Research Article

BEYOND THE BARRIERS: IDENTIFYING OBSTACLES AND SUPPORT SYSTEMS FOR OUT-OF-SCHOOL YOUTH FROM FORMAL EDUCATION

* Korsiney N. Cabasis

Professor, St. Michael's College, Iligan City, Philippines.

ABSTRACT

This paper explores into the complex challenges faced by the out-of-school youth in Iligan City, it examines the lived experiences, the barriers, and the existing support systems. Employing a qualitative research methodology, the study conducts focus group discussions with key persons associated with the AsensoKabatan-onangIliganon Network Alliance (AKINA) to systematically gather necessary data. The findings explain the complex interplay of positive and negative feelings, aspirations, and challenges that shape the experiences of out-of-school youth, it highlights the dynamic nature of their journey navigating uncertainties. These identified barriers encompass demotivation, financial constraints, unfulfilled promises, and time management conflicts, emphasizing the intricate network of difficulties hindering to their educational and personal growth. The existing support systems, including alternative learning system, government initiatives, and social networks, are recognized in fostering personal development. In proposing intervention programs, the research aims to holistically address these challenges, emphasizing comprehensive support structures and opportunities. The recommendations presented serve as a strategic roadmap, offering tailored solutions to empower out-of-school youth, bridge educational disparities, and facilitate successful reintegration into formal education, thereby contributing to a more inclusive and supportive educational landscape in Iligan City.

Keywords: out-of-school youth; formal education; support systems.

INTRODUCTION

Education serves as a cornerstone for personal growth, societal development, and economic progress. However, a significant number of youth in Iligan City find themselves disconnected from formal education, facing barriers that hinder their educational journey (Smith, 2019). This study aims to explore into the multifaceted challenges confronted by out-of-school youth in Iligan City and to identify the support systems essential for their reintegration into the formal education system. The rationale for this research lies in the recognition of the profound implications of out-of-school youth from formal education on individual lives and the broader community (Johnson, Johnson and Smith, 2018). The outcomes extend beyond immediate academic concerns, encompassing employment prospects, mental health, and the overall socio-economic of Iligan City. By revealing the obstacles faced by disconnected youth, we aim to pave the way for informed and targeted support systems that foster their educational reengagement.

Through the comprehensive exploration of these objectives, the research endeavors to provide valuable insights that can serve as a foundation for informing policymakers, aiding St. Michael's College in crafting targeted interventions for out-of-school youth (OSY), and assisting community stakeholders in formulating sustainable strategies to effectively bridge the gap for disconnected youth, as highlighted by Roberts in 2021.

THEORETICAL AND EMPIRICAL BACKGROUND

Understanding the multifaceted challenges faced by disconnected youth and the support systems necessary for their successful reintegration into formal education requires a comprehensive

*Corresponding Author: Korsiney N. Cabasis,
Professor, St. Michael's College, Iligan City, Philippines.

exploration guided by robust theoretical frameworks. In this study, three interrelated theoretical lenses—Intersectionality, Capability Approach, and Resilience Theory—illuminate the intricate dynamics influencing the experiences of out-of-school youth.

Intersectionality:

Intersectionality, a theoretical framework developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw, serves as a lens for understanding the complex interplay of various social identities and their impact on the experiences of out-of-school youth (Crenshaw, 1989). This theory recognizes that individuals hold multiple social identities (e.g., race, class, gender, disability) that intersect and interact, shaping their unique experiences and vulnerabilities. In the context of disconnected youth, an intersectional approach allows for a nuanced analysis, revealing how these social identities amplify barriers, creating distinct challenges and inequalities (Davis, 2008). For instance, a youth's experience of disconnection may be exacerbated by the intersection of socioeconomic status and race, leading to disparities in available resources and support systems. By employing intersectionality, the study aims to uncover the multifaceted nature of obstacles faced by disconnected youth, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of their experiences.

Capability Approach:

Grounded in the works of Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum, the Capability Approach provides a theoretical framework for evaluating individuals' well-being by focusing on their capabilities and freedoms to lead valuable lives (Sen, 1992; Nussbaum, 2000). For disconnected youth, the Capability Approach allows for an examination of the lack of essential capabilities—ranging from financial resources and educational skills to social networks—that hinder their ability to overcome barriers and achieve their goals. By adopting this approach, the study aims to identify the specific

capabilities that are restricted or absent for disconnected youth in Iligan City (Robeyns, 2003). Understanding these limitations is crucial for developing targeted interventions and support systems that empower youth to build the necessary capabilities and navigate their educational journeys.

