RE-EXAMINING THE RESPONSIVENESS OF SECONDARY LEVEL ALTERNATIVE DELIVERY MODES

Case Studies of Selected Open High School Program (OHSP) Schools in the Philippines Serving Marginalized Learners
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Foreword

Marginalization and educational exclusion remain a reality among many children and youth in the Philippines and other Southeast Asian countries. Moving towards inclusive education through the institutionalization of Alternative Delivery Modalities (ADM) like the Open High School Program (OHSP) manifests the strong resolve of the Philippine Department of Education (DepEd) to respond to the diverse needs and realities of all learners in various parts of the country. As ADMs become an accepted fixture in the educational landscape and a means to engage learners from marginalized groups and those who face challenges in educational access, their responsiveness needs to be assessed to ensure their alignment with the realities within the varied contexts of learners.

Through this descriptive case study, SEAMEO INNOTECH seeks to document the nature of the Philippine OHSP secondary schools’ program implementation within these specific dimensions of marginalization: children in conflict situations, child laborers in rural areas, and children in urban poverty. The three case studies showcase the strengths of current OHSP implementation in meeting the educational needs of children from marginalized contexts.
The studies also highlight the issues and concerns that need to be addressed to improve the flexibility of the program for it to continuously serve as a social justice tool for disadvantaged learners. The studies also identify some possible areas for improvement and specific strategies and practices that can help in implementing the modality within the context of the school and the learners’ circumstances.

As a SEAMEO Regional Center committed to support the realization of inclusive quality education for all, we hope this research publication promotes a better understanding of ways to address barriers to inclusion and the alternative modalities of delivering basic education. Our ultimate objective is to support our vision of “a better future for every learner in Southeast Asia”.

Ramon C. Bacani
Center Director
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<td>CNN</td>
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<td>EFA</td>
<td>Education for All</td>
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<td>LAC</td>
<td>Learning Action Cell</td>
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<td>MOOE</td>
<td>Maintenance and Other Operational Expenses</td>
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<td>M&amp;E</td>
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<td>NGO</td>
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<td>New People’s Army</td>
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<td>Open High School Program</td>
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<td>Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process</td>
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<td>PEPT</td>
<td>Philippine Educational Placement Test</td>
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<td>Professional Learning Network</td>
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<td>Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers</td>
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<td>Parents-Teachers Association</td>
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<td>Republic Act</td>
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<td>Recognition of Prior Learning</td>
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<td>Social Development Committee</td>
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<td>Southeast Asian Ministers of Education</td>
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<td>Sangley Point National High School</td>
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Abstract

In the pursuit of Education for All, equitable access to quality education remains a challenge despite expanded reach through traditional and non-traditional modes or systems of education. The need to reach out to marginalized students and those at risk of dropping out, to get young people to attend and stay in school, to address poor academic performance of students, and consider students’ personal learning circumstances are some of the bases for the development of Alternative Delivery Modalities (ADMs). The lack of versatility and flexibility of conventional learning delivery and the realities and needs of disadvantaged learners were also identified as triggers for the development of ADMs. ADMs act as pull system factors in the creation of an enriched and varied learning environment wherein learning becomes more accessible and attractive to learners. This study attempts to understand one of the ADMs, the Open High School Program (OHSP). This is the flagship alternative learning modality in the Philippines’ secondary education. Specifically, the study delved into the manner of implementation of the OHSP and how it is adapted to serve children from marginalized groups. The study also looked at the features of OHSP that proved to be beneficial to these groups, as well as those aspects that need improvement for the program to achieve greater relevance and effectiveness.

Through a descriptive case study method, three schools implementing OHSP were purposively selected based on the type of marginalized learners they were serving. These are: (1) Carmen National High School in Mindanao, which caters to children in conflict situations; (2) Kamora National High School in Northern Luzon, which accommodates child laborers in the agricultural sector; and (3) Kariton Open High School in Luzon, south of Manila, which caters to urban poor children. Information was gathered from interviews and focus group discussion conducted with school heads, teachers, and students from school year 2012-2013. Secondary data analysis was likewise employed to supplement primary data.
The three case studies show that, as an alternative modality, OHSP: (1) has a number of strategies deemed appropriate to the type of marginalized learners being served; these strategies revolve around Teaching Method/Pedagogy, Content, Support System and Learning Environment; (2) serves as an important social justice tool as it provides opportunities for learners who do not have access to traditional classroom education due to their circumstances; (3) has been widely appreciated by partners, stakeholders and by the learners themselves for providing opportunities to those who desire to complete their secondary education outside the confines of the traditional school system; (4) has been helpful in allowing marginalized children to take part in the learning process again; and (5) should have the flexibility to be aligned with the unique needs and circumstances of the different types of marginalized learners; this is critical to the program’s effectiveness in satisfying its mandate as an inclusive alternative delivery modality. While strategies have been employed to address the learners’ specific situations, there remains significant issues and gaps that need to be managed so as to refine the OHSP and make it more responsive to learners’ needs and more effective in achieving improved learning outcomes. Moreover, there is a need to revisit the OHSP to assess its responsiveness as far as institutional arrangements are concerned.
Introduction

Alternative delivery modes (ADMs), considered as one of the Flexible Learning Options (FLOs), are nontraditional modes or systems of education delivery that are implemented within the formal basic education system and allow schools to deliver quality education to marginalized students and those at risk of dropping out, as well as help the latter overcome personal, social, and economic constraints (Department of Education [DepEd], 2012). ADMs, therefore, are pull systems that enrich and differentiate the learning environment to make learning more accessible and attractive to learners. ADMs allow students to come and go from a school in order to increase their chance and opportunity to complete formal education despite challenging personal circumstances.

Use of alternative modalities in formal education is an attempt to extend access to education in developing countries such as the Philippines. The demand for ADMs in the Philippines has been increasing amid constraints in the educational budget since they have been recognized to respond to the need for a better-educated workforce who are most likely to succeed in a knowledge-based global economy (Figueroedo and Anzalone, 2003). Technological advancements that paved the way for growing interest in adopting new forms of information and communication technology (ICT) have also contributed to the genesis of ADMs. As the limitations of the traditional school system become evident, the role of ADMs likewise increases in
importance and urgency. ADMs’ significance have been heightened in education systems characterized by the insufficient number of trained personnel required to teach in schools and the misalignment between the prescribed school calendar or the timing of school days with the participation of certain students (Figueredo and Anzalone, 2003). The irrelevance of formal knowledge often encountered by school learners likewise characterizes many educational systems. “Abstract, fact-centered, and decontextualized knowledge tends to characterize the curricula, which has been leading to dropping out or poor school performance” (World Bank [WB], 2005).

Around 4 million children and youth were out of school in 2013 in the Philippines (Philippine Statistics Authority [PSA], 2015). Among children aged 12 to 15, 7.1 percent did not attend school while 19.42 percent of the students enrolled in first year high school did not complete secondary education (PSA, 2017a). The low and sluggish participation rate in secondary education as seen in Figure 1 shows that the formal system has been struggling to encourage young people to attend and stay in school, particularly after completing the primary level.

Figure 1. Net Enrollment Rate and Dropout Rate in the Secondary Level: 2010–2016

Source: DepEd, 2016
The weak holding power and poor academic student performance in many secondary schools have also been attributed in part to the conventional learning delivery system that often lacks versatility and flexibility to satisfy the learning needs of children and young people in varied circumstances (DepEd et al., 2008). Besides the inflexibility of the formal school model, other barriers that prevent children from attending or staying in secondary school include inadequate school supply and/or the poor quality of secondary education in some schools. In the search for strategies that will permit the expansion of the path to education for more young people, ADMs have been identified as one of the Philippine DepEd’s significant programmatic responses.

This research brief features case studies in an attempt to understand the DepEd’s Open High School Program (OHSP) as the flagship alternative learning modality in Philippine secondary education and gauge the extent by which it has addressed the needs of its intended beneficiaries—marginalized learners. The studies specifically sought to determine how OHSP was implemented and adapted to serve children from marginalized groups, identify the factors that proved beneficial to the beneficiaries, and which aspects of the program need to be improved for greater relevance and effectiveness. Based on these, policy and program recommendations to update and upgrade OHSP implementation in secondary education were identified.

