

Evaluation of the Playgroup Project and Alternative Learning System Programs in Village Looc and Village Opao, Mandaue City, Cebu, Philippines

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ABSTRACT

The College of Teacher Education responds to the needs of its partner communities in Mandaue City, Cebu, Philippines as it implements the Playgroup Project and the Alternative Learning System (ALS) Programs. The college has integrated its community extension programs into the academic and extra-curricular activities of the students. Student-teachers render extension services to Village Looc and Village Opao. The university funds these programs, which are supported by the faculty and other stakeholders. This descriptive, qualitative study evaluated the implementation of the two community extension programs among its beneficiaries. In the Playgroup Project, parents are satisfied with the implementation of the program. They believe that the project yields favorable results and would benefit more families in the community. The program, implemented by the faculty, students, non-teaching staff, and alumni volunteers, utilizes the resources and facilities of the university. Based on the parents' testimonies, there is a strong association between the participation of their children in the program, their learning competence, and their social and emotional well-being. The program has increased the readiness of the learners for a smooth transition to kindergarten. The improvement of the learners' dependability level had helped the parents ease their concern for their children's safety. On the other hand, the ALS Program, in cooperation with DepEd Mandaue City, involved the student-teachers and volunteers in the mapping of potential ALS learners, learning sessions, and culminating activities. This study revealed that the ALS Program had touched lives across different socio-economic backgrounds. During the interview with the learners, the researchers noted the absence of learners in some of the learning sessions. With learners facing various family and financial challenges, it becomes difficult for them to pursue their studies. However, the perception of the learners with the ALS Program is positive. They are eager to finish the program to support their families and achieve their dreams. The researchers believe that the learning environment of the learners should be improved. There is also a need for continued partnership between the government and the academe. This ensures the support and sustainability of the program. The testimonies of the learners have underscored that the ALS Program is a beacon of hope.

Keywords — Playgroup Project; Alternative Learning System; Evaluation; Community Extension Programs; Mandaue City, Cebu, Philippines

INTRODUCTION

Education gives value and worth to every person. Its enriching effect secures good life and well-being that neutralizes and crosses beyond cultural differences, racial prejudices, and economic disparities. In the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, education is viewed as a necessary foundation for establishing and promoting universal human rights. Education provides liberty, good security, economic well-being, and participation in social and political activity as well as social empowerment (UN, 2002). This landmark declaration paved the way to the rights-based discourse of education to be asserted by marginalized groups like children, women, people with special needs, and indigenous people communities.

These marginalized groups, when denied access to education, are most likely to be left behind and unable to benefit from the gains of globalization. Many studies show that globalization has increased inequality, and in the equation, the educated, skilled, and mobile workers are the winners (Arzadon & Nato, 2015).

The Philippine government recognizes this paramount role of education in the uplifting human condition. Education is an essential factor that can ensure social justice is achieved in all phases of national development. As a policy, “the state shall protect and promote the rights of all citizens to quality education at all levels and shall take appropriate steps to make such education accessible to all” (Art. XIV, Sec. 1, 1987 Philippine Constitution). This thrust to promote education as the most viable way to economic stability and the restoration of human dignity has led to the creation of ways to bring knowledge from early childhood up to the time when a person becomes a productive member of society. And in circumstances where fortune and time make education an elusive opportunity, the state, exercising its ministrant function, ensures that no one is left behind or deprived of the equalizing benefit of the school. Cementing this government policy, Congress enacted RA 9155, otherwise known as Governance of Basic Education Act of 2000. The law defines primary education as the education intended to meet the basic learning needs of children from pre-school to high school. And in deference to those who have not availed regular education, the law also includes an Alternative learning system (ALS) for the out-of-school youth, adult learners, and those with special needs.

