Second Chances: Exploring the Philippine Alternative Learning System

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Abstract: Education for all has been a campaign of education advocates over the years. But despite having various education initiatives and programs that promote inclusivity, there are still learners who have left the traditional teaching and learning environment. In the Philippines, the Alternative Learning System (ALS), which is considered to be a parallel learning program, serves as a bridge for those who are unable to attend the formal education system due to various circumstances. Hence, this paper aims to deeply understand the reasons behind students' dropping out of formal education. Additionally, using a qualitative case study research design, this attempts to examine the authentic experiences of out-of-school youths and adults that led them leave the four corners of classroom. Interestingly, the results of this study revealed that ALS students left the formal education system due to problems with family, personal conflicts, financial concerns, and accessibility concerns. Nevertheless, the narratives shared by the participants served as a way of deeply understanding the root cause that impedes their learning journey as they navigate the path of alternative education.

Keywords: Adult education, Alternative Learning System, Education for all, Inclusive education, Out-of-school youths and adults

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Introduction

The word education, for the most part, appears to be a social opportunity as its aim. It is portrayed as an equalizer of many factors including socioeconomic mobilizations and producing socially responsive and productive citizens (Davis, 2014; Conger et al., 2010). Unfortunately, not everyone has the chance to continue their formal schooling because of primarily social and economic circumstances, which include family conflicts, financial constraints, environmental pressures, and access to education (Department of Education, 2019).

In the Philippines, this phenomenon is seen to be rooted in the endemic problem of poverty which stems from larger social issues that plague the capability of individuals to become educated (Sani et al., 2019). In the situational analysis released by the National Economic Development Authority (NEDA) and UNICEF (2018), the agencies emphasized that the Philippines has persistent poverty problems that remain high, especially in areas like the regions of Mindanao. The problem of poverty creates slow human productivity and development, uneven socio-economic growth, and disruption to other essential sectors of the national and local government like education services due to inadequate and uneven funding (National Economic Development Authority, & United Nations Children's Fund, 2018).

Consequently, this problem results in new and larger challenges where access to education is far from being achieved by the majority of Filipino learners. It creates educational disparity resulting in a high incidence of drop-out rates in the country. While the Philippines had made significant efforts in increase the participation or enrollment rate of Filipino school learners from 84.60% to 91.10%, however, it was reported that the country failed to attain its goal of a 100% completion rate for primary schooling and literacy completion rate for ages 15-24 years old (National Economic Development Authority, 2014). UNESCO (2015) believes that education serves as a reliable path to escape poverty which will eventually help in the promotion of productive and stronger communities.

Ebora and Guillo (2018) argue that one way to alleviate poverty and leave no one behind is through eradicating illiteracy and expanding basic education services and life skills for out-of-school children, youth, and adults. The birth of alternative education or Alternative Learning System (ALS) in the Philippine education context has been seen to be a panacea to cover the need for achieving access to education. To illustrate the early years of the Philippine ALS, it can be traced back to the year 1936. According to Doronila (1997), the passage of Commonwealth Act no. 80 which created the Office of Adult Education during the American colonial period served as a hallmark and was "recorded as the first formal institution of adult education (called non-formal education) in the country" (p. 11). The establishment of community learning centers and their separation from traditional schools have been noticeable and continue to this day. During the post-war period in 1947, the governance of Philippine education was restructured and the office of Adult Education was renamed into the Adult and Community Education Division and put under the Bureau of Public Schools (Doronila, 1997). This was in line with integrating schools with the community and ensuring literacy among children, youths, and adults. As a response of the Philippine government to the continuous decline of participation and enrollment rate in schools, non-formal education (NFE) was massively introduced and campaigned in 1968 to intervene in the educational challenges during that time (Rogers, 2004). The enactment of the Education Act of 1982 served as a milestone for NFE to reconstruct the government's aspirations towards eradicating the persistent increase of drop-out rates in the country.

Arzadon and Nato (2015) point out that one of the ways to expand basic educational services was through widening access to education in the community setting, providing skills training for future employment, and inculcating rightful attitudes and social values. While the

Department of Education or DepEd sees the importance of rebuilding the ALS program, it was also reported that several bottlenecks need to be examined on the grounds to better grasp the situation of the ALS program in various parts of the country (Albert & Raymundo, 2016).

