

Breaking Walls, Building Dreams: The Out- of- School Youth's Story in The Municipality of Concepcion, Iloilo Philippines

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ABSTRACT: This study was conducted to describe the experiences of Out-Of-School youth specifically those discontinued BEED students in Concepcion, Iloilo, Philippines and the reasons behind their dropping out from school. The researchers utilized qualitative research using the phenomenological method. The respondents were the seven (7) out of school youth in the of the Municipality of Concepcion, Iloilo Philippines. The data gathered were analyzed using thematic analysis. Based on the findings of the study, the primary reasons of dropping out from school of out-of-school youth in Concepcion, Iloilo includes lack of financial resources/support, and early pregnancy. Despite these challenges many of them expressed a strong desire to return to school if given the opportunity and support. The study further revealed the importance of financial and emotional support from family, community, and institutions. Also, it was stated that behind the stories of every out-of-school youth is a powerful story of survival, strength, and hope. With this, it calls for the great understanding and responsive programs that will help and empower out-of-school youth to return and finish their education journey to secure, and to have a brighter future.

KEYWORDS: Out-of-School Youth, Dropping Out, Lived Experiences, Breaking Walls, Building Dreams

INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of out-of-school youth represents a significant global challenge, encompassing individuals who are not engaged in any formal educational institution. This demographic frequently faces diminished opportunities for upward socioeconomic mobility and is disproportionately affected by issues such as poverty, lack of essential life skills, and heightened vulnerability to criminal influences (Loprest et al., 2019), (Vayachuta et al., 2016). Moreover, the absence of comprehensive educational attainment among this population often perpetuates intergenerational cycles of disadvantage, undermining broader societal development (Cagang, 2024). In the Philippines, for instance, approximately 20% of the total population, or over 16 million individuals, are categorized as out-of-school youth, with poverty identified as a primary causal factor (Arpilleda, 2018). This demographic is also more susceptible to sexual risk behaviors, highlighting the multifaceted challenges associated with their exclusion from formal education (Kumar et al, 2023). Globally, violence disproportionately affects young people, leading to injury, hospitalization, death, social dysfunction, and poor mental well-being, often exacerbated by a lack of educational opportunities (Mehra et al., 2021). This issue carries substantial economic consequences for nations due to lost productivity (Mehra et al., 2021). Research indicates that achieving a higher level of education promotes factors that protect youth from poverty and violence (Mehra et al., 2021). Strong literacy abilities, vital for securing respectable careers and income, are often lacking in this group, further limiting their access to quality educational opportunities (Idulsa & Luzano, 2024). Thus, the researcher is eager to explore this study to describe the Lived Experiences of out-of-school youth in the Municipality of Concepcion, Iloilo, Philippines. Specifically in the 7 Island Barangay and to know what are the reasons behind their dropping out from school.

Epistemological Perspective

Constructivism, commonly referred to as interpretivism, is a paradigm rooted in the philosophies of both lev Vygotsky and Max Weber (Merriam, 2009) will be the epistemological viewpoint taken in this investigation. According to Crotty (1998), a constructionist believes that "all knowledge is a constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world. Through constructionism paradigm concepts from the Lived Experiences of Out-Of-School Youth in the Municipality, Concepcion, Iloilo Philippines was constructed and significant meaning of their experiences was developed. Human tells stories about their lives and those of others in order to make sense of their experiences of the world (Clandinin, Cave, & Berendonk, 2017). We interpret our experiences through our narratives in order to make them meaningful (Clandinin, 2013). We can, therefore, be considered as characters in our own stories and those of others (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Phenomenological

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approach describes experiences as they are lived. The central aims to capture the essence or the “what” and “how” of a phenomenon as experienced by people (Creswell, 2013).

OBJECTIVES

Anchored in theories of constructivism that believes knowledge is constructed through interaction between human beings and their world, this research had three core objectives,

1. To the identify the reasons of dropping out from school.
2. To examine the experiences when they left the school.
3. To reflect why they should be or should be not in school.

METHODOLOGY

This research study used the Phenomenological approach that explores the lived experiences of the individuals. Phenomenology seeks to understand the lived experiences of out of school youth and the meaning attach to those experiences. This is effective in describing their lived experiences. Phenomenology is a qualitative research approach that focuses on exploring how individuals perceive and experience a particular phenomenon (Creswell, 2013).