In 1990, the international development community, spearheaded by UNESCO, birthed the massive global education initiative called Education for All 2015 (EFA 2015). The Philippine government has signified its commitment to the EFA goals in EFA assembly in Jomtien, Thailand, in 1990

and Dakar, Bangladesh, in 2000. The Philippines also supported the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) in 2001, and the Decade for Literacy in 2003. To honor this commitment, the Philippine government strengthened its educated human resources by incorporating several legislative measures, executive measures, and alternative credential-granting schemes to address school drop-outs and literacy rates (Arzadon & Nato, 2015).

As an immediate and robust response to maintain a viable workforce and global competitiveness, the Philippine government recognizes the primacy of education in nation-building. Founded upon a strong familial orientation of elevating economic status through stable employment, education is the surest means to achieving social and financial stability. The state policy on social justice provided for under Section 10, Article 2 of the 1987 Philippine Constitution, manifests the government's hopeful desire to "promote social justice in all phases of national development." Social justice is the promotion of the welfare of all the people through the adoption of measures calculated to ensure economic stability of all the competent elements of society and through the maintenance of a proper economic and social equilibrium in the interrelations of the members of the community (*Calalang v. Williams*, 70 Phil. 726) [1940]. To keep this policy within grasp, the Philippine educational system has designed various mechanisms to ensure that no one is left behind by providing alternative methods of granting academic credentials relative to the educational level of qualification, from kindergarten up to higher education, to particular types of learners who for various reasons are unable to attend or complete the formal and regular education.

The EFA goals, adopted in Dakar, Bangladesh in 2000 specified six primary targets by 2015: early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children; universal primary and basic education, ensuring free access to, complete and compulsory primary/basic education of good quality for all children; equitable access to appropriate learning and life skills programs for youth and adults; significant improvement in levels of adult literacy; gender parity and equality; and quality education (Education for All 2015 National Review Report: Philippines). To meet these goals, the country's National EFA Committee (NEC) proposes nine tasks considered to be the most strategic in approximately achieving EFA by 2015, the year set by UNESCO as the deadline for the accomplishment of the EFA Millennium Development Goals. These nine tasks are as follows: (1) Make every school continuously perform better; (2) Make expansion of ECCD coverage yield more EFA benefits; (3) Get all teachers to continuously improve their teaching practices; (4) Adopt a 12-

year cycle for formal basic education; (5) Continue enrichment of curriculum development in the context of pillars of new functional literacy; (6) Transform non-formal and informal interventions into an alternative learning system yielding more EFA benefits; (7) Provide adequate public funding for country-wide attainment of EFA goals; (8) Create network of community-based groups for local attainment of EFA goals; and (9) Monitor progress in effort towards attainment of EFA goals. The first six of these tasks are called “production tasks” because they will provide the desired educational outcomes and an adequate foundation and supportive environment created by the three “enabling tasks,” which will be necessary to sustain effective implementation of the production tasks (Rodriguez, 2014).

Considering the country’s efforts to meet EFA standards, it is equally significant to the Philippine government’s policy of putting primacy on education the introduction of early child development programs that will complement or supplement parental rearing obligations toward children. This effort is in recognition of the learning potential of children who, at their age, may lack the basic knowledge of social interaction, survival, social etiquette, and hygiene.

The World Health Organization (WHO) estimated that in 2016, 250 million, or 43%, of children in third world countries are unable to realize their full development potential for lack of sustained and persistent effort from governments to provide an easy, accessible, and healthy educational environment. The emotional, social, and physical development of young children has a direct effect on their overall development and defines their character when they reach adulthood. This is the reason why recognizing the need to invest in the development of very young children is so important, so as to maximize their potentials and secure their future well-being.

Early childhood development (ECD) is the physical and psychosocial development occurring during the first several years of the child’s life. Studies reveal that ECD has enduring effects on human development and is crucial to the well-being of the child as he grows toward maturity. Further research positively observed that children who are healthy, properly guided, and well-nurtured during this period tend to perform better in school and eventually developed the right skill set needed in contributing to social and economic development. Well planned and goal-laden programs that incorporate health, nutrition, education, and care for young children have lessened the negative impact of poverty and have benefited the public through efficient use of public money for health, education, and social welfare. Investing in ECD has a guaranteed economic return that

clearly outweighs the cost of investing solely in formal education and training. ECD aims to give full recognition to the potentials of young children for learning and to mold their young minds to cope better with the challenges in life. A child who is well motivated for learning often shows positive characteristics, like being socially and emotionally healthy, confident, and friendly, good peer relationships, optimistic and solution-oriented, good language skills and communicates well with others, and teachable with a strong interest for learning (Asian Development Bank (ADB), 2006).