Resilience Theory:

Resilience theory explores how individuals and communities navigate adversity, adapt to challenges, and overcome setbacks (Masten and Obradović, 2006). In the context of disconnected youth, resilience theory serves as a valuable framework for examining the coping mechanisms and protective factors that contribute to their ability to overcome obstacles. The study aims to identify these protective factors, which may include family support, personal strengths, and community resources (Wright and Masten, 2005). By understanding the sources of resilience, the research seeks to inform the development of support systems that reinforce these protective factors. Resilience theory, therefore, plays a pivotal role in uncovering the internal and external resources that contribute to the resilience of disconnected youth and, subsequently, their potential for successful reintegration into formal education.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The research objectives guide a meticulous investigation, seeking to provide a comprehensive understanding of the complexities surrounding youth disconnection. The ultimate goal is to inform the development of tailored interventions that address the specific needs of disconnected youth and contribute to fostering a more inclusive and supportive educational landscape in Iligan City. The four research objectives outlined below serve as key pillars in achieving this overarching aim:

1. What are they lived experiences of out-of-school youth?
2. What are the barriers faced by out-of-school youth?
3. What are the existing support systems for out-of-school youth?
4. Based on the gathered data, what are propose recommendations for tailored interventions?

METHODS

The research employs a qualitative research methodology, specifically utilizing focus group discussions with key stakeholders associated with the AsensoKabatan-onangIliganon Network Alliance (AKINA) to collect pertinent data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. What are they lived experiences of out-of-school youth?

Theme: "Navigating Uncertainty: Aspirations, Challenges, and the Pursuit of Opportunities among Out-of-School Youth"

Youth who are not enrolled in school have lived experiences that center on managing uncertainty, which encompasses a range of feelings, goals, and difficulties. A mixture of positive and negative emotions was expressed by the participants, who simultaneously struggled with future uncertainties and found happiness and value in NGOs and LGUs. A recurring theme throughout the stories is the need to work hard despite obstacles in life, as well as the search for opportunities and financial struggles brought on by a lack of parental support. There is a general feeling of dread about the future, but it is balanced with a strong will to keep a positive view in order to achieve individual goals. These experiences are

further characterized by the need for encouragement to go back to school, the value of friendship with other young people who are not in school, and the pursuit of education and wise life decisions.

The "Navigating Uncertainty" theme highlights the complex interplay between positive and negative emotions, aspirations, and challenges, underscoring the multifaceted nature of out-of-school youth's experiences. The dynamic nature of their journey is highlighted by their search for opportunities and the necessity of making strategic choices in life. The difficulties they encounter are best illustrated by their limited resources, lack of family support, and ensuing fortitude in pursuing a better future. The contrast between hope and fear displays their resolve to face uncertainties and discloses a deep internal conflict. One thing that comes out as a common theme is their desire for education, whether it comes from going back to school or taking different routes, highlighting how important it is to their imagined futures. Overall, the results highlight the need for comprehensive support systems and opportunities to empower out-of-school youth in navigating the challenges ahead by illuminating emotions and aspirations merged into their experiences.

2. What are the barriers faced by out-of-school youth?

Theme: Barriers Faced by Out-of-School Youth

Encapsulated in the theme "Barriers Faced by Out-of-School Youth: Overcoming Obstacles to Education and Personal Growth," the barriers that out-of-school youth face reveal a variety of difficulties. The demotivation resulting from life's perceived unfairness, financial constraints, and a lack of support from family were highlighted by the participants. One factor contributing to the obstacles they face is unfulfilled promises, concerning both monetary and emotional assistance. Given the frequent conflict between work obligations and personal priorities, time management becomes a major obstacle. Financial constraints, which include problems with tuition and other personal expenses, are a recurrent theme that highlights the barriers to their academic and personal development.

The obstacles that have been identified show the intricate network of difficulties that young people who are not in school face, including problems with money, time, and emotions. Their quest of education may be hampered by broken promises and a lack of support from their families, which can worsen feelings of loneliness. Budgetary limitations are a ever-present obstacle that affects learning as well as individual welfare. Their difficulties are made more complex by the conflict between their personal and professional obligations and time management problems. The fact that time and money support are consistently emphasized highlights how intertwined these obstacles are. In order to create effective interventions and support systems that help out-of-school youth overcome these obstacles on their path to education and personal growth, it is imperative that these complex challenges be understood and addressed.

3. What are the existing support systems for out-of-school youth?

Theme: Existing Support Systems for Out-of-School Youth

Capturing the theme "Existing Support Systems for Out-of-School Youth: Nurturing Growth through Organizations, Government, and Social Networks," the current support systems for youth who are not enrolled in school expose a wide range of resources. An organized method of learning is offered by formal educational alternatives like the ALS (Alternative Learning System) from

Department of Education (DepEd). Opportunities are created in part by Local Government Units (LGU), such as the Office of the Mayor and the LGU of Iligan City. External agencies such as USAID and community-based organizations like AKINA are essential in offering assistance. Pastors, friends, and other members of one's social network serve as important sources of support. It is noteworthy, though, that while some people feel alone and unsupported, others find comfort and help in their faith based organizations.

The support systems that have been identified highlight the cooperative efforts of personal, governmental, organizational, and educational networks in fostering the development of youth who are not enrolled in school. Alternatives to formal education, public policies, and outside groups all help to open doors for education and self-improvement. The significance of social networks in offering both practical and emotional support is underscored by the roles played by pastors, friends, and faith communities. The various sources of assistance point to the necessity of a thorough strategy to meet the various needs of young people who are not enrolled in school. Creating comprehensive plans to empower and encourage out-of-school youth as they make their way toward education and personal development requires an understanding of the importance of formal support structures in addition to social networks and faith.