Purposive sampling was used in this study. Purposive sampling also known as judgmental or subjective sampling is a non-probability sampling that is selected based on the specific respondent needed in the study (Crossman, 2020). This research design was appropriate because the study focuses on collecting stories of out-of-school youth in the Municipality of Concepcion, Iloilo, Philippines .Through thematic analysis the data gathered were systematically identified, analyzed, and interpreted to uncover patterns of meaning (themes) within a set of data. Thematic analysis is a method for systematically identifying, organizing, and offering insight into patterns of meaning (themes) across the dataset. It allows the researcher to see and make sense of collective of shared meanings and experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2021)

The Participants of this study were the seven (7) selected out- of -school youth in the Municipality of Concepcion, Iloilo Philippines . These individuals represent a segment of the youth population who, for various reasons are not currently enrolled in formal education. Their participation provides valuable insights into the challenges, experiences, and perspectives of out- of-school youth making them as essential contributors to the study.

ANALYSIS

This study employed a thematic analysis approach to analyze the lived experiences of the seven (7) selected out-of-school youth (OSY) in the Municipality of Concepcion, Iloilo Philippines. The thematic approach was used to systematically examined the collected interviewed data. This approach has uncover the meaningful patterns and insights into the experiences of out of school youth, contributing to deeper understanding of their experiences.

The researcher have undergone the in-depth interview with audio recording, video tape, then right after the in-depth interview the researcher ask permission to the informants to take photo with them for the documentation of the study.

The informants of the study receive a key information about the purpose of the study, through letter and informed consent, they willingly decided to take part in the study. In order to guarantee anomity, secrecy, and the avoidance of potential harm, all information were handled with the utmost confidentiality by not disclosing the names and identity of the informants in accordance with RA 10173, generally known as the Data Privacy Act.

RESULTS

Themes Generated

Category	Emerging Themes
I. Reasons of Dropping Out of Out-of-School Youth in Concepcion, Iloilo Philippines	Lack of Financial Resources/Support Early Pregnancy
II. Experiences and Plans after leaving the school	Joined Fishing to Earn Income Worked as OFW
III. Why Should be in School	Return and Finish Schooling Gain Essential Knowledge Able to Find Decent Job

Reasons of Dropping Out of Out-of-School Youth in the Municipality of Concepcion, Iloilo

The Qualitative results of the study were supported by the narratives of the informants capturing the reasons of dropping out. A semi-structured interview was conducted among informants to gather the data.

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Based on the informants' responses, the following were the emerging themes involving the reasons of dropping out of out-of-school youth in Island Barangay in the Municipality of Concepcion, Iloilo, Philippines.

These themes were lack of financial Resources/Support and Early Pregnancy.

Lack of Financial Resources/Support

The lack of financial resources is not just a challenge to out-of-school youth, it is typically the very reason they had to stop going to school. It is the painful reality of having to give up education, not just because they wanted to, but because their families could not afford the expenses. When survival becomes the priority, education often has to take a backseat.

According to Rock et al (2016), poverty endangered the social well-being of youth living in extremely rural countries. The poor which are less organized have more difficulties of access. Thus, financial problems are a vital issue for everyone, especially students. Most students must struggle to make ends meet as they come from underprivileged families (Norazlan et al [2020](#)). Student's classroom performance is an important aspect of their journey towards academic success.

However, there are some students that may fail in its academic performance just because he/she is more concentrated on how much money to spend or how much to save depending on their subjects or projects Widener (2017). They are worried in where they are going to get the money to pay for supplies and daily need for a student in school because of their limited budget or resources Moore, et al (2021). Stanley, et al (2023) also added that students with families of a low financial status have experienced shortage of resources of money could potentially and negatively affect the student's academic performance. This evidence showcased that financial problem influence student's academic performance. Moreover, financially weak students have a high possibility of drop-out as cited by Nambala, (2022).

Therefore, financial issue is the greatest factor that could lead to dropouts among high school and college students.