In 1999, the Philippine Government launched a five-year ECD Project in three southern regions encompassing thirteen provinces and about 2.2 million households. A few years later, in 2002, the project became part of a broader governmental program that was formally adopted through the Republic Act 8980, otherwise known as the Early Childhood Care and Development Act (Armezin et al., 2006). The Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) Law, which was enacted in 2000, recognizes four modalities through which ECCD services are delivered, i.e., through daycare centers, homes, pre-schools, and health centers or clinics (UNESCO International Bureau of Education (IBE), 2006).

Republic Act 6972, or better known as the Barangay Level Total Protection of Children Act, provides that all local government units, specifically the barangays, are required to establish a day-care center in their respective locality. Daycare centers within the barangay level are maintained and supported by the barangay. This is to ensure that families with children and who cannot afford to send their children to private learning centers can avail of the early child development programs of the government regardless of their economic status. In 2005, ensuring the efficacy of this government program, President Gloria Arroyo certified legislation that standardized the lessons taught in the Barangay Day Care Centers. In response to this call, the National Preschool Education Program was enacted. The program intends to ensure that all children, 4 to 5 years old, will have the basic foundation for learning and development before they start kindergarten. The government recognizes that a sizeable portion of the population is economically disadvantaged, and their situation may jeopardize the proper development of children in terms of health, education, sanitation, and their capacity to contribute to society. Hence, the program further aims to utilize existing daycare centers and to provide those without daycare centers venues for pre-school classes (UNESCO International Bureau of Education (IBE), 2006).

Early child care education saw its bright future for children with the universalization of the pre-school program in 2011-2012. Since then, there has

been a notable increase in the number of daycare centers in the Philippines. This increase has ushered an era of increased enrolment for ECCE. As a result, a steady increase in the enrolment for kindergarten and Grade 1 with ECCE experience has been observed since 2013 (Education for All 2015 National Review Report: Philippines). Children with pre-school education backgrounds are more prepared for the challenges of formal basic education and are more likely to stay in school as long as there is that opportunity for continues education.

On the other side of the spectrum and equally an important problem to be addressed by the government is the need to extend education to those who are not in schools. Despite government efforts to reduce illiteracy and make education free and accessible to all Filipinos, a 2008 survey by Functional Literacy, Education and Mass Media Survey (FLEMMS) showed that 32 percent of Filipinos age six to 24, were not in school (Education for All 2015 National Review Report: Philippines). In another study conducted by UNESCO, it is observed that there is inequality in the transition from elementary to high school in the Philippines, and this inequality has hardly changed since 2003. Only 69 percent of elementary graduates from the poorest families continued into high school, compared with 94 percent of those from the richest households. Although there was tremendous progress in expanding access to basic education, still a survey in 2016 shows that around half of Filipino students are finding it hard to complete basic education on time (World Bank, “The Philippines Alternative Learning System: A Second Chance to Develop the Human Capital of Out-of-School Youth and Adults,” 2018). Two of the most common reasons for failing to go to school have a direct relationship to the economic situation of the students, such as the high cost of education and working to augment the family income. Among the youth, the most common reason for not attending school was their lack of personal interest in school. To ensure that no one is left behind and to maintain education to be available for all, the DepEd introduced various alternative modalities and intervention mechanisms which afford education regardless of the diverse socio-cultural and economic backgrounds of the learners (Education for All 2015 National Review Report: Philippines).

