

Alternative Learning System (ALS) for the Marginalized, Excluded and Vulnerable Sectors (MEVS), ALS for Lifelong Learning

Context

The Out-of-School Phenomenon

According to the National Youth Commission (NYC), Out-of-School Children and Youth (OSCY) refers to 7 to 14 years old and not enrolled in any formal or vocational school and 15-24 years old and not enrolled in any formal or vocational school, not formally employed, and not a tertiary level graduate. The Philippines ranks high as one of the countries with a sizable number of OSCY. In a co-publication of the International Labor Organization (ILO) and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) released in 2014, the Philippines ranked the highest in number in 2012 among 8 ASEAN countries. Even higher than that of Indonesia with a population double than the Philippines.

OSCY numbers continue to grow and drop-out rates have even increased especially in poorer regions of the country. In 2013, the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) reported that the number of 5-17 years old not attending school was estimated at 3.249M. The recent number, according to PSA's Annual Poverty Indicators Survey (APIS) is 3.8 million or 10 percent of the 39 million Filipinos with age range 6 to 24 years old or 1 in every 10 Filipinos aged 6 to 24 who are out of school. Poverty is the overriding reason for dropping-out as the direct and indirect cost of education continues to grow, even though education is supposed to be free.

Nationwide, about 53% of OSCYs belong to families whose income fall at the bottom 30% based on their per capita income.

Table 3. Percent Distribution of OSCY by Per Capita Income Decile and Sex: Philippines, 2016

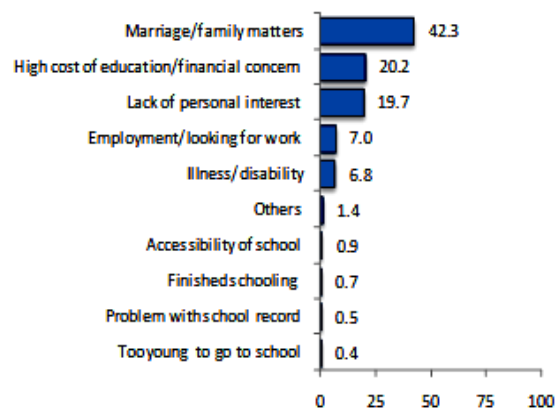
Decile	Male	Female	Both Sexes	Both Sexes
Number of OSCYs (in '000)	1,184	2,623	3,807	
First Decile	23.5	20.2	21.2	21.2
Second Decile	14.7	17.5	16.6	37.9
Third Decile	15.2	14.6	14.8	52.7
Fourth Decile	11.9	11.8	11.9	64.5
Fifth Decile	9.1	12.6	11.5	76.0
Sixth Decile	7.4	10.3	9.4	85.4
Seventh Decile	5.4	6.9	6.4	91.8
Eighth Decile	7.9	3.6	5.0	96.8
Ninth Decile	2.8	1.9	2.2	98.9
Tenth Decile	2.2	0.6	1.1	100.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	

Philippine Statistics Authority, APIS 2016

Drop-outs are especially high in the poorest regions. Department of Education (DepEd) data showed that among the country's 17 regions, the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM), with one of the highest rate of poverty incidence, also has the highest drop-out rate which increased by 76% comparing SY 2002-2003 and 2012-2013. Even in the National Capital Region (NCR), comparing the same school years, drop-out rate increased by 77%. Additional factors such as natural disasters and conflict situations further aggravate the situation.

***The Out-of-School phenomenon reflects
the over-all socio-economic situation of the country including poverty,
regional inequalities, rapid population growth rate,
sluggish economic growth and low absorption of the labor force.***

Figure 1. Reason for Not Attending School of the OSCYs Philippines, 2016



Source: Philippine Statistics Authority

According to the Annual Poverty Indicators Survey (APIS), the most common reasons among OSCYs for not attending school were marriage or family matters (42.3%), high cost of education or financial concerns (20.2%), and lack of personal interest (19.7%). Marriage or family matters were the main reason among women OSY with 59.3%; while among males, it was lack of personal interest with 36.5%.

Even government interventions such as the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) which requires beneficiaries to send their children to school, barely made a dent in addressing the OSCY phenomenon. The number of OSCY had in fact increased since 4Ps started in 2008, from around 2.7 to 3.8 million. (2016 APIS, PSA)

Government Program to Educate the Out-of-School: Non-Formal Education (NFE) and the Alternative Learning System (ALS)

The Non-Formal Education (NFE) is one of government's programs to address the education of the out-of-school. Although Non-Formal Education started way back even before the Commonwealth era, it was thru the Governance of Education Act 2001 or R.A. 9155 that the Alternative Learning System (ALS) was recognized as *"a parallel learning system to provide a viable alternative to the existing formal education instruction, encompassing both the non-formal and informal sources of knowledge and skills"* (Sec. 12.1 Rules XII). The Bureau of Alternative Learning System (BALS) was established to *"address the learning needs of the marginalized groups of the population including the deprived, depressed, and underserved citizens"*(Sec. 2). Among its goals is to provide an alternative learning system for out of school youth and adults and help improve their socio-economic status by enhancing their basic educational capability through functional education and literacy and continuing education programs.

ALS learners are given learning modules. Equivalency certificates are awarded to those who successfully complete the achievement test at the end of the learning module. The NFE Accreditation and Equivalency (A&E) holds considerable potential for OSCY and school drop-

outs to return to formal schooling or obtain an equivalency certificate, which in turn opens opportunities for further education and decent work.

Unfortunately, the vast majority of the OSCY are not being reached thru the current program. The total number of beneficiaries is only at less than half a million per year or around 300,000. The program is severely under-resourced and account for less than 1% of the education budget.