Informants have expressed that they were not able to continue their education because of lack of financial support. They conveyed:

"Syempre kapigaduhon man kag indi man kaya sang akon mga ginikanan nga paeskwelahon ako kundi nagita ako sang ubra para makabulig sa ila." (Informant 7)

"of course, it was a struggle, and my parents couldn't afford to send me to school, but I found work to help out" (informant 7)

"Syempre Financial Problem" (Informant 6)

"Of course, financial Problem" (Informant 6)

"Kulang sa financial kay may damo paku nga utod nga ga eskwela sa city kag dapat kogid sila nga buligan." (Informant 3)

"We were short on money because I have many younger siblings who are studying in the city and I have to help them." (Informant 3)

"Tungod sa subra nga kapigadohon kag pito (7) kami nga mag ulolotod nga ga eskwela kolang katama ang financial amo na ang rason nga nag untat ako." (Informant 2)

"Because of extreme poverty and with seven of us siblings studying, our finances were insufficient, which is why I had to stop." (Informant 2)

"Syempre ang rason sa pag untat sang eskwela kulang man sa financial wala sa side namon ang ginikanan namon, ara lang ako sa akon lola ti kung indi kami maninguha sang una mag upod sa sinsoro indi kami ka eskwela man wala kami sang balon, pag kaon sympre pigado man ang ginikanan namon, kag that time nag love life kag nag anon a eh nangabuhi asta nga nag anona nag bata isa ka bilog." (Informant 1)

"Of course, the reason I stopped school was because we lacked of financial support. Our parents weren't able to help us. I lived with my grandmother, and if we hadn't worked together in fishing, we wouldn't have been able to go to school or to provide food. Our parents were always struggling, and at that time I fell in love and got pregnant. And I continued to live life to raise my child." (Informant 1)

Early Pregnancy

Early Pregnancy is a major factor contributing to the high rate of out-of- school youth, particularly for girls. The impact of early pregnancy on a young person's education is multifaceted firstly, it often leads to social stigma and pressure from family and peers to leave school. Secondly, the demands of motherhood, including childcare and financial responsibilities, make it difficult for young mothers to continue their education. Thirdly, the lack of adequate support systems, such as childcare facilities and education programs specifically designed for young mothers, further hinders their ability to return to school. The combination of these factors creates a cycle where early pregnancy often leads to school dropout, limiting future opportunities and perpetuating a cycle of poverty and disadvantage.

Teenage Pregnancy has been identified as one of the major contributors towards material and child morbidity and mortality rates Jonas et al (2016). Chances of stillbirths, new born weight for infants born of adolescent mothers increase significantly compared to those born to mothers ages 20-29 WHO (2014). Additionally, teenage pregnancy reduces many life opportunities for young girls, such as education, employment, and better income. Teenagers become pregnant are more likely to

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discontinue school or at least not reach the same educational levels as their peers who do not become pregnant. While Mesa (2016) stated that children of teenage mothers are more likely to grow up and repeat parent's teenage reproductive behaviors. to continue education. Dropping out rates, repeaters, scoring and unable to graduate are the academic consequences of teenage pregnancy.

Informants have expressed that they were not able to continue their education because of Early pregnancy. They conveyed:

“Nag-untat ako sa pageswkela sang nag busong ako hay wala ko na dayon gin padayon ang akon nga pag eskwela.” (Informant 4)

“I dropped out of school when I became pregnant. I didn't continue my studies after that.” (Informant 4)

“One of the reason kung ngaa nag-untat ako school because of early pregnancy at age of 19 which is 2nd year college that time because of pre-maturity sang bata need gid mag stay for a month kag need gid e priority ang pregnancy. Second reason financial Problem.” (Informant 5)

“One of the reasons I dropped out of school was because of early pregnancy at the age of 19. I was in my second year of college at that time. The baby was premature and I had to stay in the hospital for a month, so I had to prioritize the pregnancy. The second reason was financial problem.” (Informant 5)

Experiences and Plans after leaving the school

The Qualitative results of the study were supported by the narratives of the informants capturing the reasons of dropping out. A semi-structured interview was conducted among informants to gather the data.

Based on the informants' responses, the following were the emerging themes involving the experiences and plans after leaving the school of out of out-of-school youth in Poblacion.

These themes were Joined Fishing to Earn Income, Worked as OFW and Returned and finish Schooling.

Joined Fishing to Earn Income

After leaving the school out-of-school youth joined fishing to earn income to support their families, their daily needs, and to survive from their everyday life.

The prevalence of working students has become a regular Occurrence everywhere, and this phenomenon is primary motivated by financial constrains Abenoja et al (2019) it has also been attested that child labor is sign of poverty (Fernandez et al 2014). In the Philippines despite various forms of government funding to support children's education ,872thousand or 2.8 percent of the total population of 31.17 million children aged 5to17 were employed, according to the Philippine Statistical Authority (PSA). According to Reyes, (2020) fishing is one of the primary sources of income for over 1.6 million people in the country.