Acknowledging the sad reality that many Filipinos do not have a chance to attend and finish formal basic education due to other reasons that are beyond their fault, like dropping out from schools due to armed conflict and natural calamity, while some do not have schools in their communities, the government introduced ALS as an alternative learning mechanism parallel to the existing formal instruction. When one finds it hard to be re-assimilated within the regular

formal education due to age, time, and status, ALS is an alternate or substitute means to reestablish educational goals in life.

In the first EFA decade (1991-2000), the Philippine government made explicit the urgency of addressing school attrition through strengthening student retention measures and the provision of Alternative Learning System that will address illiteracy and promote continuing education (Arzadon & Nato, 2015). The enactment of Republic Act 9155 or the Governance Act for Basic Education provides for the establishment of the Alternative Learning System (ALS) as an alternative credential-granting scheme to out-of-school children, youth and adult population. It made special provisions for addressing the learning needs of school dropouts, adults, and other learners who are considered by law as marginalized (DDUs; Arzadon & Nato, 2015).

Basically, the Department of Education (DepEd) leads in the delivery of ALS as a “second chance” program to build the human capital of out of school youth and adults. There are two major programs being offered through the Bureau of Alternative Learning System (BALS), namely: the Basic Literacy Program (BLP) and the Continuing Education Program – Accreditation and Equivalency (A&E). The ALS program includes both the non-formal and informal sources of knowledge and skills. The conduct of classes may be school-based or community-based, depending on what is available and convenient for the learners. The instruction is modular and flexible and covers all academic subjects - sciences, mathematics, English, Filipino, social studies, values, and current events. After completion and final assessment, the students will undergo the accreditation and equivalency (A&E) test covering all learning strands in the ALS curriculum. If successful, the passer is then given a certificate equivalent to a diploma to certify their competencies which would allow them to either work or pursue further studies.

The government’s ALS program is gaining momentum for the past years since its inception. Enrolment is steadily increasing, attesting to the fact that many out of school youths and adults have regained the hope of acquiring education for better opportunities and eventually a better life. In 2011, the number of ALS enrollees reached half a million, a very significant increase since 2005. Examinees for the A&E test have also increased, with 2013 having the highest although the number of passers was quite low (Education for All 2015 National Review Report: Philippines).

In 2018, the World Bank published its findings on the state of the implementation of ALS in the Philippines. The program has made remarkable

headway as the number of ALS learners that benefited the program had increased from 537,666 in 2016 to 641,584 in 2017. Recent data indicate that about 3.7 million youth aged 16-24 and 3.1 million young adults aged 25-30 did not complete junior high school. Worse, 23% of those aged 15 to 30 are out of school. However, learner attendance between 2014 and 2016 shows a moderately positive record of 60%, while 30% passed the A&E exam. Interestingly, female examinees are showing better exam results than their male counterparts. On the other hand, ALS learners from urban areas have a higher passing rate than those in the rural areas (World Bank, “The Philippines Alternative Learning System: A Second Chance to Develop the Human Capital of Out-of-School Youth and Adults,” 2018).

As mentioned above, it is the Department of Education that has the primary mandate to carry out and manage the program. However, the private non-government organization is not precluded from contributing or extending support in the delivery of the program as part of its community extension services; but still, the DepEd exercises the power of supervision over these agencies. Literacy programs of NGOs have been widely acknowledged as key partners of government in community development, especially in areas where indigenous cultural communities are often afflicted by poverty and unreached by formal education. In the 2010 basic learning needs survey of providers, a greater majority of non-school-based literacy service providers are NGOs (55%), while only one-third are government organizations (32%). A few are international organizations (1%). The remaining organizations come from the academe (7%), most of which are extension programs of private and public HEIs and people’s organizations (3%) (Education for All 2015 National Review Report: Philippines).