In a nutshell, the findings of this study can contribute to deepening one's understanding of the learning journey of OSYA learners in the Philippine ALS program. Significantly, this case study provided opportunities for the urban ALS learners to express and share their experiences which are beneficial for policymakers, curriculum designers, educators, and school stakeholders in exploring the parallel learning of the Philippine education system. To illustrate, this provides opportunities for policymakers and educators to rethink the way they plan, assess, implement, and evaluate alternative education in the country. This fills the gaps about alternative education in the Philippine context and adds to the existing reference in redesigning the parallel learning system program by aligning to the Philippines' K-12 curriculum and qualifications framework. As such, this ensures that the ALS learners are still at par with the educational demands of globalization.

Therefore, this paper aims to answer the research question of "Why did ALS learners decide to drop out from formal education in the Philippines?". This pertains to the literature reviews where the reasons for drop-out rates are concentrated on numerical descriptions. The need to deeply understand the reasons behind these statistical data is timely and necessary (Albert et al., 2016). Their authentic experiences greatly serve as an opportunity to deepen one's understanding about their ALS learning journey which is considered to be a second chance learning.

Theoretical Framework

This paper focuses on investigating the case of experiences of ALS students in an urban community in Manila, Philippines. The alternative school movement was developed through the desire of alternative education advocates to provide interventions for students who were academically and socially disengaged due to various circumstances. Central to this understanding, this study is guided by social reproduction theory which originates from the idea of Marxist theory. The theory argues how social inequalities are reproduced and influenced by socioeconomic and cultural systems which affect the ability of individuals to have access to education (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Willis, 1977).

To illustrate, Gilleard (2020) identified the concept of economic or financial capital as a factor for educational opportunities. Students from middle-class status have an advantage over those who belong to lower income status in terms of access to education. In the same manner, students from poor families are more vulnerable to drop-out as compared to upper-class students due to lack of financial support. This suggests the idea that wealth transfers from one generation to another, and it can greatly affect the ability of individuals to have educational access (Ikpuri, 2023).

Additionally, cultural capital which is defined as the ability of the family to influence their children's knowledge, skills, and cultural practices (Doob, 2019; Gilleard, 2020). This presents that families who belong to middle-income status are more capable and inclined to send their children to schools since they value investing in good education. A good example is the concept of so-called objectified cultural capital where they teach and promote the value of education through investing in books and educational materials as compared to families of lower income status who lacked in this aspect (Ikpuri, 2023).

The position of social reproduction theory served as a guide in exploring the case of experiences of ALS students about the factors that led them to leave the formal education

system. Their collective voices paved the way to understand how social inequalities or challenges influenced their learning journey making them decide to take the alternative pathway of education. Finally, this framework served as a guide to deeply understand where they are coming from.

Literature Review

Economic and societal problem: The phenomenon of students' educational drop-out

The problems of students' leaving traditional teaching and learning environment have been associated with various challenges which often leads to generational inequalities (Dupere et al., 2018). Some scholars have agreed that students left schooling due to economic hardships, family matters, early marriage, and peer influences (Albert & Raymundo, 2016; Chenge et al., 2017; Department of Education, 2019; Dupere et al., 2018; Felisilda & Torreon, 2020; Omollo & Yambo, 2017).

In the study conducted by Chenge et al. (2017), they investigated the family factors that contribute to school dropouts. Using a mixed research method on 55 purposive selected students in the Rushinga district, the researchers found out that there was a high incidence of secondary school dropout rate in the area. The poverty problem significantly affects the learning condition of the students where 70% of the respondents strongly agreed that financial limitations impede them to continue their educational pursuits. This reflects that people living in poverty are in a disadvantaged situation since they are more likely to leave school than those who are living above the poverty threshold.

Aside from the financial problems that most families are experiencing in the district of Rushinga, the separation of students' parents contributed to one of the main factors that led students to stop schooling. There were 73% of the respondents accumulatively emphasized that parental divorce is a family issue that affects the students' learning process due to weak family structure and support. This, in turn, creates an emerging issue where female students, at most, become vulnerable to early marriage or unexpected family settling. This phenomenon, as discussed by Chenge et al. (2017), is a crucial factor that one must look into since parental involvement in students' academic journey plays an important role in a child's successful completion and educational achievement.

