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Open high school program: challenges and opportunities (mandated duty, consistent in faith and healthy in life)

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Abstract

The study examined the implementation, challenges, and opportunities of the Open High School Program (OHSP) in three secondary schools in Tabaco City Division, namely Tabaco National High School, San Lorenzo National High School, and San Miguel National High School. The OHSP had served as an alternative mode of secondary education, designed to accommodate learners who could not attend traditional schools due to personal, economic, or geographical constraints. In analyzing the data gathered from the survey on the implementation of the OHSP, descriptive statistical tools were primarily employed. The main statistical measure used was the weighted mean, which determined the average level of implementation and degree of challenges based on the frequency of responses across the five-point Likert scale. The study had involved 3 school heads, 25 OHS teachers, and 58 learners who had utilized surveys to answer the research questions. Notwithstanding the full implementation of the different projects and activities, there were still obstacles and challenges that had hindered the productivity and success of the program. For instance, training had been conducted annually; however, not all necessary skills required by teachers had been given attention, such as teaching skills using different educational applications to make learning more meaningful. Another challenge faced by implementers was the lack of students' motivation, which had resulted in poor participation and performance. Many OHSP students had experienced feelings of isolation, lack of peer interaction, and limited opportunities for collaborative learning. To address these concerns, the intervention program, "Strengthening Learner Engagement in the Open High School Program through Group Chat Collaboration," had proposed the use of structured online group chat platforms as a tool to foster peer support, enhance communication, and sustain motivation among learners. The researcher had suggested and recommended the use of a Program Implementation Plan to be utilized as a guide by all implementing schools to ensure that all projects and activities are done successfully on the prescribed time. This would have enabled them to align the program with learners' expectations, leading to improved outcomes and achievements for the learners following the plan.

Keywords: Challenges and Opportunities; Open High School Program; Program Design; Program Management; Training Support

1. Introduction

Education was recognized as a fundamental human right, equipping individuals with essential skills and knowledge for full participation in society. However, learners have frequently encountered obstacles that impeded their access to and completion of basic education. One potential remedy to this predicament was the adoption of alternative educational modalities, exemplified through the Open High School Program (OHSP).

The Open High School Program (OHSP) had been an alternative secondary-education mode that utilized distance-learning, face-to-face teaching facilitation, and self-learning modules to enable learners who could not attend regular classes to complete high school. Created under the K-12 reforms, it had provided a "learning anywhere and anytime"

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option for elementary graduates, school-dropouts, and Philippine Education Placement Test (PEPT) passers, allowing enrollment at any time and a maximum six-year completion period. The program catered to students facing physical, financial, or geographic constraints, offering a flexible schedule, self-paced study, and reduced school fees and transportation costs.

Notwithstanding the implementation of OHSP through some public schools as an intervention for students identified as being at risk of dropping out, referred to as SARDOs, a significant number of dropouts had remained unable to finish high school. OHSP administrators needed to implement and observe a well-coordinated balance of advocacy, support, and monitoring. Continuous monitoring and evaluation had been necessary to track learner progress, assess teacher effectiveness, and refine strategies, thereby rendering OHSP sustainable and impactful, and helping learners who needed flexible pathways succeed.

In Tabaco City Division, four schools had offered the Open High School Program (OHSP) to cater to learners in need of access to quality education despite personal constraints. Learners in this program had attended classes every Saturday, covering all subjects, like those offered in formal education. To ensure continuity in learning, classes had been shifted to Modular Distance Learning (MDL) during calamities, disasters, and/or emergencies precipitated through natural or human-induced hazards.

The study had enhanced readers' awareness and understanding of the status of OHSP implementation in Tabaco City Division, highlighting challenges and opportunities related to Program Management, Program Design and structures, and Training and support. This had served as a wake-up call for stakeholders to strengthen advocacy efforts, raising awareness about OHSP within the community and among potential learners, thereby attracting more students to the program and augmenting its impact on widening access to education.

2. Methodology

This study employed a quantitative approach to investigate the implementation, challenges, and opportunities of the Open High School Program (OHSP) in the Tabaco City Division. The research design outlined the structure and strategy for investigating the problem, whereas the methodology specified the procedures, tools, and techniques utilized to collect, analyze, and interpret data, thereby ensuring the research was credible, valid, and replicable. To address the research questions, surveys were employed as instruments to gather data for analysis. The primary research instrument, a questionnaire, was typically utilized in quantitative research designs. The use of various data collection techniques and the acquisition of information from multiple sources, including learners, teachers, and program staff, enhanced the validity and reliability of the data and its interpretation (Zohrabi, 2013). Moreover, the survey provided a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Lopez-Fernandez and Molina-Arizona, 2014).