Compared to the allocation for every pupil in the formal system, the task of providing education to out of school youth should be equally given priority since lack of access to education is caused mainly by poverty and further deprivation of education perpetuates the cycle of poverty both in urban and rural areas. This can only be addressed by sufficient financing for ALS with at least Php 5,000 per learner inclusive of the modules and funds to increase the number of mobile teachers, learning centers and allowance for instructional managers (IMs). BALS only got an average of 0.19% from the national budget for education, thus inadequate to fully implement its program. Recently, the functions of the former BALS was subsumed in the different bureaus. This further poses a challenge to the effective implementation of ALS programs nationwide.

Issues and Concerns with Government ALS

The following are some of the issues and concerns on ALS presented by local People's Organizations (POs), NGOs and sectors in the Island consultations facilitated by E-Net.

Policy level. Institutional changes are required to ensure sustainable and long-term reductions to OSY. Based on experience and practice, ALS as a program of DepEd is not able to reach its full potential to address education for the out of school. It is dependent on whether or not it is given sufficient financial subsidy and other necessary assistance so as to cover a substantial number of learners. Furthermore, it is affected when changes in the bureaucracy happen and program priorities shift. CSOs, most especially E-Net, have long been calling for the institutionalization of ALS and ensure that sufficient budget allocation is given.



Data on OSCY – Mapping the OSCY. Lack of a facilitating mechanism to track the OSCY population, documenting experiences, disseminating information, and networking with those engaged in youth activities and advocacy for the youth has limited the potential for making a significant impact on the OSCY problem. Data is especially important not only in tracking the areas where there are large numbers of OSCY, but on knowing and understanding the different contexts of the OSCY so as to target what education programs, including mode, will best suit their concrete reality or situation.

Resource Mobilization and Scaling Up. Existing programs only reach a very small proportion. Other constraints on scaling up programs include difficulties in replicating successful models. While CSOs have best practices, their limited resources affect sustainability of their education services and also, only a limited number of learners are reached. Government support and partnerships with CSOs are possible avenues for improving the environment so that ALS programs can flourish.

Local level (Division level). At the local level, the Local School Board (LSB) is limited by its directive to focus on maintaining and managing schools. Public education, which includes ALS, does not comprise their mandate. ALS is seen as a form of education that will help curb the increasing number of OSY across the country. However, the limitations of LSB make it difficult to access government funds that could help set up and finance ALS.

Program level. DepEd report says there are only about 6,000 ALS mobile teachers, coordinators and facilitators. At least 3 times more are needed to reach out to 1 million learners. ALS mobile teachers are also overloaded with seventy (70) learners per teacher. A World Bank study recommends less than forty (40). Global studies on literacy programs that is similar to ALS recommend twenty (20) learners per teacher.

Lack or absence of community learning centers (CLCs) where classes can take place particularly in highly congested slum areas and in remote rural areas is a major factor affecting the implementation of ALS.

Quality is of course affected by the large class sizes, less contact time, lack of ALS modules, non-conducive learning environment, lack of teacher training and finally, the particular circumstances of learners who may be working, or loaded with domestic chores, or have learning difficulties, and other factors that made them drop out of school. There is still a low percent of ALS completers and test takers and low passing rate at 20-30%.

Recommendations: Fulfilling the Commitment to 'Education for All'

Improve Instruments for Data Gathering, Research and Analysis

- ◆ Address lack of or limitations in data collection and research on the number and profiles of out of school children, youth and adults. Research on multiple barriers for not attending school so that they can be effectively targeted with interventions; Use the data and research for informed policy making, including increased investment.

Continue to Expand Public Provision of Education and Allocate Resources

- ◆ Increase public spending on basic education; Support areas where there are higher rates in school exclusion and drop-outs;
- ◆ Prioritize pre-primary provision in marginalized rural and urban poor areas in order to provide equitable opportunities;
- ◆ Continue to expand public provision of school infrastructure and investment in terms of coverage and quality improvement targeted at areas where need is greatest – rural areas and urban slums;

Increase Opportunities for Alternative Pathways to Basic Education

- ◆ Expand and intensify delivery of Alternative Learning System (ALS) that is appropriate to age levels and responds to the different contexts of learners;
- ◆ Significant financial allocation to strengthen and expand ALS coverage;
- ◆ Increase the per capita budget per ALS learner;
- ◆ Fund and establish learning centers and facilities that are close to the learners or where the learners are, given their particular contexts – community-based, near homes, in places of work;
- ◆ Ensure sufficient salaries and subsidies of ALS coordinators and mobile teachers - additional ALS Coordinators and ALS mobile teachers especially in divisions where the number of drop-outs and out-of-school children and youth is significant; Additional support such as transportation/food/housing allowance for ALS mobile teachers and less requirements for ALS teachers' accreditation;

Develop Appropriate Curriculum and Modules

- ◆ Come up with ALS framework and material appropriate for particular context of learners – taking into account their needs and specific circumstance and in consideration of the K12 curriculum;
- ◆ Develop the curriculum to integrate awareness on health care especially drug awareness and reproductive health (drug addiction and early pregnancy being main reasons for dropping out of school), environmental concern and disaster preparedness, education on human/community relationships, life skills, work skills and social and cultural development to be more productive and functional citizens;

Teachers Recruitment, Training and Deployment

- ◆ Recruit and deploy teachers favoring rural and urban poor areas where there are large numbers of OSCY to address disparities in access and availability of education;
- ◆ Upgrade teachers condition in terms of welfare, salaries and benefits so these will not be barriers for them to perform well;

Interventions that Address Multiple and Overlapping Barriers Keeping Children/Youth from School

- ◆ Strengthen sector/agency coordination for improved cross-sectoral planning and approach in addressing multiple and overlapping barriers to schooling simultaneously.



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