Makati High School, one of the pioneer schools in implementing OHSP, was featured in a newspaper for opening up new possibilities to marginalized learners. (Photo by SEAMEO INNOTECH, 2013)
Method

To complete the descriptive case studies, three schools with OHSPs were purposively selected based on the type of marginalized learners they served. Carmen National High School (CNHS) (North Cotabato) was located in Mindanao and so catered to children in conflict-stricken areas. Kamora National High School (KNHS) (Benguet), meanwhile, is located in Northern Luzon and so served mostly child laborers who worked in farms or organizations tied to the agricultural sector. Finally, Kariton Open High School, also located in Luzon (Cavite), primarily catered to children from poverty-stricken areas. Data was gathered from interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) with school heads, teachers, and students within school year (SY) 2012–2013. Document analysis was likewise employed to gather other information necessary to supplement the primary data.

Figure 2. Location of Selected Schools in the Philippines
The Open High School Program as an Alternative Delivery Mode in Secondary Education

Instituting effective ADMs is a critical part of the bigger picture that recognizes the need to access quality secondary education. Since high enrollment or participation rates at the primary level have created pressure for higher levels to follow, investments in expanding secondary education is essential. Constraints in the educational budget and difficulties in achieving universal primary education, however, have led developing countries to employ alternative modalities that tend to be less costly than conventional ones. In the Philippines, one of the alternative secondary-level modalities that gained a strong foothold in the educational landscape is OHSP.

Enabling Policy Environment

The advocacy and implementation of OHSP is strongly anchored on the 1987 Philippine Constitution, the highest law of the land, which explicitly underlines the protection and promotion of the right of all citizens to quality basic education by making it accessible to all, regardless of differentiating factors, including age,
High enrollment rates in primary schools are not being sustained at the secondary level, hence the need for alternative strategies to encourage children to enroll and complete their secondary education. (Photo by SEAMEO INNOTECH, 2013)

gender, and socioeconomic and political status (Art. XIV, Sec. 1). This right is further recognized when DepEd released DepEd Order 46, s. 2006 that institutionalized the implementation of OHSP through guidelines for student recruitment, curricula, materials, student progress monitoring, and learning assessment.

In 2012, DepEd Order No. 54, s. 2012 or the Policy Guidelines on the Implementation of ADMs reiterated the commitment of the Philippine government to Education for All (EFA) objectives and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by providing better access to education through Alternative Delivery Modes such as OHSP, so that marginalized students and those at risk of dropping out due to unavoidable circumstances can complete their education. DepEd also issued DepEd Order No. 43, s. 2013 that called for the inclusiveness of basic education through the implementation of programs for the gifted, learners with disabilities, Muslim learners, indigenous peoples, and learners under difficult circumstances (i.e., result of geographic isolation; chronic illness; displacement due to armed conflict, urban resettlement, or disasters; child abuse; child labor practices). The enactment of Republic Act (RA) No. 10665 or The Open High School System (OHSS) Act in 2015, was a landmark development in terms of mainstreaming flexible and learner-centered high school education.
The law aims to increase the access of more learners to secondary education through the open learning modality. All of these directives, laws, and legal frameworks constitute the policy environment in which DepEd has been implementing OHSP as an ADM for secondary-level students.

**Overarching Goal and Specific Objectives of the OHSP**

First implemented by DepEd in 1998 as an expansion of the Project Effective and Affordable Secondary Education (EASE), which was piloted in 1995, the OHSP was designed as an ADM for learners who cannot regularly attend school due to problems such as geographical inaccessibility; financial difficulties; physical disability; and time, social, and family constraints (*DepEd Order 46, s. 2006*). The program uses an independent, self-directed approach to learning, providing elementary-school graduates, high-school dropouts, and successful examinees of the Philippine Education Placement Test (PEPT) an opportunity to complete secondary education. It also aims to encourage those out of school to finish secondary education while averting school leaving; curbing the high-school dropout rate, and increasing the secondary education participation rate; and increase the quality distance education achievement rate. OHSP was also adopted by DepEd to respond to overcrowded classrooms and as one of its Dropout Reduction Program (DORP) interventions catering to students at risk of dropping out by persuading them to stay in school (*Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization [SEAMEO] Regional Center for Educational Innovation and Technology [INNOTECH], 2015*).

As of 2013, 500 public high schools reportedly implemented OHSP (SEAMEO INNOTECH, 2015). However, based on enrollment alone in SY 2017–18, only 64 public high schools confirmed that they still implemented the program (DepEd, 2018). The total number obtained by SEAMEO INNOTECH may, however, include high schools that could be implementing OHSP but did not have enrollees within the school year identified by the DepEd EBEIS. It is possible that this number does not include those high schools that may be implementing OHSP but have no enrollees during the school year, as well as those schools that did not report their numbers to DepEd.
OHSP students in Kamora National High School has several activities in their OHSP Center. (Photo by SEAMEO INNOTECH, 2013)
Salient Features of the Open High School Program

• **Flexible, self-paced, independent approach to learning.** OHSP is an alternative approach to basic education in place of formal and regular classroom instruction in that it provides students a flexible learning environment outside the regular and formal classroom and thoughtfully considers the numerous constraints (i.e., geographical, socioeconomic, personal, and physical) that impede them from attending regular classes and continuing or completing secondary education. The program enables them to learn at the time, place, and pace that suits and satisfies their circumstances and requirements (*R.A. No. 10665*, Section 2e).

• **Learner-centered and customized curriculum design.** In terms of curriculum content, OHSP adopts the K-12 Enhanced Basic Education Curriculum using the standards and learning competencies of different subject areas (*R.A. No. 10665*, Section 8). Learners go through the same core curriculum as regular formal school students. Lessons are presented through modules, which learners can study on their own. A learning plan that outlines the modules and worksheets with corresponding desired competencies to develop is discussed with the learners. How much time a learner will spend on each module or worksheet (e.g., one week for module 1) depends on his or her own circumstance. All OHSP students design and follow their own learning plans.

• **Learner-directed delivery system.** Learners report to school once or more times a week, depending on their arrangement with OHSP teachers for face-to-face discussions. Apart from class meetings, teachers use these as opportunities to monitor the performance of learners by validating their competencies. The teachers also use these meetings to coach and counsel learners.

• **Up-to-par standard learner assessment.** Learners are subjected to the same assessment guidelines and grading system as formal school students. In general, OHSP students are evaluated by subject
area teachers using the same scheme used in regular high schools. The scheme includes written and/or oral tests and assessment of required outputs. Promotion to the next level requires completion of the requirements and mastery of at least 75 percent of the required competencies per subject area. Acceleration (i.e., skipping a year level) is also possible if a student completes all of the requirements and displays mastery of at least 90 percent of the required competencies per subject area. A learner can take the program for a maximum period of six years and has the option to go back to regular school anytime within the period of study. Switching from regular schooling and taking part in the program and vice versa is also possible.
Open High School Program and Marginalized Learners

The Dakar Framework for Action has set “inclusive education as one of the main strategies to address the question of marginalization and exclusion” (UNESCO, 2000). As an ADM, OHSP promotes inclusive education by opening up learning opportunities for students under difficult and special circumstances. It is founded on the principle of equity in education, which has several dimensions (Carr, 2016) that include fairness, which implies that personal and social circumstances (e.g., gender, socioeconomic status, or ethnic origin) should not hinder educational potential, and inclusion, which implies ensuring basic minimum standards of education that everyone should have access to (UNESCO, 2000).

The Educationally Marginalized in the Philippines

Most governments around the world upheld the principle of equal opportunity in education. They believe that allowing barriers to education to go unhampered infringe on people’s basic rights and buttress social inequalities. This is why many have “pledged to explicitly identify, target, and respond flexibly to the needs and circumstances of the poorest and most marginalized” (UNESCO, 2010).
Marginalized children suffer from a “form of acute and persistent disadvantage rooted in underlying social inequalities” (UNESCO, 2010, p. 135). They exist at the periphery of society and are excluded based on the following categories (UNESCO, 2009):

a. **Gender-related**: Girls (although in some countries, boys are at a disadvantage).

b. **Culture-related**: Children that belong to specific castes, ethnic groups or tribes, and/or religious groups and who speak a unique language.

c. **Location-related**: Children who live in conflict-affected areas, refugees and displaced persons, child soldiers, nomads, children in rural areas, children living in urban slums, and street children.


e. **Special groups**: Children with disabilities (CWD), gifted children, children living with human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS), and orphans.