Challenges in the family as a root cause of students' dropping out

The low levels of educational attainment of parents also served as the main factor as to the reasons for students' incidence of school dropout (Chenge et al., 2017). The researchers of this study agreed that parents who have high educational background are more likely to influence and guide accordingly their children towards attaining a path for educational completion, however, those who have not able to complete education are also in danger of being trapped in social disparities (Conger et al., 2010).

Moreover, it was found out by Chenge et al. (2017) that the death of parents is another variable that contributes to redefining family structures which results in various unexpected challenges. Family changes are important determinants for school dropouts because it affects the way the child behaves in school (Ainsworth, 2005; Basumatary, 2012; Chenge et al., 2017). Thus, this only shows that those students who are living in good social and economic conditions have more likely to remain and finish school, while those who are in challenging situations are more likely not to attend school.

Albert and Raymundo (2016) also reported numerous factors that influence students being not in school. The authors reiterated that uneventful situations experienced by a student

like having been raised in a broken family contribute to student absenteeism and eventually dropping out from school. This is because that family separation creates family gaps, broken structures, and malfunctions of responsibilities. It was pointed out, for example, that a parent has to work and perform either the task of being a father or a mother in the family which results in poor to lack of parental care. Having been in a dysfunctional family results in family role imbalance. There were also instances where the child has to step up and take the role of being a financial provider. These situational gaps are crucial since, according to some scholars, those youths are highly emotionally dependent and they easily react to the situation through their feelings (Dupere et al., 2017; Felisilda & Torreon, 2020; Omollo & Yambo, 2017).

Peers as roadblock towards educational continuity

The influence of peer pressure has also been revealed as one of the factors for students' absenteeism and eventually leading to dropping out from formal education (Albert & Raymundo, 2016; Omollo & Yambo, 2017). In many cases, peer influence has been noted to be a driver for students to be out of focus on their school tasks.

To illustrate, Albert and Raymundo (2016) identified that there were situations where students spend their school hours in computer shops to play computer games, and their parents would later find out from the teachers about the absences incurred by their child. While Omollo and Yambo (2017) emphasized that students who were influenced by negative peer pressure were the products of poor socio-economic status and family problems. This portrays that those students from poor demographic and socio-economic backgrounds learned to renavigate their attention to others because of the lack of support they felt from their parents or family.

Methodology

Research Design

This study utilized a qualitative case study research design (Creswell, 2014; Merriam, 2009; Stake, 2006; Yin, 2014). The use of a case study as a research design allowed me to conduct an in-depth analysis of the ALS program. It provided me an opportunity to immerse and learn from their authentic experiences which involved the subjective reality of the participants about their past experiences as to why they dropped-out from formal education prior to entering in an alternative education. Creswell (2014), in fact, specified that the use of a case study research design is essential for exploring and presenting the ALS learners' perspectives in their context.

Participants and Locale

There were eight participants who were purposively selected. The following were the criteria in the selection of the participants, such as they must be age 18 years old and above, must have a history of dropping out from formal education, and willing to participate and share their prior experiences. Further, this research was conducted in an urban community learning center in the first district of Tondo, Manila, Philippines. The said area of focus or locale of the study was chosen considering its geographical and strategic location where a huge number of the urban poor population is residing (Gamboa, Rivera, & Reyes, 2019), and that it offers alternative education to out-of-school youths and adults (OSYA) learners in the populous area in Tondo, Manila, Philippines.

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Data Collection, Ethical Considerations and Trustworthiness

Prior to my data collection, I ensured that all necessary documents and permission to conduct study were processed and approved by the authorities from division office and school. Moreover, I requested the assistance of the ALS teacher in identifying the target participants. This process helped me to maximize my time and effort, and focus on my research aim. At the same time, the use of a semi-structured interview facilitated good flow of conversation where my participants had the opportunity to freely express their past experiences and insights about the factors that led them to dropped out from formal education. I was also reminded by the ALS teacher to be more sensitive in asking questions and not forcing them to answers since some of them have baggage of bad experiences which can trigger their emotions. Part of establishing rapport and confidence with the participants was through the process of introducing myself, my purpose, and creating an informal conversation.