PROPOSED INTERVENTION PROGRAMS

This intervention program aims to holistically address the lived experiences, barriers, and existing support systems for out-of-school youth, fostering an environment that empowers them to overcome challenges and pursue education and personal growth.

Theme Navigating Uncertainty: Aspirations, Challenges, and the Pursuit of Opportunities among Out-of-School Youth

Objective:

Explain and address the multifaceted experiences of out-of-school youth, providing comprehensive support for their journey.

Key Components:

- Emphasize the positive and negative emotions, aspirations, and challenges faced by out-of-school youth.
- Recognize the importance of encouragement to return to school, the value of friendships, and the pursuit of education and wise decisions.
- Develop strategies to balance the dread about the future with a positive outlook for individual goal achievement.
- Create opportunities and financial support systems to address the obstacles related to limited resources and lack of parental support.
- Implement initiatives to empower and motivate out-of-school youth in navigating uncertainties and making informed life choices.

Theme Barriers Faced by Out-of-School Youth: Overcoming Obstacles to Education and Personal Growth

Objective:

Understand and address the complex network of barriers hindering the education and personal growth of out-of-school youth.

Key Components

- Identify and tackle demotivation stemming from perceived life unfairness and unfulfilled promises.
- Address financial constraints and lack of family support as key barriers to academic and personal development.
- Develop time management strategies to overcome conflicts between work obligations and personal priorities.
- Implement interventions to alleviate budgetary limitations affecting learning and individual welfare.
- Recognize the interconnection of obstacles and create/strengthen a tailored support systems to overcome these challenges.

Theme Existing Support Systems for Out-of-School Youth: Nurturing Growth through Organizations, Government, and Social Networks

Objective:

Strengthen and expand current support systems to nurture the growth and development of out-of-school youth through diverse resources.

Key Components

- Utilize educational alternatives such as ALS to provide organized learning opportunities.
- Collaborate with Local Government Units (LGUs) to create and enhance opportunities for out-of-school youth.
- Engage agencies and community-based organizations to offer essential assistance and support.
- Recognize and leverage the role of social networks, including pastors, friends, and faith communities, in providing support.
- Develop comprehensive plans that integrate formal support structures with social networks and faith-based support.

CONCLUSION

In summary, out-of-school youth face a mix of challenges and aspirations, emphasizing the need for comprehensive support. Challenges include financial struggles and conflicting priorities, while a strong desire for education persists. Overcoming these barriers requires understanding and addressing the complex network of difficulties.

Existing support systems, highlighted in the theme "Nurturing Growth," encompass formal education alternatives, government initiatives, and community-based organizations. Social networks and faith communities also play crucial roles. Recognizing the importance of both formal structures and personal networks is vital in creating effective strategies to empower and encourage out-of-school youth on their path to education and personal development.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the comprehensive analysis of the lived experiences, barriers, and existing support systems encountered by out-of-school youth in Iligan City, the ensuing recommendations serve as a strategic roadmap for stakeholders and institutions to address the identified challenges effectively. These recommendations are tailored to foster a supportive environment, bridge educational disparities, and empower the youth toward successful reintegration into formal education.

To Schools:

- Establish outreach programs to identify and engage with out-of-school youth, providing information about available educational alternatives, support systems, and opportunities.
- Develop flexible learning programs that accommodate the diverse needs and circumstances of out-of-school youth, emphasizing practical skills and life-oriented education.
- Collaborate with NGOs and local businesses to create internship and apprenticeship programs, offering hands-on learning experiences and potential employment opportunities.

To Local Government Units (LGUs):

- Strengthen and expand existing initiatives, such as the Office of the Mayor and LGU programs, to create more opportunities for out-of-school youth, including vocational training and skill development.
- Implement policies that address financial barriers, such as subsidies for tuition and assistance with personal expenses, to make education more accessible.
- Establish community centers that provide a safe and supportive environment for out-of-school youth, offering counseling services, mentorship programs, and access to educational resources.

To NGOs:

- Collaborate with formal education systems to enhance the reach of Alternative Learning Systems (ALS) and other non-traditional education methods.
- Develop mentorship programs that connect out-of-school youth with successful individuals who can provide guidance and support.
- Advocate for policy changes at the local and national levels to address systemic issues contributing to the challenges faced by out-of-school youth.

To Key Stakeholders:

- Foster partnerships between schools, LGUs, NGOs, and businesses to create a comprehensive and interconnected support network for out-of-school youth.
- Conduct awareness campaigns to eliminate societal stigma surrounding out-of-school youth, promoting understanding and empathy.
- Invest in research and data collection to continually assess the effectiveness of interventions and adapt strategies to evolving needs.

For Program Implementers:

- Regularly assess the impact of the intervention programs through surveys, feedback sessions, and collaboration with community members to ensure relevance and effectiveness.
- Implement capacity-building programs for teachers, mentors, and support staff involved in working with out-of-school youth, emphasizing empathy, understanding, and motivational strategies.
- Establish a feedback loop involving out-of-school youth in the design and evaluation of interventions, ensuring their perspectives are considered in decision-making processes.

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