These people’s experience of exclusion is based on a complex tangle of intertwined dimensions that involve poverty, location, gender, ethnicity, language, and disability. Many children do not just belong in a single category but tend to suffer from multiple disadvantages.
In the Philippines, marginalized people are officially defined as those “groups in society who, for reasons of poverty, geographical inaccessibility, culture, language, religion, age, gender, migrant status, or other disadvantage, have not benefited from health, education, employment, and other opportunities, and who are relegated to the sidelines of political persuasion, social negotiation, and economic bargaining” (National Economic and Development Authority [NEDA] - Social Development Committee [SDC], 2007, as cited in NEDA, 2017, p. 371). Given this, some sectors were identified as most likely to become unprepared for school, unschooled, insufficiently schooled, and poorly schooled in the Philippines. Specifically, these are girls, members of poverty-stricken families, Muslims, indigenous peoples, children with disabilities or special needs, children affected by armed conflict, street children, drug users and youth offenders, working children or child laborers, children who live in remote areas, and those who have been displaced by calamities and natural disasters (National EFA Committee, 2014).

Wide disparities are seen in key education indicators across geographic regions and socio-economic demographic groups such as gender, ethnicity, rural and urban areas, that are not so apparent just by looking at national averages of key performance indicators (David and Albert, 2015). These disparities showed that in terms of opportunities and achievements, not all sectors are created equal. This research brief focused on three educationally marginalized sectors—(a) children in conflict situations, (b) child laborers in rural areas, and (c) children who suffer from urban poverty.

A. Children in Conflict Situations

In the Philippines, children in conflict situations, by definition, are “members of displaced families as a result of armed conflict; physically weakened, orphaned, or disabled as a result of armed conflict; combatants and those mobilized for other armed conflict-related activities; and disrupted from schooling due to armed conflict” (PSA, 2017c).

The phenomenon of children in conflict situations is a manifestation of wider socioeconomic and political contexts, including issues of poverty, regional inequalities, and conflict-stricken areas due to ideology-based disputes. The Philippines has had a number of long-running ideology-based
armed conflicts (IBACs), which pertain primarily to communist and Muslim insurgencies (Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process [OPAPP] and Surveys, Training, Research and Development Services [STRIDES], 2009). Similar to natural disasters, armed conflicts result in the displacement of families and communities and the disruption of people’s lives and normal routines. In these situations, children are most affected and become especially vulnerable to insufficient schooling or dropping out of school for at least the duration of their displacement due to reasons such as no longer being able to afford education, the distance of the evacuation center from the school, or needing to work to support their families (Save the Children, 2011).

In a number of cases, children have been recruited to become child soldiers or combatants by non-state armed groups (NSAGs) such as the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and the New People’s Army (NPA) and paramilitary groups associated with the military (United Nations [UN] General Assembly, 2016; Silverio, n.d.). In a study that interviewed close to 200 current and former child soldiers from different NSAGs in the country, reasons why children joined a group included personal support for its political ideologies; shared religious beliefs and conviction; lack of options and uncertainty with their future; and the wish to defend their family and community (Silverio, n.d.). Those recruited are mostly adolescents who are perceived as trusting; have the physical capacity of an adult; and tend to be impulsive and aggressive (Makinano, 2002 as cited in Save the Children, 2011).

Among the many adverse effects of conflict on children is disruption to education, as schools and classrooms are damaged, classes are suspended or cancelled indefinitely, teachers and students are attacked and/or displaced, the youth are recruited by NSAGs, household incomes drop, and family structures change. As of SY 2016–17, 757 schools or 1.17 percent of the total number of schools nationwide suffered from armed conflict incidents (DepEd-EBEIS, 2017 as cited in DepEd-Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Service [DRRMS], 2018). From SY 2013–14 to SY 2015-16, all six regions in Mindanao also consistently belonged to the top 10 regions with the highest percentage of schools that suffered armed conflict incidents. During the 2017 Marawi crisis alone, at least 132 schools
were affected by the conflict, which prevented 2,933 teachers and 22,714 students from returning to school (DepEd, 2017). In the entire Mindanao, with the exception of Northern Mindanao, the proportion of children and youth out of school is higher than the national average of 10.6 percent (PSA, 2015). In the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM), the nonattendance rate was four percentage points higher than the national average. The proportion of 7- to 16-year-old children and youth out of school reached 12 percent compared to the national average—2 percent. The adverse effects of education disruption or deprivation fed into the low functional literacy rate in the ARMM, the lowest across all regions. Only 72.1 percent of those aged 10 to 64 in the region can read, write, and count compared to nine out of ten functionally literate people at the national level (PSA, 2015).

B. Child Laborers

Child laborers, in general, refer to “children who reportedly work in hazardous environments regardless of the number of hours they spent at work or those who work long hours—more than 20 hours a week if they are aged 5 to 14 and more than 40 hours a week if they are 15–17 years old” (PSA, 2012). The 2011 Survey of Children reveals that out of an estimated 5.5 million working children aged 5 to 17, around 58.4 percent or 3.2 million are considered child laborers (PSA, 2012). Of these, 98.9 percent or around 3 million work in hazardous environments.
Findings also indicate that more child laborers were secondary-school-aged than primary-school-aged (DepEd et al., 2008). A little more than half (50.3 percent) of these children were unpaid family workers while around four in ten worked outside their homes. A higher number of 10–14-year-old (13.3 percent) child laborers in hazardous environments did not attend school compared to 5–9-year-olds (9 percent). Among all of the working children aged 15–17, 59.9 percent were school non-attendees (PSA, 2017b). As such, it can be said that the proportion of child laborers not attending school increases with age.

These child laborers are mostly based in rural areas and are overwhelmingly represented in the poorest income quintile. The most-cited reasons for working suggest poverty and lack of decent employment opportunities for parents, compelling families to allow their children to work to pay for the direct and hidden costs of education (UNICEF and UNESCO Institute for Statistics [UIS], 2015).

The Philippines has a significant number of child laborers engaged in agricultural work. According to the 2011 Survey of Children, of the 5.5 million working children aged 5–17, around 60 percent (more than 3 million) are involved in farming (PSA, 2012). In 2016, about 46.4 percent of the working children were involved in agriculture, hunting, and forestry (PSA, 2017b). In rural agricultural communities, students often worked in the fields or tended to gardens to help their families, especially during the planting and harvesting seasons. Given the seasonality of their work, their school attendance and performance are likely to be affected. Their work schedules are often not accommodated in the traditional classroom setup, making it difficult for them to regularly attend classes.

Child labor tends to hinder the development of children because it interferes with their education and leaves them vulnerable to exploitation. Child laborers tend to experience difficulties in school attendance, resulting in low grades, tardiness, and absenteeism (Guarcello et al., 2014). The labor these children engage in acts as a “push” factor most likely affecting their decision to stay in school as well as their ability to attend and focus in class (Guarcello et al., 2014).
Figure 4. Working Children by Major Occupation Group (PSA, 2017)
C. Children Living in Poverty

Poverty continues to put a significant number of Filipino students at risk of dropping out from school. While public education may be free, many children still do not study because of “hidden costs” such as transportation, daily allowances, and school supplies that tend to weigh down on indigent learners. Based on the Family Income and Expenditure Survey (FIES) and Labor Force Survey (LFS) data, around 13.4 million children or over a third of all children aged 17 and below are considered income-poor (cited in Reyes et al., 2014). That means their families do not meet their minimum food and basic nonfood needs. The number of poor children grew from 33 percent in 2003 to 35.5 percent in 2009, translating to an increase of around 2.3 million within six years.

Studies show that children from poor families are more likely to drop out than those from families that are not considered poor. Data from the 2017 Annual Poverty Indicator Survey (APIS) revealed that most out-of-school children (OOSC) and youth come from poor families, about half of whom belong to families whose incomes fall within the lowest 30 percent (PSA, 2018a). The hidden and opportunity costs tied to education still largely impinge on their meager resources.

In the same vein, the household income interacts with rural-urban location. Three out of four income-poor children live in rural areas (PSA and UNICEF, 2015). More than half of the primary school-aged out-of-school children in rural areas come from families in the bottom 20 percent of the per capita distribution, much higher than the 19.7 percent of OOSC in urban areas in the same quintile. OOSC of lower-secondary school age follow the same trend (Reyes et al., 2014). The poverty-headcount ratios indicate that rural poverty, relative to urban poverty, is still a big problem. In the Philippines, the urban share of the poor has been rising along with the population.
The three case studies that follow illustrate how different OHSP-implementing schools have implemented and adapted the program to respond to specific dimensions of marginalization—children in conflict situations, child laborers in rural areas, and children in urban poverty. These cases attempt to analyze and highlight the features of OHSP that allowed the schools to address the educational needs of a subgroup of marginalized children and propose other programmatic design features that would help increase OHSP’s responsiveness as a strategy to promote inclusive quality Education for All (EFA).