Additionally, I discussed with the participants the content of the informed consent, and asked for their permission that the interview process to be audio recorded for accuracy of the data transcriptions. All the participants have agreed and have no questions; hence, they signed the informed consent indicating their willingness to participate. Follow-up questions and informal conversations were also employed to deepen their shared experiences until I can no longer get new information, hence, it saturates (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Faulkner & Trotter, 2017).

I transcribed verbatim all the gathered data using a Microsoft software and application. The transcribed results were kept confidential using codes/aliases to ensure the participants' anonymity (e.g., use of pseudonyms or aliases). The transcriptions were audit trailed for validity check through the assistance and guidance of my colleague in the field who are considered experts in the area of alternative education. Likewise, All raw data were deleted after the study had been completed in compliance with ethical and data privacy purposes.

Data Analysis

Using Saldaña's (2009) coding process, I utilized this as a form of data interpretation and analysis which serves as a critical link between the qualitative data and its meaningful explanation (Creswell, 2015; Saldaña, 2009). In this way, all gathered data were analyzed methodologically. Firstly, I employed intimacy with the collected data (Esterberg, 2002). This represents that being the primary instrument of the data collection process, I am directly immersed in deeply understanding my collected data by systematically reading and re-reading the transcripts wherein the important words or statements from the interview transcripts were highlighted and captured accordingly.

Secondly, I employed a direct coding method by providing descriptive labels of the participant-generated shared statements (Saldaña, 2009). In this way, it facilitated a comprehensive understanding of information through reviewing subjectively the data and writing comments on the information found in the participant's transcripts (Saldaña, 2009).

Table 1
Process of analysis

Themes	Initial codes	Sample Responses
Family concerns	Family conflicting issues	"I had a problem with my parents. My dad had another family. Hence, what I did was not to attend my school classes. It was my form of punishment to them. That I will not study anymore. After all, it was nothing. That's why I stopped formal schooling." (P1)

	Untimely family settling	"I married early…I stopped schooling. Then went to the province… when we went there, I got pregnant." (P4)
Personal conflicting concerns	Environmental influence	"I was influenced by my classmates and friends not go to school anymore. Just drink and hang out." (P1)
	Low self-esteem	"I was being bullied by my classmates since I am older than them. I experienced repeating grade levels and it affected my self-confidence and interaction with my peers" (P5)
Financial concerns	Financial issues	"I need to work at an early age for my family because our financial resources are not enough for us. Since my sister is also studying, I have to give way for her to maximize our family's financial budget." (P6) "Due to poverty and lack of financial support from my family, I have to stop schooling. Although, my elder sister and my mom support me financially, however, it was not enough to sustain my needs in school which resulted me to leave the formal schooling." (P8)
Accessibility concerns	Institutional policies	"I experienced difficulty enrolling and transferring to secondary school since the institution is requiring me to submit first my transfer credentials which include my birth certificate. However, I have a problem with my birth certificate since I am an adopted." (P2)

The last phase employed putting the segments of categories into central themes. This stage is critical as it reflects the categorization of codes. It provided me the opportunity to reflect on the category of codes that emerged then reanalyzed these sub-categories to come up with overarching themes through employing the "most analytic sense" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 57). The themes that developed pass through the rigorous process of reading, reflecting, reanalyzing, and reorganizing of codes which facilitated the researcher's goal to give voice to the country's parallel learning program. The subsection below shows the processes on how the data were analyzed from codes to categories to the refinement of main themes. Likewise, observation notes and/or document reviews were also presented to support the interview transcripts.

Findings and Discussion

The unique experiences entailed diverse voices as to the reasons why they have to stop attending school. While it seems that this question creates an open wound to reminisce, however, it also represents a time to go back and to reflect on the journey of ALS students in navigating their dreams in an unfamiliarized approach to education. Understanding the journey from the time they left formal school allows one to become culturally and socially sensitive individuals about learning from the past experiences of students' life journey. This subsection presents four main themes or concerns that emerged after the transcribed data. These concerns were thematized as family, personal conflicts, financial, and access.