The process entailed determining the participants through purposive sampling, followed by the distribution of survey questionnaires for the quantitative component. After preparing and validating the research instruments, data gathering, tabular analysis, interpretation, and results ensued. Quantitative data were primarily collected through the distribution of a survey questionnaire to the OHSP implementing schools in the Tabaco City Division. The questionnaire comprised closed-ended questions designed to measure the extent of program implementation, as well as identify challenges and opportunities. The development of the questionnaire was informed by a review of relevant literature, and its questions were pretested prior to administration to ensure their clarity and effectiveness

3. Materials

Survey Questionnaires for School administrators, Open High School Teachers and Open High School Learners

4. Results and Discussion

Based on the analysis of the data, the findings of the study revealed the following:

4.1. Program Management

The findings revealed that there had been full implementation along program management. Among the indicators, establishing strong governance with clear roles and responsibilities -- School head, OHSP Coordinator, and teachers had fulfilled their respective roles, which had garnered the highest rating with a mean of 4.89, indicating Full Implementation. Conversely, ensuring that OHSP policies and guidelines had been disseminated to learners, school personnel, parents, and stakeholders through orientation programs and conferences had received the lowest rating,

with a mean of 4.32, although still indicating Full Implementation. This suggested that schools had needed to enhance information dissemination. Broader communication and orientation activities could have rendered the program more effective and better understood by all stakeholders.

As stipulated in DepEd Order No. 46, series of 2006, the community and Local Government (LGU) had been expected to assist schools in promoting OHSP through various means, including flyers, brochures, radio and television announcements, community assemblies, and consultation meetings with school officials, Parents-Teachers Association (PTA) officers, and barangay councils. The overall general weighted mean of 4.57 for all indicators had signified full implementation of the program. It was evident that school heads, OHSP coordinators, and teachers had adhered to the guidelines on OHSP implementation, as outlined in DepEd Order No. 46, s. 2006, dated November 30, 2006. This implied that implementing schools had been aware of the duties and responsibilities of individuals involved in the program, and that necessary aspects of implementation had been managed effectively. As noted by Sapre (2002), management involved a series of actions and tasks relevant to the organized and effectual application of resources within an organization to attain objectives.

4.2. Program Design and Structure

The findings of the study indicated that all indicators had incurred a mean with a verbal interpretation of "fully implemented." Specifically, the prescribed frequency and duration of class meetings/consultations had been discussed with learners, garnering a mean score of 4.82, which corresponded to "fully implemented." This suggested that teachers and students engaged in dialogues regarding the number of classes. Furthermore, it implied that OHSP learners had participated in orientation programs alongside their parents/guardians, thereby enhancing their understanding of the program and facilitating the completion of necessary documents, including the learner's and parent's/guardian's agreement and class schedules, as stipulated in DepEd Order No. 46, s. 2006.

The indicator that had ranked second pertained to the inclusion of OHSP as a performance target in the School Improvement Plan (SIP), serving as an alternative to the regular high school program, particularly for school leavers and those at risk of dropping out, with a mean score of 4.68, indicating "fully implemented." This implied that schools in Tabaco City Division offering OHSP had complied with the Implementing Rules and Regulations of Republic Act No. 10665, an Act Establishing the Open High School System in the Philippines and Appropriating Funds therefor. Further analysis revealed that fostering a collaborative environment among OHSP schools in the division had garnered a mean score of 4.36, corresponding to "fully implemented," thus ranking second-to-last. This suggested that the division had effectively collaborated and communicated to ensure adherence to the guidelines and policies set forth by the Department of Education for the full implementation of the Open High School Program.

4.3. Training and Support

The analysis revealed that the general weighted mean for training and support was 3.55, which fell under "mostly implemented." The highest means was garnered by "Regular classroom monitoring and supervision of school administrators and OHSP supervisors was conducted to give technical support and guidance," with a rating of 4.14, interpreted as Mostly Implemented. This indicated that the assigned office to monitor OHSP implementation in the division was effective in its role. The Division OHSP coordinator and school administrators regularly conducted classroom monitoring to assess the appropriateness of strategies and approaches employed by teachers when dealing with diverse learners.