**Carmen National High School: Reaching Out to Children Involved in Armed Conflict**

In Region XII in Mindanao lies Carmen, a municipality of North Cotabato. A largely agricultural area, it has 28 villages (barangays) and a total population of 82,469 (PSA, 2013). Several conflicts have been reported in some parts, particularly those considered strongholds of the MILF (WB, 2003).
Carmen National High School (CNHS) had, in 2012, a total of 2,087 students, more than half of whom were females (54 percent). The majority of its 46 teachers were also female (76 percent). It had high dropout rates from 2008 to 2012. Although this decreased in SY 2011–12, it was still high at 8.85 percent.

Due to the increasing number of students at risk of dropping out in North Cotabato fuelled by soldier recruitment, financial difficulties, and child labor, CNHS introduced the OHSP to cater to the educational needs of the community.

The concerted efforts of the CNHS principal, guidance counselor, and coordinator of the Dropout Reduction Program (DORP) brought on the program’s implementation, when in 2008, they all attended a seminar of the Division Office as part of DepEd’s institutionalization efforts. At the outset, teachers went to nearby puroks (zones) and poblacions (municipality centers), sought out school-leavers, and encouraged them to continue schooling through the OHSP. The teachers reported that initially, the community eyed the program with skepticism, not treating it as a viable and credible alternative pathway for out-of-school children (OOSC). They persisted though and attended barangay meetings and parents-teachers association (PTA) gatherings to talk about the program and entice concerned parents to enroll their children.
The Open High School Program Experience

- **Learners.** OHSP learners were mostly from poor and remote areas, many of whom could not afford to buy the basic supplies they need to go to school. A few were members of indigenous groups. The learners came from all ages, among whom some as young as grade 7 who were being recruited to become part of the MILF and other armed groups. Children from some areas were being lured to join trainings and become child soldiers because they could no longer afford to be regular students on account of extreme poverty. The number of enrollees in OHSP steadily increased from 37 in SY 2009–10 to 439 in SY 2012–13.

- **Learning resources.** The school reproduced DepEd’s EASE modules for students to take home and use. Not enough copies, however, were produced for everyone’s use should each of them wish to take home the modules. As such, the teachers allowed students to use textbooks and reviewers from the Division Office as alternative learning materials.
Learning delivery and environment. While the motivation to learn via regular classes and earn a diploma is high, the students of CNHS admitted not having the means to continue and complete their studies. The OHSP’s modular approach enabled them to cut on education-related costs and resume their high-school education. The program also widened their options if they dreamed of entering college or finding decent work. One of their success stories involved a former commander of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) who graduated from the program then earned a scholarship and enrolled in college.

Using the same contents as in regular school classes, students attended lectures held in CNHS once a week to learn science; mathematics; English; Filipino; technology and livelihood education (TLE); music, arts, physical education, and health (MAPEH); and social
studies. All classes were facilitated by master teachers in available classrooms. The day assigned to learners to go to school depended on the poblacion where they lived. Only five of the 10 subjects were taken per week; the others were covered the following week. They spent only four hours in school per week. In cases where students needed to consult the teachers on topics they had difficulty understanding, the former were free to go to school on other days. OHSP students were also encouraged to join the school’s extracurricular activities such as the Junior-Senior (JS) prom, intramurals, and field trips. The teachers used the mother tongue in teaching and facilitated learning through differentiated instruction by revising the lessons to ensure that they learned even if they had limited time for each session and despite the limited number of modules.

- **Learning support services.** Although OHSP learners were required to report to school once a week, CNHS also sent out teachers to serve as mobile instructors to meet the learners in their villages. Classes were conducted at least once every two weeks in an available space like a barangay (village/community) hall for lectures and discussions. The sessions were also a venue for consultation and question-and-answer sessions.

- **Teachers.** Master teachers and department heads of CNHS were primarily tapped to teach the program. The teachers were selected based on their willingness and experience. Department heads for OHSP had to contend with overloading as they taught beyond their required load limits, on top of their responsibility as department heads. In some cases, the teachers had to do home visitations during weekends because some of the students were unable to attend classes. The teachers went above and beyond the call of duty and remained unperturbed even if it entailed crossing creeks, dikes, and muddy roads and other risky activities to undertake visitations. To secure their safety from warring groups, the teachers sought the permission of local government officials so they can enter communities and wore uniforms so they can be easily identified as teachers.
What Worked for Children in Conflict Situations

Despite limited resources and overloaded teachers, CNHS’s OHSP was able to provide for the educational needs of previous school-leavers and those at risk of leaving school by employing strategies that encouraged and increased their participation. These included flexible schedules, home visits, differentiated instruction from master teachers, encouraging participation in school activities, use of their mother tongue, and community sensitization apart from using self-paced modules.

In cases where the disruption affects only a portion of the community or selected families, students used a modular learning mode coupled with home visitations. Apart from modular learning, they were also strongly encouraged to attend weekly sessions or go to the nearest learning center. By adopting a limited number of school days and hours per week, along with community visitations, to accommodate their circumstances, the program demonstrated flexibility and variation in arrangement that allowed learners to study at the time, place, and manner that best suited their needs. At the same time, the regular schedule and routine offered them a sense of structure, normalcy, and purpose that went beyond conflict and poverty (UNICEF, 2006; McCallin, 1999 as cited in Nicolai & Triplehorn, 2003).

The education provided by the program had aspects that could potentially protect the children in armed conflict. By giving them an identity as learners, the program helped enhance their self-concept and self-worth, reduced their sense of inadequacy that came with being out of school, and helped protect them from forced recruitment by armed groups (Nicolai and Triplehorn, 2003). The program also took the children away from the violence of armed conflict by enhancing their appreciation for education and equipping them with skills and knowledge for future occupations not related to armed combat. The program transmitted information and knowledge that are not just important to the children’s survival but also to their future aspirations.

Conducting home visitations also communicated a strong inclusive spirit. Despite security risks, the teachers served as mobile teachers in assigned areas that they needed to visit at least once every two weeks. Besides
conducting home visits where teachers personally witnessed the realities the students faced, they also reported teaching beyond their required loads. In some cases, the teachers even went out to teach during weekends. All these highlighted the teachers’ dedication to providing quality education, support, and acceptance and making the students feel that they matter. Such practice could help lift the spirit of the students and send the message that the school cares for them. By creating strong bonds, the teachers can also provide the space that will help the children create meaning amid the instabilities in their lives.

To further enhance the students’ sense of belonging, the school adopted other inclusive policies such as encouraging them to join extracurricular activities such as the JS prom, intramurals, and field trips, which speaks of the school's effort to include and integrate OHSP students. Preventing students from feeling disconnected or invisible has been cited by educators as one of the ways to effectively connect with the marginalized (Miller, 2006). The program therefore has the potential to help facilitate social integration for OOSC. This is very important, as education programs should
be able to support socialization, peer networks, and community interaction to enhance the students’ sense of inclusion and help them appreciate and accept views different from their own (Tomasevski, 2001). The use of their mother tongue and community sensitization and involvement seem necessary ingredients as well in getting the youth to return to and trust the school system and aspire for a life that does not involve conflict and wars.

**How the Current Practice Can be Improved**

The program can help enhance education’s role in cognitive protection by equipping children with the citizenship, life, reflective, and critical-thinking skills necessary to analyze varied situations and propaganda and consequently make informed decisions. Thus, a need to contextualize the curriculum used by OHSP so it can impart peace-promoting messages, concepts, values, and skills related to human rights; conflict resolution, management, or transformation; negotiation and collaboration; respect for gender and cultural diversity; interfaith and intercultural solidarity; anti-discrimination; nonviolence; social justice; social equity; and human security is seen. Messages about health, hygiene and sanitation, HIV/AIDS, and safety and protection should also be strengthened. In areas of conflict, the curriculum also has to be reviewed for biases and messages that encourage stereotypes and division.

The program should also aim to become conflict-, gender-, and culture-sensitive, not just in its curriculum but also in its pedagogy, teaching-learning materials, learner assessment, and teacher recruitment and development. The teachers have to be supported as well in meeting their responsibilities through trainings and the provision of supplementary learning materials that promote relevant concepts. As mentors, the teachers need to be equipped with the skills that would allow them to more effectively assist the students create meaning and value for their educational experience. Since parents and communities are particularly key partners in the reestablishment of and in the subsequent development of learning in conflict-affected areas (UNICEF, 2006), community resources may also be tapped as learning materials.
Teachers and school officials could also initiate a regular mobile classroom for affected students until a situation normalizes. To maximize the visits, differentiated instruction is used.

Indirect education costs were a challenge for some students as, even with the much-reduced number of days needed to go to school; transportation costs impeded them from attending the once-a-week classes. Schools need to provide support systems that would help alleviate the hidden costs that are preventing children from attending school.