The theme family concerns talk about the unexpected happenings to the life of each participant that affected not only their family but also themselves. It portrays the realities of life and the issues that surround their family resulting for the participants to look for an escape route and become wanderers. It also represents the family conflicts that arose and experienced by ALS students which influenced their capability to pursue their journey in formal school. The obstacles brought about the issues within their family created a zone of concern due to its effect on their lives and school matters. To illustrate the narrations that were raised by students who have been in a broken family, it highlighted that their situation was challenged not only their socio-emotional wellbeing, but it also resulted to rebel against their parents. For instance, P1

was emotional when she reminisced about the reason for leaving the formal school. In fact, both P1's mother and stepmother were present when the researcher interviewed P1. As P1 verbalized:

> "I had a problem with my parents. When I learned that they were separated, I started skipping my classes until I dropped-out." (P1)

The absence of P5's father has also triggered him to leave the four corners of the classroom. P5's shared that his father is a womanizer and always promises that their family will be fixed and back again together. However, it remained as a promise of hope and dream because P5's father continues to have an affair with his other woman.

> "I left schooling because my parents separated. I thought they were okay, but it changed. My dad left us." (P5)

In the case of P3, he was a bit shy when asked about the reasons for leaving formal school. His narration about having been in a broken family impedes him to continue his study since P3's parents had parted their ways and built their own family. The incarceration of P3's father has also affected not only his way of living but also his education journey. This unfortunate event of P3, where his father was imprisoned and no one will take care of him, made him think to withdraw from a formal school. P3 worked for quite some time as a tricycle driver in their community and was later adopted by his grandparents.

These statements reflect that conflicts within the family structure such as problems of being in a broken family can affect the education pathway of students. The Department of Education (2019) emphasized that students leave formal education because of early marriage and family matters. The notion also of poor parental care put students in a zone of concern where a high risk for absenteeism might happen resulting in dropping out of school. In a discussion paper published by Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS), David et al. (2018) argued that:

> "Take a hypothetical of a child in Grade 2 whose parents separate, she would be affected emotionally by the absence of one parent. If the father leaves, it usually means that the mother is left without an income source and children have to work, the mother would then work and lose the time to guide children through school as a solo parent in a poor family."

Moreover, P4 and P8's academic journeys were disrupted due to teenage pregnancy. The influence brought about by untimely family settling affected not only their personal life but also their education. In this case, they have no choice but to recalibrate their role from being a student to becoming a teenage mother. This unexpected event created disparity among them which they have to focus on building their family at an early age. Hence, this hindered their aspiration to continue learning in a formal school. Both of them shared that:

> "I did not finish my studies because I got pregnant when I was 18 years old. I left school and went to our province. I was thinking of going back to school that time, but there's no one to take care of my child." (4)

> "I was a 3rd year high student when I accidentally got pregnant. I left our house and lived with my boyfriend that time. I have no time to continue schooling since I have to attend to the needs of my growing family back then." (P8)

Examining the theme of family concerns posits the notion that family significantly influences the way individuals act and behave in school (Chenge et al., 2017; Felisilda & Torreon, 2020). This also pertains to the idea that one of the central roles of the family is to guide and to hone their child's psychological, moral, and spiritual development (Omuruyi,

2014). However, from the findings that were shared by the ALS students, the brokenness and emptiness they felt due to stressors or areas of concerns focusing on family-related issues such as parental separation, parental loss and death, parental incarceration, and teen pregnancy (David et al., 2018; Department of Education, 2019; Dupere et al., 2015; Sahin et al., 2016) made it more difficult for them to absorb and handle the stressful situation or environment the lived into. The lack of attention, parental care, and support contributed to the participants to leave the hallways of the school and chose another path outside being a student. Family matters and marriage are seen to be the main reasons why students dropped out from formal education (Department of Education, 2019).

The issues or problems that surround the family put students at risk of absenteeism because of the stressors or conflicts that arise which becomes an area of concern. The study habits and conditions of the students in school are being affected due to the disparity or gaps that were created within their family structure (David et al., 2018). This only shows that the existence of a whole family and the presence of parental care and affection to the child are necessary motivators to drive them in dealing with life's challenges and a proactive approach for academic sustenance. But in such cases, the unexpected happenings and events that thrive on the family of the participants made them agitated to continue their academic journey. The effect of family conflicts is detrimental to one's wellbeing resulting in a negative impact on students' academic performance because they are generally deprived of love and attention which they began to search for others, thus, resulting in unwanted pregnancy and early family marriage (David et al., 2018; Dupere et al., 2018; Sahin et al., 2016). In essence, this synthesizes that those students who came from an unhealthy family environment is vulnerable in leaving formal school because of the excess baggage they carried on and the emptiness they feel hindered their education journey.