Additionally, teachers had opportunities to develop assessments congruent to learners' differences, as reflected by the indicator "Assessment tools were matched to learners' abilities and circumstances," with a mean of 4.79, or "Fully Implemented." Two indicators, "Access to learning resources (print, digital, multimedia)" with a mean of 3.86, and "Peer collaboration and mentoring among OHSP teachers" with a mean of 3.36, were described as "mostly implemented." The indicator "Focus group discussion was held regularly (quarterly) to personally discuss issues encountered by teachers and learners in the field" was described as "slightly implemented," with a mean of 3.32. This suggested that school administrators and OHSP coordinators should conduct quarterly conferences or focus group discussions to address issues and challenges encountered during program implementation.

4.4. School Administration

The findings revealed that the challenges encountered by school administrators had a general weighted mean of 2.61, which was interpreted as "fairly challenging". This suggested that, overall, the challenges were manageable, and with necessary adjustments or improvements, they could be addressed effectively. The data implied that schools could provide support and preventing crises from escalating into severe issues, which was indicative of effective leadership

among the three schools offering the program. However, among the ten indicators, lack of students' motivation, with a mean score of 3.75, was interpreted as challenging and emerged as the most significant challenge encountered by school heads in implementing the program. This underscored the need for incorporating motivational activities that extended beyond mere provision of lessons or competencies. According to Dweck's (2006) research on the growth mindset, motivated students were more likely to perceive difficulties as opportunities for learning rather than obstacles.

The data also revealed that implementing schools provided training to enhance teaching pedagogies and approaches, as well as assessment construction, tailored to individual learners' circumstances. However, it was noted that not all requisite teaching skills were addressed during annual training sessions. Furthermore, the indicators "lack of learning facilities" (mean: 2.00) and "limited budget allocation for OHSP" (mean: 2.21) were categorized as "least challenging". The data suggested that school administrators allocated sufficient budget to support learning facilities for teachers and students. The findings further revealed that the indicator with the lowest mean score was "insufficient staffing/teachers for program implementation" (mean: 1.64), which was interpreted as "less challenging". Nonetheless, it was evident that constant and annual training for these teachers was necessary, highlighting the need for continuous capacity building to ensure they remained equipped to effectively implement the program.

4.5. Community Involvement

The result of the study showed that challenges encountered by community stakeholders during the implementation of OHSP had a mean of 3.49, indicating that the implementation was challenging for the community. This suggested that the community faced difficulties in adapting to the program. Specifically, the limited community awareness of OHSP, with a means of 4.00, was a significant challenge. The lack of awareness among community members likely hindered awareness, as community partnerships were essential for creating effective schools that met the needs of students, teachers, and the broader community.

Schutz (2006) stated that improved school-community engagement could contribute to academic achievement and promote a more equal and democratic society. Furthermore, the lack of parental support, with a mean of 3.49, was also a challenge. This indicated that many parents of OHS students did not provide full support to the program, neglecting their children's needs in school. To address this, schools were expected to hold regular conferences with OHSP parents to encourage and remind them of their important roles and functions in their children's schooling. A study by Suarez (2017) found that the lack of support from stakeholders was a significant barrier to the implementation of OHSP, underscoring the need for community engagement and parental involvement.

4.6. Learners

The findings of the study revealed that the primary challenge faced by students was irregular attendance, stemming from work or personal issues, with a weighted mean of 3.93, which signified a challenging issue. The significance of parental support and participation in addressing this challenge was highlighted by Evangelista (2008), who posited that parent involvement was crucial for achieving progress in pupils and the broader school community. Sapungan & Sapunga (2014) emphasized that involving parents in education could lead to proactive implementation of changes and development among students, ultimately contributing to quality reform in education.

In contrast, the findings revealed that the lack of immediate support and feedback from teachers was a relatively minor issue, with a mean of 1.96. This suggested that teachers provided timely support and feedback to students, thereby helping to address their academic difficulties despite their personal and professional commitments. Kehrer, Kelly, & Heffernan (2013) observed that immediate feedback was essential for correcting misconceptions and preventing the reinforcement of mistakes, thereby facilitating student learning.

5. Conclusions

Based on the findings, the following conclusions were deduced:

- The Open High School Program (OHSP) in Tabaco City Division was effectively implemented, with strong program management and design.
- Challenges existed, including limited community awareness, lack of parental support, and student motivation issues.
- Teachers provided timely support and feedback, but training and support could be improved, particularly in addressing diverse learner needs and promoting peer collaboration.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions, the following recommendations were offered:

- Schools conducted regular information campaigns and orientation programs to increase community awareness and encourage parental involvement in OHSP.
- Continuous capacity-building programs were provided for OHSP teachers, focusing on addressing diverse learner needs, peer collaboration, and effective use of technology.
- Motivational activities and incentives were implemented to improve student attendance and engagement, and additional support was provided for students with work or personal commitments.

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