**Kamora National High School: Child Laborers Earning an Education While Earning a Living in Rural Areas**

Kabayan is a fourth-class municipality located in the eastern part of the mountainous province of Benguet. It is a largely agricultural land with 13 barangays and a total population of 13,588 (NSO, 2013). While Kabayan is home to a number of indigenous groups, the Ibalois comprise their majority. It is thus known as the seat of the Ibaloi culture (Department of the Interior and Local Government [DILG] - Cordillera Administrative Region [CAR], 1999). Their main source of livelihood is agriculture.

Located in an agricultural municipality, Kamora National High School caters to children working in farms to finish their education. (Photo by SEAMEO INNOTECH, 2013)
The Kamora National High School (KNHS) is situated in a farming community whose 470 students (around 99 percent of the total number) belonged to the Ibaloi indigenous group as of SY 2012–13. Females comprised 57 percent of the total student population. The school had 19 teachers, the majority of whom were females (74 percent). Many of its learners were members of farming families who worked in fields or gardens to support themselves. Many of their parents did not finish school as well.

KNHS found a way to reach out to students living under difficult circumstances such as those working or tending to their own gardens or farms through OHSP. Cognizant of the high dropout rate, the school first implemented OHSP in the summer of 2008. The school informed the community about the program as an alternative option for children during major activities such as graduations. School authorities also attended other non-school-sponsored gatherings to further advocate the program among parents.
The Open High School Program Experience

- **Learners.** From only eight students in 2008, the number of OHSP enrollees reached 17 in SY 2012–13 (i.e., 16 males and 1 female). Since most school-leavers were boys, it was no surprise that this gender difference was also reflected in the composition of OHSP students. Up until that time, the highest number of OHSP enrollees recorded was 48 in SY 2009–2010. Starting SY 2010–2011, however, the school transferred OHSP students to the Alternative Learning System (ALS) Accreditation and Equivalency (A&E) Program, resulting in lower enrollment. Another nonformal learning program, the Balik-Paaralan para sa Out-of-School Adults (BP-OSA), was instituted in KNHS in 2012.

Many of the OHSP learners were from farming families who worked in fields or gardens to support themselves. Many of their parents did not finish school.

Some OHSP learners suffered from comprehension problems and low self-esteem because of being overage for school or their erstwhile school-leaver status. Perceptions that OHSP learners have a lower status compared to regular-school students probably also played a role. Some students had difficulty with attendance, submitting projects, and complying with school rules (e.g., grooming and behavior). In response, the school administrators tried to be more understanding of and lenient with OHSP students so they would not drop out of the program.

Geographic barriers also discouraged some learners from making the trip to school over long and, sometimes, even dangerous terrains. While they were asked to report to school only once a week at a minimum, some still reported difficulties going on scheduled dates due to lack of transportation means.

- **Learning environment and resources.** Due to the unavailability of modules for self-directed learning at the start, textbooks were used as learning materials. In 2009, the EASE modules were introduced for the students’ use. They could borrow and take home modules should they wish to study while absent for a week or more due to various reasons.

Apart from not being aligned yet with the new K to 12 Curriculum, the modules were perceived insufficient in content and quantity. Some
students were left without modules to use after all copies had been checked out. This was partially addressed when some students accomplished modules in school rather than at home. The teachers also mentioned limitations with modular compared with regular instruction. In response, they used additional materials such as regular school workbooks to supplement learnings.

The school designated a room for the OHSP Coordinator where the modules, learner portfolios, and other files were kept. The students recognized the library as a conducive place where they could study on their own. They also used the 21 computers in school when regular students were not using them. The teachers reported using multimedia resources such as Encarta for science.

• **Learning delivery.** Except during harvest time, the students were required to report to school for consultation and checking their module exercises at least once a week. To facilitate learning, the OHSP teachers used visual aids for clarification and simplified concepts on top of group activities and project assignments. The school administrators also tried to relax a few school rules for OHSP students so they would not drop out. For instance, students from farming families were allowed to
skip the Monday and Tuesday consultations and checking of module exercises during harvest time. Students’ outputs were put on display to motivate them to do their best. Those who wanted to seek assistance from the 19 advisers or subject area teachers could do so during their free time. Volunteer teachers were assigned to focus on the needs of OHSP students as well. When needed, they consulted those who were trained and had experience with OHSP.

At the end of the school year, a Dropout Reduction Program (DORP) Council was tasked to assess the learners’ portfolio and approve student promotion. The council devised an assessment technique or tool that allowed students to demonstrate their competencies with their work and awarded them points based on their performance. Part of the assessment considered how the OHSP students used their time at home or at work. For instance, using compost as fertilizer and manifesting entrepreneurial skills earn corresponding points.

- **Teachers.** Teachers were chosen based on their subject matter knowledge. They attended training on OHSP as part of their preparation. In subsequent years, however, the other teachers did not get special trainings and just relied on and consulted instead with those who already had experience and were trained on OHSP. The teachers expressed their relative lack of experience and the need for further training, particularly about methods most suitable to learners’ circumstances in life.

- **Partnership.** The local government and the mayor supported the program by shouldering the cost of printing the modules and other fees (e.g., library fees) incurred by the OHSP students. However, despite these efforts, the modules were still insufficient in quantity.

**What Worked for Child Laborers**

KNHS clearly took pains in designing its OHSP around the realities of the disadvantaged learners in its community. It offered several alternative pathways that learners at risk of dropping out or under difficult circumstances could choose from depending on their situation. By providing working students, for instance, the flexibility to engage in work and using an assessment system that encouraged them to apply their education to their
Outputs of OHSP students in Kamora National High School are displayed in an OHSP Corner to motivate them to do their best. (Photo by SEAMEO INNOTECH, 2013)
work the relevance and importance of finishing high school was enhanced. Giving learners who were absent for a long period of time a chance to catch up with lessons using the EASE modules was also a way to save them from possibly getting discouraged to continue schooling.

Child laborers seemed to benefit from the modular instruction design used by OHSP that required weekly face-to-face interaction. Seasonal workers used the modules, allowing them to continue studying while on leave for a period of time (e.g., the harvest season) and to go back to school once their work is done. Authentic assessment such as giving credit to lesson application at work was an innovation that also benefited child workers.

Thus, learner assessment was revised to be more responsive to the needs, experiences, and conditions of the working students. They were graded based on how they translated learning in their work. Education became significant and moved closer to their life experiences. Learning was no longer a remote, theoretical engagement; instead, it became a source of relevant and practical knowledge for students. This need for contextualization was also underscored in Lange’s and Sletten’s study (2002), which discussed the importance of relevant and individualized learning plans for marginalized learners.

KNHS relaxed the rules it normally enforced for regular students to accommodate the situation and disposition of its OHSP students. Hence, it had to waive rules regarding attendance, project submission, and compliance with grooming rules to encourage students to remain in class. Relaxing the disciplinary rules increased the OHSP students’ chances of completing their studies because their extraordinary situations as child laborers were considered.

**How the Current Practice Can Be Improved**

As established in countless studies, poverty is an important, although not the lone, determinant of child labor (International Labor Organization [ILO], 2013). When hidden education costs therefore continue to be a burden for poor families despite flexible school schedules and free tuition fees, the likelihood of noncompletion for working children remains. Some KNHS
learners still had to contend with high transportation expenses due to the long distance from their home to the school and so could not attend the weekly OHSP sessions. Schools and communities can address this through providing scholarships and mobile learning means to bring classrooms closer to them.

Standards and procedures for formal academic recognition of work-based learning as a way of duly recognizing prior learning experience and to assess class performance also need to be institutionalized and strengthened, especially in schools where a significant number of students work. Such assessment of on-the-job skills can then be translated into academic equivalency measures to promote recognition of prior learning and help facilitate the learning process.

To sustain the interest of working students, curricula, learning materials, and learning assessments need to be localized and aligned with their work context. Among the reasons why children are out of school involve perceptions of the importance and relevance of schooling. Thus, efforts should be exerted to increase the relevance of curricula and learning materials through contextualization and localization and employ pedagogical approaches that would allow the children to connect to these better (Understanding Children’s Work [UCW], 2015).