Compare to the previous theme, the theme of personal conflicting concerns reflect the participant's poor self-confidence in pursuing their educational aspirations. At the same time, it pertains to the influence brought about by their environment or surrounding that pull them back in not attending formal school. While the former area of concern is focused on the conflicts within their family, this theme illustrates how having low self-esteem and peer pressure challenge the inner self of the participants or their motivational pursuit for education. P5 narrates that having been bullied by his classmates due to personal problems affected his education. In fact, it came to a point where P5 have to repeat the school year because of poor performance in school.

> "I was being bullied in school and it really affected my eagerness to continue schooling. I tried several times to go to traditional school, but it really made me demotivated." (P5)

This confirmation from P5 supported the arguments stated by Albert et al. (2020). The said authors highlighted that students tend to repeat the same grade level several times because of the emotional impact brought about, for instance, of personal conflicts that affected the students' motivation. In a news article released by Manila Bulletin, it was also stated that students who have poor performance in school have a high incidence of dropping out since they are demotivated (Gonzales, 2019). This claims that personal conflicts, such as poor to absence of self-motivation and confidence in moving forward in relation to personal problems, can result to a low level of school interest. Some students might also think of being overaged for a particular grade level due to frequent repetition in school, thus, this might lead students to leave the four walls of the classroom.

In the case of P1, the conflict she was experiencing made her vulnerable where she was influenced by her classmates and friends not to go to class and just hang out instead of studying.

The impact of peer pressure put P1 in an inopportune situation where she has to choose whether to go to school or not. But due to various problems she carried that time, P1 had an inner conflict with herself that resulted in leaving school. For P3, he was influenced by his environment on the path of using illegal drugs. Since P3's parents were separated and parental care was transferred to his grandparents and siblings, the influence of his environment greatly impacted him to try vices, such as the use of illegal drugs.

There were claims that students who focused most of their time with their peers are products of poor or lack of parental care (David et al., 2018). In fact, learning from the stories of students who ended up dropping out of school, like in the case of P1 and P3, would tell that one main reason was the negative influence of peers. To wit:

> "The "barkada" is a unit, a group of peers who spend time together and do things together, peer influence can be positive, in the cases of those who eventually left school this is negative. As a group, they would leave the school premises and spend the day in computer shops playing games, or they would hang around outside without any real activity, or they would go drinking." (David et al., 2018, p. 19)

Additionally, the impact of peer pressure would often result in inner self conflicts. As the students learn to divert their focus from school matters to pressures from peers, the chance of students learning to drink and smoke and even trying to use illegal drugs is high (David et al., 2018). Their curiosity about learning its surroundings and continuous building of friendships and groups are two of the most important components in the teenage life of students which sometimes oversee by parents. These negative vices affect students' study habits that result in frequent absenteeism and eventually demotivation to go to school.

Looking at the theme of personal conflicting concerns, it presents that low self-esteem can cause individuals to lose motivation to proceed on their academic journey. The challenge, for instance, of bullying, grade repetition, and overaged discourage the students to go back to the classroom because of a feeling of personal isolation (Albert et al., 2018; Sahin et al., 2016). This also reflects that school becomes a personal conflict environment where they feel that they do not belong and are not accepted. Most often than not, these students tend to slow down their momentum in school engagements until they come to think of ways to escape education since they feel that formal education is exclusive for selected students.

The influence also of the people around them can be a source of losing their focus and purpose as to why it is necessary to go and finish school. It synthesizes the notion of the influence of peers which has a major contribution in shaping the lives of adolescent students' behavior in making decisions (David et al., 2018; Dupere et al., 2018; Omollo & Yambo, 2017). It cannot be denied that during this stage, adolescent students are becoming closer to their peers. The idea of environmental pressure creates conflict within one's self either accepting the negative pressures from peers or not. However, most of the time, the decisions of adolescent students are based and influenced by their friends and colleagues around them. It also becomes a problem when an individual is surrounded by negative peers who are inclined to various social vices and illegal activities. They often feel helpless in deciphering whether to accept or reject the pressures from others since the majority of ALS students are also carrying other burdens that might inhibit the proper processing of decisions in life. As a result, they become opponents of their own decision-making process which is usually driven in the other way around.