Informants have expressed that they were not able to continue their education because they Joined Fishing to Earn income

“nag ibang bansa naman eh. Construction kag sa lawod. Ga upod ako sa lawod kag gabulig ako kay lolo sa talamnan kag ga lawig ako ka mga kasapatan. Ga upod ako sa lawod kag para may sud-an kami kag may income. ubra sa lawod, pangisda, basketball.” (Informant 3)

“I worked abroad. worked in the construction and I joined fishing to earn an income and have food to eat. I also helped my grandfather in the farm and take care of animals, work in the mid sea, fishing, basketball” (Informant 3)

Worked as OFW

Out-of-School Youth preferred to worked abroad as Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) because it provides them with opportunities that they might not find locally due to their limited education. Despite the challenges of being an OFWs, they endure it all to earn wages to support their families, siblings' education, and sometimes to save their own future.

San Juan E. Jr., (2016) believe that being a migrant worker is a good opportunity to uplift the life of whoever tried it. Having a greener pasture is the number one reason why many Filipinos leave their families in the Philippines and work abroad.

Informants conveyed:

“kag nag OFW ako ligad lang ako nag puli kag mabalik naman ako sa Saudi para matagaan ko mayo nga kabuhi akon bata. “Nag ibang bansa naman eh.” (Informant 7)

“I just came back from working abroad. I will return to Saudi Arabia to give my child a better life. “Then, I will go back abroad but in different country, after all.” (Informant 7)

Return and Finish Schooling

Out-of-School Youths hope to Return and finish schooling to complete their education, to obtain a degree, diploma, or other credential, or simply to gain knowledge, develop skills, help support their families and have a better life.

Returning to and finishing school has become a significant focus of educational research, especially in the wake of disruptions caused by health, economic, or social factors. According to Galanza et al (2023), many Filipino college students experienced a

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decline in academic motivation and school attendance due to pandemic-related stressors, including financial hardship and mental health concerns. These factors influenced their decisions on whether to return to school or delay completion of their degrees. The study emphasized that responsive policies, such as mental health services and flexible learning options, are essential to support students' return and retention.

Informants conveyed:

“Gusto kopa mag eskwela para makabulig sa akon ginikanan. Oo gusto ko mag padayon sa pag eskwela para maka kuha ako sang diploma kag para maka bulig ako sa akon pamilya. Gusto ko maka eskwela liwat kag para (makakita) makuha ko ang skon nga gina pangayo para sa bata ko kag mahatag ko iya handom sa ulihi. Kung may opportunity, if opportunity na siguro e pursue ko man nga mag padayon eskwela. Oo, skwela eh para maka tapos maka bulig sa pamilya.” (Informant 4)

“I still want to go to school so I can help my parents. Yes, I want to continue schooling so I can get a diploma and help my family. I want to go back to school so I can get the things I need for my child and give him a future that he deserves. If there’s an opportunity, I’d definitely pursue going back to school. Yes, school is for finishing and helping the family.” (Informant 7)

Why Should you be In School?

The Qualitative results of the study were supported by the narratives of the informants capturing the reasons of dropping out. A semi-structured interview was conducted among informants to gather the data.

Based on the informants’ responses, the following were the emerging themes involving why should be in school. These themes were Gain Essential Knowledge And Able to find Decent Job

Gain Essential Knowledge

Studying directly cultivates knowledge acquisition. The process of learning, researching, and engaging with educational materials expands understanding of subjects, builds critical thinking skills, and allows for the internalization of information, resulting in increased knowledge.

The acquisition of essential knowledge among out-of-school youth (OSY) is crucial for empowering individuals and improving their social and economic mobility. In the Philippines, the Alternative Learning System (ALS) provides an accessible education pathway for OSY, focusing on essential literacy and life skills. According to the Department of Education DepEd (2022), ALS offers flexible learning opportunities for youth who have missed formal schooling, with programs that allow students to learn at their own pace. This system plays a vital role in providing essential knowledge in a format that accommodates the needs of OSY, particularly in rural and underserved communities.