The low educational attainment of parents and how they value education have also been linked to child labor (Aldaba et al., 2004). Evidence shows a strong negative correlation between the educational attainment of the household head with his or her children's employment. Lack of information among parents may reinforce perceptions of children as social insurance that could put them in situations that are not always for their best interests. Thus, community sensitization and raising the awareness of parents on the dangers of child labor and the importance of taking advantage of educational opportunities such as OHSP should be further intensified. Schools can also collaborate with local governments and private groups to develop adult-learning activities for parents.
Kariton Open High School: Providing a Refuge for Students from Urban Poor Communities

Going to school tired, hungry, and penniless has been the case for many indigent students in the country. Students from poor families confront many challenges that distract them from pursuing education. Most of them do not have access to school supplies and learning materials at home. Some experience bullying or suffer from lack of nutrition, among others.

In Cavite City, however, these children were given an opportunity to go to high school through the Kariton Open High School (KOHS), an initiative of the Dynamic Teen Company (DTC) that popularized the Kariton Klasrum (pushcart classroom) Program. Efren Peñaflorida, the “2009 Channel News Network (CNN) Hero of the Year,” along with his classmates, formed the youth group DTC in 1997. Kariton education advances the welfare of children who cannot or lack the motivation to attend school because of poverty.
Cavite City is one of the six cities of the province of Cavite in Region IV-A\(^1\) or the CALABARZON\(^2\) region. Found southwest of Manila, Cavite has a population of 3,090,691 as of 2010 and is considered the most populous province in the country (National Statistics Office [NSO], 2012). By 2015, its population grew to 3,678,301 (PSA, 2018b). The high growth rate in earlier decades led to significant in-migration, a demographic trend that might have led in turn to the rising number of street children, dropouts, and out-of-school youth (OSY) in the city (Cavite Provincial Planning and Development Office [CPPDO], 2012). The high poverty incidence from 2003 to 2009 could also be a factor (CPPDO, 2011).

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1. Regions are administrative divisions in the Philippines that serve to organize provinces for administrative efficiency. With the exception of the ARMM, all regions do not have a separate local government.

2. The CALABARZON Region or Region IV-A is composed of five provinces—Cavite, Laguna, Batangas, Rizal, and Quezon.
The Open High School Program Experience

DTC’s KOHS is also known as the Dropout and Out-of-School Edification (DOSE) Program. It was officially hosted in SY 2012–13 by the Sangley Point National High School (SPNHS), which acted as its mother school at that time.

Initially, DTC served the street children and OSY of Cavite City by providing values education and hygiene and sanitation lessons, food, and healthcare and first aid services through the Kariton Klasrum Program to entice them to go back to regular school. It used a pushcart to deliver services to beneficiaries. Encouraged by former DepEd Secretary Bro. Armin Luistro, DTC extended their services and adapted the DepEd’s OHSP, turning the original program into KOHS. This helped DTC realized its vision of provide income-poor youth access to free secondary education through an ADM.

- **Learners.** KOHS specifically targeted children who dropped out of school due to financial difficulties, domestic abuse, or bullying. It ensures an environment conducive to learning by giving children their basic needs and school supplies, along with enough time to perform their familial duties and responsibilities. In SY 2012–13, KOHS’s grade 7 level had 16 students (half were males, the other half, females). Many of the learners were completers of the Kariton Klasrum Program who eventually went on to finish formal elementary school.

- **Learning environment and resources.** Students used a well-furnished and spacious room in the DTC building as classroom. KOHS relied on classroom-based learning in traditional schools to address the possibility that learners wish to return to formal schooling later. The learners used the DepEd’s EASE modules, along with an adequate number of other reading and learning materials. They also had access to computer facilities. KOHS gave the students everything they needed in the OHSP, including meals and school supplies. This considerably lessened the indirect education costs that weigh down many income-poor families.

- **Learning delivery.** KOHS followed the DepEd curriculum but used the EASE modules for regular subjects. It also added civics to give the students an opportunity to reach out to communities in need. Students
expressed their enjoyment in this subject because they learned from and were inspired by real-life heroes. The subject also allowed them to engage in outreach or community services on Saturdays. The teachers observed a marked improvement in the learners’ skills and attitudes as the program progressed, in part due to the curriculum enhancements.

Classes started every day at 10 A.M. so students who needed to do household chores or had other familial responsibilities to attend could do so before school. These ended at 6 P.M. so volunteer teachers who had full-time jobs would get enough rest. KOHS students were assessed the same way regular students were (i.e., through quizzes, projects, and quarterly tests).

When discussing lessons, teachers relied on the rich street experience of the students to enhance their interest and make learning more relevant. This form of scaffolding, activating students’ prior knowledge, made the lessons more engaging and helped them make sense of new knowledge better. Given this instructional approach and the warm relationship between the teachers and students, the latter felt they could approach the former for assistance anytime.

• **Learning support system.** Due to weak foundational skills, some learners had difficulties coping with their studies, particularly in English and Math. In response, some teachers offered to spend time before classes started to explain the concepts they had difficulty with. DTC also supplemented the OHSP with the Learner’s Educational Aid Program (LEAP) to provide additional support to cope with KOHS’s demands. LEAP provided the students tutorial lessons, health check-ups, free school supplies, and other interventions to encourage the children to stay in school and finish high school.

• **Teachers.** In SY 2012–13, seven teachers served 16 students. Some had multiple tasks. One teacher, in particular, taught three subjects, acted as record keeper, and prepared snacks for the students. All of the teachers were volunteers who were not compensated for their services. They worked around their full-time jobs’ schedules. In return, SPNHS trained the OHSP teachers on the K to 12 Curriculum and school-based management.
The Kariton education advances the welfare of those children who are unable to attend school because of poverty. The Kariton Open High School started in 2012 in Sangley Point National High School. (Photo by SEAMEO INNOTECH, 2013)
What Worked for Children Living in Poverty

Students from poor families confront many challenges that distract them from pursuing education. Most of them do not have access to school supplies and learning materials at home. Some experience bullying or suffer from lack of nutrition, among others. KOHS advances their welfare even if they cannot or lack the motivation to attend school due to poverty. It is an innovative initiative that recognizes the need for new approaches that are more tailor-made for vulnerable sectors of the society.

Borrowing from the basic strategies of DepEd’s OHSP, DTC’s KOHS reaches out to disadvantaged students as an extension to traditional schooling. The program uses additional strategies designed to address the specific concerns of children that keep them from pursuing their studies. These strategies include providing learning materials and an environment that offered them food, school supplies, healthcare and first aid services, along with tutorials from volunteer teachers. The program adapted not only to the children's schedule considering their domestic circumstances, but also slightly adjusted the curriculum to inspire them to rise above their challenges with an additional subject. Meaningful activities made school less threatening for the children (Cuthrell et al., 2010). It put in place a system that did not financially cost them anything, improved the access to and affordability of education; and addressed their lack of education and proper healthcare and nutrition.

All these are important ingredients of a positive classroom environment that children in poverty need. Strategies designed to create such an environment can affect their school experience in significant ways (Cuthrell et al., 2010). Poor children need teachers who accept and respect them despite their background and give them enough time and assistance to complete their studies and work (Pellino, 2006). This is a key factor that makes a difference for at-risk students. Since poverty goes beyond financial hardship, it is lessened when strong emotional, spiritual, and physical support is provided (Cuthrell et al., 2010). In addition, as a number of studies about youth disengagement show, a personal attribute associated with a higher likelihood of early school leaving is poor student-teacher relationship (Curtis and McMillan, 2008 as cited in Wilson et al.,
Lange and Sletten (2002) also found that relationships with teachers are an influential school-based factor that affects disengagement. Strong connections and relationships tend to affect the academic involvement of at-risk students. Some young people, especially those who have complex life experiences, require a school environment that is empathetic and supportive so they can have a higher chance of academic success and greater sense of well-being (Mills and Mcgregor, 2010).

**How the Current Practice Can Be Improved**

A number of learners, particularly those who live in the dumpsite of Cavite, missed classes because they needed to take care of their siblings. In such cases, KOHS teachers discussed options with their parents. They convinced the parents to keep sending their children to school since DTC will take care of all costs, including indirect ones like meals and school supplies. To further improve school participation and performance, however, families need to become involved not just as OHSP advocates, but also as willing resources and participants in their children's education (Cuthrell et al., 2010). Families, for instance, should work with the students on learning activities (e.g., homework and projects) at home.

Some teachers did note, however, that some parents had difficulties helping their children due to the language used in the modules and learning materials. Learning materials should therefore use the mother tongue for better understanding. These should be better contextualized as well to the children's realities and needs.