The next area of concern highlights the struggles of students with regard to their financial capacity. It projects the economic hardships of students' families just to send them to school. The threat of unemployment and better opportunities hindered their parents and relatives to support their education. The high cost of education also left students to become wanderers whether to pursue their schooling versus securing their daily needs. From the field notes of the

researcher, it was observed that the community where the participants belong is depressive. Bystanders can be seen everywhere. Children were outside playing as if no health protocols were being imposed. The majority of houses are made of wood which is combustible and can easily be destroyed. To narrate the shared experiences of the participants, P4 shared that she came from a poor family where her mother worked as a household helper and her father served as a delivery boy. P4 also experienced moving from one house to another because they can no longer pay their house rental. P4 looked back on her past experiences, and she verbalized:

> "Life is really unfair. We cannot go to school due to financial problems. My parents do not have regular income and jobs. My mom is a house maid and my dad is a laborer. We keep on living from place to another. We do not have a permanent address." (P4)

In the case of P5, P6, and P7, they have to leave school in order to help in providing for the needs of their family. Thus, they assumed the role of being a financial provider by working as a blue-collar worker. For P5, since his father had left them, he realized that he must stepped up and look for a job that could support his family. Likewise, P6 has no other choice but to leave school and work at an early age to support her family's daily needs. Their house is too small for family members of 7. They also live with their uncles and aunts which makes their house congested for an extended family. I also noticed poor ventilation and the house structure is purely made up of woods.

The statements shared by the participants were related to the document which was released by the Department of Education (2019) where 17.90% of surveyed out-of-school children and youth emphasized financial resources as a problem for not finishing education. The capability of students to pursue their educational aspirations is hampered by their social and economic conditions.

The theme of financial concerns synthesizes that even if education is being offered free for all students in the Philippine public school setting, some are still confronted with a high cost of education, such as school expenses, which made it difficult for parents to budget their daily household expenses. David et al. (2018) emphasized the idea that poor families who lived in largely poor communities are much vulnerable to social collapse. This situation is most likely to expose students to work at an early age because they have to help in supporting to feed their families. There are also instances that a child has to step up because their parent or their financial provider left them or died unexpectedly (Mughal et al., 2019). From these lenses, it is seen as a detrimental factor for a child to focus his or her attention on learning because he or she carries a burden of reality where financial problems continue to hamper their daily lives. This uneventful situation puts the child at an unrest and disadvantage level to continue life in school.

More so, the impact of the shared participants' experiences provides us a glimpse of financial incapacity as a barrier for students like them to continue education. Even if the Philippines has various education initiatives but if economic opportunities are not in place, hence, there would always be gaps within the system. Unfortunately, the children or students are also affected by the impact of lack of economic opportunities in the country where students have to leave school resulting in developmental delays in moving up to the academic ladder. David et al. (2018) argued that those family who belongs to below poverty line have a high possibility of dropping out from formal school because they have to look for ways to feed their stomach than sustaining food for their brain. Further, this echoes students' changing roles in order to help to support their family from being a student to becoming a financial provider role. This phenomenon projects that the issue of financial resources remained as a problem over the years where poor students impede access to education (Albert et al., 2018).

The last theme presents compliance of students in passing and/or completing school admission requirements, such as birth certificate, as an accessibility concern that prohibit students from an opportunity to be enrolled in school. It also pertains as a barrier for students to be admitted since they lack necessary documents. These documents are sometimes seen as too costly for some students to get and process legal documents. In the case of P2, who was considered an orphan, her adopted family doesn't have any document to prove regarding her birth. When P2 was moving to junior high school, she could no longer be granted by the school to be admitted and was asked for necessary documents such as P2's birth certificate so she can proceed in Grade 7. However, since they could not show any documents, P2 and her adopted family decided not to enroll for the meantime in school. P2 verbalized:

> "I cannot proceed enrolling to high school because the school requires to submit my original birth certificate. After graduating elementary, I stopped schooling since I do not have the necessary admission requirements that the school asks us. My aunt do not have any knowledge about it since I was just left by my mom to them." (P2)

