagine future possibilities.

*ALS-PDL 1: "The lessons are not just about literacy in the traditional sense; they help me understand the deeper meaning behind words and express myself more clearly."*

*ALS-PDL 9: "I have learned how to analyze texts more effectively, write more clearly, and express my ideas in a structured way."*

Interpretation. The accounts suggest that the program supported functional and reflective literacy. Participants did not describe only technical improvement; they emphasized confidence, meaning making, and communication. However, because no standardized pretest-posttest result was reported, the evidence should be interpreted as perceived improvement.

## Finding 2 Spiritual Development

Participants described spirituality as an inward process of reflection, self-understanding, forgiveness, peace, and connection with a larger purpose. Several reported that they initially associated spirituality only with religious practices. The program broadened this understanding by linking reflective activities with their choices, emotions, relationships, and hopes for change.

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The most common experiences were honest examination of past actions, recognition of emotional wounds, forgiveness of self and others, and a calmer response to incarceration. The use of stories and metaphors allowed participants to approach painful experiences indirectly and interpret them with less defensiveness.

*ALS-PDL 1: "I used to think spirituality was just about religious practices, but now I realize it is more about self-reflection and understanding my inner thoughts."*

*ALS-PDL 2: "I have learned to forgive myself and others. I feel like I am now on a path to redemption, and it gives me hope for the future."*

Interpretation. Spiritual development functioned as a resource for coping and moral reflection. It helped participants construct meaning from confinement and consider a future identity not defined solely by past wrongdoing. The finding supports retaining reflective activities while ensuring that participation remains voluntary and respectful of diverse beliefs.

### Finding 3 Storytelling Metaphor and Creative Expression

Storytelling made lessons relatable because participants could compare characters, conflicts, and consequences with their own lives. Metaphorical analysis encouraged them to look for meanings beneath the literal text and to consider alternative interpretations. Creative expression through writing and drawing gave them a structured way to communicate emotions that were difficult to state directly.

These methods increased engagement and helped connect academic, emotional, and personal learning. Participants described writing and art as therapeutic, while discussion helped them recognize that others also experienced struggle, regret, and hope.

*ALS-PDL 7: "The stories often reflect the struggles I have faced in my life, and they make the lessons feel more personal."*

*ALS-PDL 8: "Creative expression, whether through writing or drawing, has given me a way to express my feelings and ideas in a safe space."*

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Interpretation. The program's creative methods served both instructional and psychosocial functions. They supported comprehension and critical thinking while also offering distance from painful experiences. Facilitators should retain these methods, provide clear prompts and supportive feedback, and avoid pressuring participants to disclose experiences they prefer to keep private.

## **Finding 4 Personal Development Resilience and Rehabilitation**

Participants associated the program with greater self-awareness, emotional control, hope, patience, and belief in the possibility of change. Rehabilitation was described not simply as completing a sentence or following rules, but as changing patterns of thought and behavior, accepting responsibility, learning from setbacks, and preparing for a more constructive future.

Resilience appeared in participants' willingness to continue despite difficulty, reinterpret setbacks as part of growth, and imagine identities beyond their past offenses. The combined literacy and reflective activities helped them articulate goals and recognize personal agency.

*ALS-PDL 2: "Rehabilitation is not just about serving time, but about changing the way you think and live."*

*ALS-PDL 10: "The program has shown me that with the right mindset and effort, rehabilitation is possible."*

Interpretation. The intervention appears to create conditions that support readiness for rehabilitation: hope, reflection, communication, and future orientation. These are meaningful intermediate outcomes, although actual reintegration and sustained behavioral change require continued support and longer-term evaluation.