Organizational support for teachers also needs to be strengthened so they will continue volunteering. KOHS has teachers who are not compensated. While SPNHS provided OHSP teachers training on the K to 12 Curriculum and school-based management, they still did not get much institutional support for subject preparation and so relied on their own efforts. As OHSP teachers, they need training on using specific tools and methods such as recognition of prior learning (RPL), portfolio assessment, remediation, self-directed learning, and contextualization. Instituting a professional training program for the volunteer teachers will not just benefit them, but also their students.
Besides completing modules, OHSP students are also evaluated the same way their formal school counterparts are via pen-and-paper tests. Given that some students are at an academic disadvantage relative to their peers, more frequent assessment may create academic interactions that resemble active coaching. Other means of evaluating student performance should also be explored such as authentic forms of assessment. Traditional assessment may not be the most appropriate for alternative settings.

Emotional and behavioral problems were also reported among children from lower socio-economic class compared with those from upper- and middle-income families (Brooks-Gunn and Duncan, 1997 as cited in Cuthrell et al., 2010). As such, a guidance counselor or a peer-counseling group may also prove a good support system in an open high school.
Conclusion and Recommendations

In a society characterized by high inequality, educational exclusion is still a reality and implementing ADMs is a response that is not only timely, but also imperative. In the Philippines, nonformal learning systems have long been enhancing access to educational opportunities to traditionally excluded sectors. Even within the formal education setting, measures have been instituted to widen access and inclusion as a demonstration of the conviction to address and respond to the diverse needs and realities of all learners, particularly children from marginalized and excluded groups. OHSP is one such measure.

As ADMs become an accepted fixture in the educational landscape, the OHSP needs to be revisited and reassessed in terms of responsiveness. Institutional arrangements should have the essential elements that would allow all children, particularly the marginalized and disadvantaged, to have complete access to education so they can achieve social success in the future.

The Philippines has definitely made great inroads in moving educational policy and practice toward a more inclusive direction with the institutionalization of ADMs, specifically the OHSP, within the discourse of providing Education for All (EFA). This is testament to the country’s
resolve to legitimize and strengthen flexible and educationally inclusive programs as a necessary component in engaging the youth who face the greatest number of challenges.

The OHSP has been a vital component in enhancing access to education and inclusiveness for many marginalized secondary learners. The cases presented in this research brief showed that this ADM is an important social justice tool because it affords learners who do not have access to traditional classroom education on account of their special circumstances, their basic right to education.

The program is widely appreciated by partners, stakeholders, and learners. It has been proactively seeking out students at risk of dropping out of school in conflict-laden situations (CNHS in North Cotabato), child laborers encumbered by difficult circumstances (KNHS in Benguet), and indigent students saddled with personal and socioeconomic difficulties (KOHS in Cavite City).

But while the case studies in this brief showed that OHSP has been helping to bridge the gap between marginalized children and the learning process, implementing schools still need to adapt and modify the ADM to better align it with the realities and needs of intended beneficiaries. The featured OHSP schools employed a variety of strategies that help them implement the ADM only within their capacity and very specific learners’ circumstances. A summary of the strategies applied in the three featured schools is found in the table below.
Table 1. Strategies Used by the OHSP Schools By Type of Marginalized Learner

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy Used</th>
<th>Children in Conflict Situations</th>
<th>Child Laborers</th>
<th>Children in Urban Poor Communities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teaching Method/ Pedagogy</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of self-paced modules</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of differentiated instruction/ scaffolding</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authentic assessment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of supplementary textbooks and reviewers</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Content</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum adaptation/ contextualization</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language of instruction/ Use of mother tongue</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School timetables/ Flexible schedule of classes</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexible consultations</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategy Used</td>
<td>Children in Conflict Situations</td>
<td>Child Laborers</td>
<td>Children in Urban Poor Communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Support System</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community sensitization</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home visitations</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integration in school activities</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjustment of school rules</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeding program</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provision of tutorial</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provision of school supplies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provision of health services</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of volunteer teachers</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partnership with external groups and organizations</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Learning Environment</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assignment of own school building/infrastructure/classroom</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of existing facilities (e.g., libraries, book shelves, cabinets)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The table shows that despite diversity in the context of marginalization, some of the strategies to address students’ learning needs are, in fact, similar across varying groups. These general strategies may indicate that some approaches are appropriate across groups because of their interlinked nature. The different dimensions of marginalization and social exclusion reveal an intricate web of interdependent features that are largely founded upon poverty (McGregor & Mills, 2011). On the other hand, some strategies tend to be more emphasized in one group than in others. This may suggest a more nuanced analysis of the situation that a certain group confronts and the consequent adoption of more specific measures that have been adapted to their realities and constraints. Thus, as the cases showed, the capacity to contextualize OHSP considering the unique needs of different types of marginalized learners is critical to its effectiveness as an inclusive ADM.

While strategies that tried to address learners’ specific situations have been tried out, some major issues and gaps remained. We, therefore, recommend the following:

**Policies**

- **Quality of education.** While policies are still generally oriented to expanding access and supply to achieve universal enrollment, the quality of educational services remains an issue that limits the responsiveness of the OHSP. This feeds into an existing perception that ADMs are merely supplementary and therefore inferior to mainstream education. Policies need to be revisited to underscore the importance of ensuring that the quality of learning for marginalized students is at least at par with that of mainstream education. The OHSP should be aligned with the K to 12 Curriculum and the *Open High School System Act (RA No. 10665)*. It should be developed as a genuine alternative that uses high-quality curricula and facilitates access to various pathways beyond secondary education. The *OHSP Manual of Operations* also needs to be revised to reflect a more updated set of policies, procedures, minimum quality standards, and benchmarks of excellence in tune with the contexts and needs of a
variety of disadvantaged learners. A framework for expanding OHSP to include more implementing schools should ensue as well to serve the greatest number of underserved groups. Quality benchmarks need to be established as well to include recognition of prior learning (RPL), portfolio assessment, self-directed learning, modular instruction, and contextualization. By improving the quality of the learning experience, families would be encouraged to invest in their children’s education because of its potential returns despite the financial and opportunity costs it may entail (UCW, 2015). OHSP students need to be engaged in deep meaningful learning for understanding or development of higher-order thinking, socioemotional, and life skills. Ensuring that quality standards are adequately met without stifling contextualization and programmatic flexibility and compromising the aspects that make the approach learner-centered is therefore the primary challenge.

• **Innovation.** OHSP schools need to further study the obstacles that their students experience and subsequently refine policies and strategies to help them overcome these. OHSP directives and guidelines should encourage schools to initiate innovations to improve the quality and relevance of the learning experience of marginalized students. By presenting a quality alternative, the education OHSPs provide can be seen as worthwhile alternatives to joining armed groups, engaging in child labor, and other poverty-related situations.

• **Budget support.** Despite the program features that allow schools to bring down costs to marginalized learners, these have not been enough due to budget limitations, restricting implementation. Insufficient copies of modules and unaffordable transportation costs even for a once-a-week consultation also significantly affected learner participation. To address these barriers, schools need to allocate an adequate amount for their OHSP from their Maintenance and other Operational Expenses (MOOE) budget. Increasing the regular allocation for OHSP as mandated by Section 14 of RA No. 10665 is also critical to ensure the sustainability and scalability of the OHSP as an inclusive ADM.
Learning Delivery

• **Curriculum content.** OHSP implementers are strongly urged to increase efforts to contextualize curricula to meet the students’ needs and circumstances. To be truly relevant, curricula need to be guided by contextualization, considering the knowledge and issues linked to the students’ and their communities’ realities. Critical to providing socially just education is having students who regard their learning as meaningful (McGregor et al., 2015). Curricula should therefore respond to the needs of disadvantaged students and give them pathways that are relevant to their future goals. These need to be flexible enough to account for modification and variation so they can be better-aligned and more relevant to how the marginalized youth can address and transcend their contexts.

Curricula, especially for the marginalized and underserved, should become a social justice tool to mitigate the perpetuation of inequality. For inclusion agenda to advance, efforts should be exerted to review curricula and integrate or mainstream concepts that would challenge the traditional ideologies of dominant social groups, class structures, and gender relations. Teachers and facilitators need to develop the skills required to accomplish this.

• **Self-directed instruction.** Issues with regard to independent and self-learning skills among marginalized secondary-level students need to be addressed as well. In independent learning, responsibility for the process shifts from the teachers to students. This responsibility involves sustaining the motivation to learn, understanding what they are learning, and collaborating with teachers to help structure their learning (Meyer, 2010). Self-instruction as the primary modality among children and adolescents poses some risks though as they tend not to be highly motivated about exercising discipline in self-study or possess clear educational goals (Figueredo and Anzalone, 2002). In high school, distance programs require frequent and structured face-to-face support and supervision as students do not become independent on their own. Thus, OHSP teachers as facilitators should provide a suitable learning environment where interactive processes ensue to
help students learn how to learn and develop intellectual skills and the capacity for independent and reflective learning (Meyer, 2010). OHSP guidelines specifically state that the first semester of the school year be devoted to establishing the learners’ capacity for independent learning. How this is done needs to be fleshed out more. It is critical therefore that teachers and learning facilitators are equipped with the skills to help learners learn independently. They should be able to maximize sessions by teaching them “how to learn” instead of merely “what to learn.” Students can be taught strategies on self-regulation, elaboration of learning (e.g., mnemonic devices and memory techniques), and reading comprehension. Students need to learn how to gather and make use of learning materials on their own as well.