Informants conveyed:

“Damo ka may nabal-an kag kung diin ka nga pungsod dal-on may eneskwelahan kagid. Kinanlan gid nga ara ka sa school kay ang knowledge mo ma kuha mo dira ma apply mo dayon in the future kung mag ubra ka kag sa adlaw-adlaw mo nga pagkabuhi.” “Sa eskwelahan damo ka gid matun an, damo mabal-an.” (Informant 5)

“You can learn a lot, and no matter where you go in the world, there are schools. You really need to be in school because the knowledge you gain there can be applied in the future when you work and in your daily life.” You can learn so much in school, you can learn a lot.” (Informant 5)

Able to Find Decent Job

Finding a decent job involves several key factors. Skills and qualifications are crucial employers seek candidates with relevant experience and training Networking plays a significant role, as many job opportunities are not publicly advertised. Job searching strategies are essential, including utilizing online job boards, company websites and professional networking platforms. Persistence and resilience are vital, as the job search process can be lengthy and challenging finally, self-presentation, including a strong resume and effective interviewing skills, significantly impacts success.

The challenge of securing decent employment is particularly acute for out-of-school youth (OSY), as they often lack formal education and the necessary skills required by employers. However, several initiatives and programs are aimed at improving their employability and ensuring that they can find stable, decent jobs. Vocational Education and Training (VET) programs have been found to be effective in enhancing the job prospects of OSY. TESDA (2023) emphasized that youth who received vocational training were more likely to find jobs in sectors such as construction, hospitality, and information technology. These training programs equip OSY with practical, industry-specific skills that are in demand in the labor market. In Nigeria, for instance, the government has partnered with various stakeholders to offer vocational training programs to OSY, leading to improved job placements and self-employment opportunities Ofuonye (2023).

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Informants conveyed:

“maka ubra ka, kay kung wala ka abi ka tapos ma ubra mo lang mga sulod balay, DH kung ano –ano lang, pero kung nakatapos kagid, nami gid nga company masudlan mo dako nga sweldo, nami gid ya eh kung makatapos ka. “Kay para makatapos sang pag eskwela para makakita sang maayo nga ubra, kay subong nga panahon pag wala ka tinapusan kabudlay mag pangita sang ubra.” “Para maka kuha diploma kag para dasig ka pangita ka ubra kay kung wala ka tinapusan budlay makakita ka imo ubra.” (Informant 1)

“You can get a job, because if you don't finish school, you'll only be doing housework, or some kind of domestic helper. But if you finish school, you can get into a good company, get a good salary, it's really good if you finish school.” Nowadays, if you don't have a degree, seeking a job is very hard.” “to get a diploma and to find a job quickly, because if you don't have a degree, it's hard to find a job.” (Informant 1).

Other informants added:

“Mag-eskwela gid kita permi para nga kung may diploma kita may ubra kita kay budlay kung wala kita diploma kay indi kita mayo ka pangita ubra para maka income kita dako.” “pagkatapos mo ya eskwela, kapangita ka ubra nga nami kung wala ka naman sa eskwelahan ang ubra mo bisan ano lang yawan kapa pangita kag dapat subong daan kagraduate ka.” (Informant 4)

“We should always go to school so that when we have a diploma, we can have a job. It's hard if we don't have a diploma because we won't be able to find a good job to earn a good income. “After you finish school, you can find a good job. If you're not in school, your job can be anything, you'll just be looking for work. you should graduate now.” (Informant 4)

CONCLUSION

The conclusions are drawn based on the thematic result of the study. The researcher concluded that lived experiences of out-of-school youth in the Municipality of Concepcion, Iloilo Philippines are very challenging. The reasons, while common lack of financial resources and early pregnancy has a unique story that reflect the struggles, sacrifices, and dreams of young individuals. Financial hardships remain the most pressing challenge, forcing many to choose work over education just to help their families survive. For young women, early pregnancy becomes a life turning point, often met with little support and difficult choices.

Despite the hardships, what stood out most in informant's responses was the unwavering hope. Many still hold onto their desire to return to school, to earn a diploma, and to secure a better life for themselves and their families. Some have taken paths such as working abroad or joining local fishing to survive, yet dream of finishing school remains alive.

In connection with these, the reasons behind dropping out of out-of-school youth in the Municipality of Concepcion is clear that the journey of out-of-school youth is not defined by failure, but by resilience and courage to continue despite the adversity. The experiences of out-of-school youth, no matter how painful or difficult, have become a motivation to strive harder and aim higher not just for themselves, but for their families and future. Their struggles shape them into more mature, responsible, and determined individuals who are ready to rise above judgement and limitations. These challenges do not break them; instead, they build stronger, wiser, and more independent people who are constantly working to become the best version of themselves.

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