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## Integrated Discussion of Findings

The four findings form a connected process. Engaging stories made literacy activities understandable and personally relevant. Improved confidence in reading and writing gave participants stronger tools for reflection and expression. Reflection, in turn, supported spiritual meaning, emotional processing, and reconsideration of past choices. These experiences contributed to hope and resilience, which participants associated with rehabilitation.

| Program process          | Immediate experience                                    | Perceived contribution    |
|--------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Story and guided reading | Greater engagement and comprehension                    | Confidence in literacy    |
| Metaphorical analysis    | Deeper interpretation of text and life events           | Critical reflection       |
| Writing and drawing      | Safe expression of thoughts and emotions                | Self-awareness and relief |
| Reflective dialogue      | Recognition of responsibility, forgiveness, and purpose | Spiritual growth          |
| Sharing and feedback     | Voice, respect, and connection                          | Hope and resilience       |

The findings are coherent with a holistic view of correctional education: academic learning is strengthened when it recognizes the learner's emotional and moral context. Project Talinghaga's distinctive contribution is the deliberate integration of literacy, creativity, and reflection. Its strongest evidence is the consistency of participant accounts across the four questions. Its main evidentiary limitation is the absence of objective literacy measures and follow-up data.

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## CONCLUSIONS

Participants perceived substantial gains in reading comprehension, writing, critical thinking, and confidence in self-expression. Literacy was experienced as both an academic skill and a practical tool for communication and self-understanding.

The spiritual dimension supported reflection, forgiveness, emotional healing, peace, and renewed purpose. Participants viewed spirituality more broadly than ritual practice and connected it with responsibility and personal change.

Storytelling, metaphorical analysis, writing, and art made learning engaging and personally relevant. These methods helped participants interpret texts, examine life experiences, and express difficult thoughts in safer ways.

Participants associated Project Talinghaga with increased self-awareness, resilience, hope, and readiness for rehabilitation. The program encouraged them to see change as a continuing process that requires effort and support.

The findings demonstrate the relevance of an integrated literacy and reflection program in a correctional ALS setting. They do not, by themselves, prove long-term literacy gains, successful reintegration, or reduced recidivism.

Overall conclusion. Project Talinghaga offers a promising learner-centered model for connecting literacy instruction with creative expression and reflective development among ALS-PDL learners. Its value lies in helping participants read and write with greater meaning while strengthening their capacity to understand themselves and envision constructive futures.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Continue the use of storytelling, metaphorical analysis, creative writing, and visual expression, with activities differentiated according to learners' literacy levels.

Add simple baseline and endline assessments in reading comprehension and writing so perceived gains can be examined alongside objective evidence.

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Strengthen structured reflection through guided journals, values clarification, mindfulness or quiet reflection, and facilitated discussion that respects diverse beliefs.

Provide facilitators with training in trauma-informed, nonjudgmental communication and in handling sensitive disclosures within institutional protocols.

Create individual learning portfolios containing selected writing, art, reflections, and progress records to document growth across sessions.

Establish follow-up mentoring and continuity arrangements with ALS personnel, BJMP staff, families, and community partners when appropriate and permitted.

Conduct a longer-term evaluation using a larger or multi-site sample and follow-up indicators related to literacy retention, continued education, coping, and reintegration.

Protect confidentiality and voluntary participation in all future implementation and research, particularly when outputs contain personal histories.

## Utilization Monitoring and Dissemination

**Program utilization.** The findings may guide the refinement of Project Talinghaga session plans, facilitator orientation, learning materials, and learner-support mechanisms. Results may also inform ALS and BJMP discussions on holistic educational programming for PDLs.

| Area          | Suggested indicator                             | Evidence source            |
|---------------|-------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Participation | Attendance and completion of sessions           | Session records            |
| Literacy      | Change in comprehension and writing performance | Baseline and endline tasks |
| Expression    | Quality and completeness of outputs             | Learner portfolios         |
| Reflection    | Ability to articulate insights and goals        | Journals and interviews    |

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|            |                                            |                                     |
|------------|--------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Well-being | Self-reported hope, coping, and confidence | Brief validated scales or check-ins |
| Continuity | Participation in follow-up ALS activities  | Program tracking records            |

**Dissemination.** The condensed findings may be shared during a Learning Action Cell, In-Service Training, ALS-BJMP program review, or an appropriate research forum. Any public presentation should remove identifying information and use participant quotations sparingly and respectfully.

**Decision implication.** Continued implementation is warranted as a promising educational practice, provided that future cycles include stronger outcome monitoring and sustained learner support. Program decisions should combine participant voice with measurable literacy evidence and institutional feasibility.

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