- **Teachers’ skills.** Apart from attitudes, teachers’ knowledge and abilities are critical as well in making OHSP more responsive. As shown in the case studies, teachers were generally aware of the plight of their marginalized students and so showed concern, compassion, and sensitivity. But while their attitude toward inclusion may be positive, their knowledge and skills in inclusionary practices and appropriate pedagogical approaches may require more work. In successful alternative programs, educators are provided with professional capacity-building activities that allow them to improve their strategies while maintaining academic focus (Aron, 2006). Teaching methods need to be diversified and should take into account students’ conditions and characteristics. Pedagogical approaches should be appropriate and effective to allow teachers to skillfully connect with children from marginalized groups. As such, they need skills to identify and address issues and challenges that their learners face and use suitable strategies to help their wards live meaningful lives, prepare them for their future, and contribute to social change while taking into account their cultural, socioeconomic, and gender realities. As an ADM, the OHSP should not just aim to provide access to, but also ensure that students are receiving quality education by equipping teachers with the skills and expertise they need to identify and address their students’ requirements.
• **Teachers’ capacity-building.** It is important to establish desired minimum competencies for OHSP teachers so they would become effective conduits of learning for marginalized students. Based on the gaps identified in their actual competency levels, a holistic set of capacity-building interventions to address these may then be developed, which could include short- and long-term trainings, Learning Action Cell (LAC) programs, mentoring and coaching, instructional supervision, knowledge visits, peer learning, technical assistance provision, and professional learning network (PLN) establishment (assisted by technologies such as social media).

• **Teacher support.** A question that needs to be asked is: Does the education offered via OHSP marginalize teachers? OHSP teachers reported working beyond their usual teaching loads. Despite showing significant commitment to facilitating learning, working amid difficult conditions may still affect the viability of their engagement. Sound working conditions and ongoing professional support for OHSP teachers thus need to be promoted and ensured. When planning and implementing ADMs, the teachers’ voices must be heard and their needs met so they will not feel disadvantaged.

• **Role of technology.** Technology, particularly mobile devices and the internet, have proven useful in delivering alternative forms of instruction. Modules may be digitized and online classrooms set up. Students and teachers should be given access to reference materials and other digital learning resources. However, the technologies used should be appropriate to a school’s infrastructure and connectivity. Very few public high schools use technology in teaching because they do not have the necessary infrastructure in place. Partnerships may be forged with private and nongovernment organizations (NGOs) to build these.
Learning Environment

• **Learning materials.** OHSP schools need modules that are aligned with the K to 12 Curriculum. But they also need to be learner-friendly and easily accessible for students with weak foundational skills. This means enhancing existing modules and other learning materials and using, if possible, the learners’ mother tongue, especially for disadvantaged students whose knowledge of Filipino and English may be very limited. Materials should also be customized by drawing on locally relevant contents and contexts. They need to be reviewed for negative stereotypes, prejudicial statements, and other messages that may reinforce intergroup conflicts, gender biases, and societal divisions. Apart from quality issues, the quantity of materials should also be addressed so teachers and learners would not need to spend their own money for photocopying services or reproducing these.

• **School facilities and equipment.** Technological support (e.g., providing internet access to computers), resource centers, and library and resource materials should be readily available to OHSP learners. While school facilities were always open for student use, some schools only allowed them to use the said facilities when regular students were not using them. This may be a practical solution to limited resources but contradicts the inclusive nature of ADMs, serving all children equally. In such instances, proponents and implementers need to ask themselves if inclusion may be generating new forms of exclusion. Schools need to devise more inclusive policies and arrangements for facilities and equipment so OHSP learners are not further marginalized.

• **School calendar and rules.** School calendars and timetables need to be flexible to accommodate the varying schedules of learners under different difficult circumstances (e.g., harvest time for rural-based child workers). School-related issues pertaining to uniforms, attendance, assessment deadlines, and behaviors should be handled with greater flexibility and openness to dialogue. Such relaxation of rules can greatly contribute to increasing students’ level of engagement because they perceive the school as compassionate and sensitive to their special needs.
• **Learner assessment.** Contextualized, appropriate, and varied forms of formative assessment methods to evaluate student performance should be explored and adopted based on the learners’ realities. These require using nontraditional forms of assessment such as authentic and performance assessment that could illustrate how students gain more from integrating learning in real-life settings. Authentic assessment may come in the form of assessing students’ skills while at work while performance assessments may require students to demonstrate their proficiency in using a particular gadget or piece of equipment.

**Support Mechanisms**

• **Partnerships.** The experiences of the different schools featured in this research study revealed that partnerships and alliance-building with local government units (LGUs), government agencies, and private organizations produced rewarding results. But while partnerships and support from local governments, parents, and communities have been noted, these need to be further harnessed and strengthened. The resources that schools have are not enough to meet students’ specific needs, especially those from marginalized groups. OHSP schools need to partner with parents, agencies, and community groups to provide at-risk youth the support that they need. These may include, but are not limited to, housing support, daycare services, meals, and counseling. LGUs proved helpful in raising funds for module reproduction and financial support provision for students. NGOs are known for establishing programs and interventions that help realize various DORP endeavors. Teachers should also be prepared and trained to refer the learners to appropriate agencies, organizations, or service providers. Recognizing the social factors that contribute to marginalized students’ disengagement from school is critical to increase their chances of success and improve learning outcomes. DepEd still needs to fortify its role as the primary funding source for sustaining OHSP schools.

• **Parental participation.** Studies suggest that parental involvement is a key factor for students in ADMs to stay in school and a significant relationship exists between parental involvement and academic
achievement (Fan and Chen, 2001; May and Copeland, 1998 as cited in Foley and Pang, 2006). Innovative strategies of expanding parents’ role in their children’s education as advocates, resource persons, and participants need to be explored and considered.

- **Post-program options.** Career guidance and postprogram pathways for OHSP students through linkages and referrals to government agencies, LGUs, and private sector companies should be strengthened. Student access to employment referrals, job fairs, scholarships, seed capital for small businesses, and postsecondary technical training should also be improved. These services can expand the options available to at-risk children after graduating, depending on their needs, personalities, and interests, along with job market demands. These can also help them make informed decisions on what subjects to take up in senior high school.

- **Quality assurance.** The mechanisms for ensuring the quality of OHSP inputs, processes, and outputs need to be strengthened to enhance the impact to marginalized learners. These include enhancing instructional supervision and using a monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system (including deployment of tools and database development). The latter entails improving information systems (ISs) to identify and profile OHSP learners and the different subsectors of disadvantaged groups that they belong to, assess their learning needs, and track their learning progress. An impact assessment of promising OHSP practices that could serve as input to other implementers can also be conducted. Competency benchmarks specific to OHSP teachers may also need to be developed to complement the existing Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers (PPST).

- **Mapping.** To serve as inputs to program planning and policy formulation, mapping, targeting, and profiling of OHSP learners should be enhanced. Through these, OHSP providers can respond more appropriately to their needs and design contents, methods, and materials that specifically cater to their needs.
Throughout the world, as in the Philippines, efforts are continually exerted to provide more appropriate and effective educational responses for all children, regardless of background, characteristics, and conditions. Targeted interventions are essential to more effectively serve the most marginalized learners and break down the different barriers that prevent or discourage them from completing school. As the local case studies showed, contextualization and adaptation of learning environments, resources, curricula, forms of assessment, and other aspects are critical strategies to enhance the responsiveness of the OHSP as an ADM for learners in marginalized communities. These cases recognize that a one-size-fits-all model can further marginalize students who already experience much adversity in their daily lives and such an approach is antithetical to a modality that was specifically developed to address the needs of disadvantaged groups with varying contexts and needs.


_______ (2012). The number of working children 5 to 17 years old is estimated at 5.5 million (Preliminary Results of the 2011 Survey on Children). Retrieved from https://psa.gov.ph/content/number-working-children-5-17-years-old-estimated-55-million-preliminary-results-2011-survey#sthash.Jn6MAGIA.dpuf


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