Looking at this aspect of students' reason for dropping out, it shows that inclusive education is really for everyone. The notion of administrative requirements impedes students to have access to education because of the absence of necessary documents for school admission like a certificate of live birth. Although there is no law that mandates schools in the Philippines that requires students to pass certificate of live birth as a child's basis for identification and admission to school (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2015), however, the DepEd in 2018 released DepEd order no. 3, s. 2018 or the basic education enrollment policy where it emphasized that students who have no existing profile in the Learner Information System or LIS must accomplish the basic education enrollment form and submit a certificate of live birth from the PSA as part of enrollment requirements. In fact, the need to submit a birth certificate is the first thing that school teachers are asking for students upon enrollment (Villasis & Abante, 2020). In effect, this kind of administrative barrier has been seen as a problem why some students leave formal education.

As such, this presents that passing of birth certificate document as a requirement in school admission is identified as a classical barrier because not all students have the capacity to provide birth certificate especially those who are in a disadvantaged situation like the orphans whose parents passed away. In summary, while it seems that it is good to set standards in school admissions like submissions of documentary requirements to ensure proper identification of the students, however, it is also important to provide the students an alternative pathway to process the admission requirements if the government aims for inclusive education for all.

Conclusion and Suggestions

The narratives expressed by the ALS learners signify that more than the numerical information that is being published, there are underlying unique experiences that are worth being listened to and shared by giving them voices. Every ALS student's learning journey has its own stories and reasons to tell as to why they left formal education. The influences brought about by various uneventful circumstances have allowed students to leave formal education, thus, they became and tagged as OSYA in their community. It is interesting to note that these OSYA learners were also victims of life hardships. They dropped out not because they wanted to, but because they had to. The importance of listening to the walks of every student's experience, which are beyond numerical or statistical findings, served as a gateway to deeply reflect and explore the root cause of students leaving in the four corners of the classroom.

From the findings that emerged in this study, it would be suggested that policymakers and educators could proactively consider the factors that caused students to leave the formal education System. For instance, they could provide and intensify educational programs, such as home visitations for students who have incurred multiple absences to know their status. Additionally, despite the basic education in the Philippines being offered free for all, it would be good to provide financial subsidies to cover other fees like strengthening the policies, such as no fee collection and provisions of nutritional programs, so it would address other educational expenses.

In a nutshell, this reflects that despite the difficulties and challenges of leaving the formal education to returning to school under the ALS program, it shows that the Philippine ALS responds and services as a bridge of hope in providing second-chance learning. While it might take a lot of courage to move forward, there is also a need to have strong motivation and inspiration in taking the less path traveled since alternative education is not common and unfamiliar to the general population.

Limitations of the Study

Considering the nature of this thesis where it is bounded by an area of focus, , thus, the researcher followed specified characteristics in deeply understanding the experiences of the ALS students about their learning journey in alternative education. This, in turn, limits the scope of the researcher in examining various lenses of out-of-school youth and adults regarding their reflections and viewpoints on the Philippines' parallel learning program. The findings are also confined to ALS students' experiences, insights, and reflections which might be interpreted by other researchers or scholars in different viewpoints or perspectives.

Additionally, it is not hidden from the knowledge of others that the purpose of this thesis is not to make any generalizations in answering the research questions, hence, it only has eight participants who agreed to participate. In fact, Creswell (2014) pointed out that these numbers are already good for a qualitative case study since the objective is not to generalize the results but to ensure that the data being collected are saturated. Aside from that, the researcher also set criteria to be followed to ensure the purposive selection of the participants.

Moreover, there are scarcity of literature about the Philippine ALS which made it difficult for the researcher to gather, compare, and analyze the challenges, opportunities, and practices of alternative education in the country. Even alternative education studies in a global context seem to be limited considering that much of the resources are being devoted to the traditional or formal education system. This difficulty of searching for various academic peer-reviewed journal articles and online published theses has been the biggest challenge for the researcher.

Despite these limitations that the researcher faced before, during, and after the conduct of this thesis, it was still a good attempt journeying to the unfamiliar face of the Philippine education system. After all, these limitations have contributed to ensuring that the voiceless face of the Philippine education system is heard and listened through reflecting their voices in this study.

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