As an academic institution with active community extension programs, the University of Cebu Lapu-Lapu and Mandaue acknowledges its vital role in contributing to the government’s effort to uphold UNESCO’s goal of “Education for All.” This social responsibility is enshrined in the university’s vision which is to democratize quality education, give hope and transform lives, and in its mission to serve as an active catalyst in providing efficient and effective delivery of educational services, and to pursue excellence in instruction, research and community services towards social and economic development as well as environmental sustainability. Furthermore, social responsibility is reflected in its institutional goals: (1) Offer programs to include Alternative Learning Systems (ALS) or non-conventional programs that are relevant and compliant with institutional, regulatory, industry and accreditation standards that will develop

life-long learners; (2) Develop social awareness, responsibility, and accountability among stakeholders anchored on instruction, research and production; and, (3) Develop a pool of qualified, professional and motivated faculty in the areas of instruction, research, and community extension.

True to these goals, the College of Teacher Education of UCLM has undertaken an initiative to establish two community extension programs with two partner communities, Village Looc and Village Opao. These programs are the Playgroup for pre-school and the Alternative Learning System for the out-of-school youth. These programs also address the needs of residents based on a community needs assessment conducted in 2008 and 2016. In 2008, the community residents identified needs on solid waste management, literacy, and livelihood. In 2016, the needs identified were solid waste management, health education, literacy, livelihood, greening, livestock raising, and community participation programs (Amparado, Camayra, Dorio Jr. & Patindol, 2017).

The programs are not intended to replace, compete, or overlap with existing efforts of the villages for similar undertakings but rather to complement their on-going programs with similar objectives. The community extension programs would serve both community and students whose attributes should include: life-long learner, socially accountable and responsible, and ethically responsible. The college believes that the relevance of education is the affirmation that it entails social responsibility and so must reach out to the communities to help them in their effort to better life for everybody.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study evaluated the playgroup and ALS programs of the College of Teacher Education. It determined the physical, psychosocial, and cognitive development of learners who availed of the playgroup program and the impact of their development on the parents and the community. Similarly, the same purpose is intended for evaluating the impact of the ALS program with regard to the economic, psychological, and social status of the students who availed of the program. The result of the study will also provide venues for improvement, means to ensure continuity and design methods for effective monitoring and utilization of evaluation results.

METHODOLOGY

This descriptive, qualitative research aimed to gather information from parents of playgroup learners and students of ALS through the sharing of their experiences in two community extension programs. Parents of learners in the playgroup program shared their experiences regarding their observation and reaction as to the effect of the program on the lives of their children and on their role as parents. The same process was done for the students of ALS.

Seven mothers and a father from Village Looc and Village Opao, Mandaue City, Cebu, and whose children are recipients of the program were invited to share their experiences regarding the playgroup. They were divided into two groups, and each group was facilitated by one of the researchers assisted by three volunteer students from the College of Teacher Education. Although the researchers would like to interview 10-15 informants for this study, the researchers respected the decision of the informants who do not want to be involved in the study. The facilitators took notes of the proceeding and recorded every detail of the experiences shared by the parents. After an hour of sharing, the parents changed the group, and the same process was followed. The process was intended to determine whether there have been significant physical, psychosocial, and cognitive improvements among their children. The facilitators posed additional questions for clarification and elicited possible occurrences in order to determine variations and consistency. The process was repeated until saturation has been achieved.

The same method was utilized for the students of ALS. One mobile teacher and twelve learners from the ALS Village Looc Center were interviewed to share their experiences while attending the program. Several sessions were conducted until saturation was attained.

To evaluate the trustworthiness of data and interpretations, the researchers used the approach of Lincoln and Guba, which includes credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. For credibility, the researchers ensured that there was a prolonged engagement between the researchers and the informants. The researchers also ensured that the data gathered were stable over time. Confirmability was checked with documents of students from the playgroup and ALS, which includes written outputs, class records, and performance outputs. The transferability of the study was measured if the findings from the data can be transferred to other settings or groups.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The following themes were gathered during the Focus Group Discussions conducted by the researchers with the involved parents, teachers, and learners from the community extension programs of the College of Teacher Education.

Themes from the Playgroup Project

Acquisition of New Skills

Parents observed that their children had acquired basic skills which previously they did not have. Most telling developments are the children's ability to draw objects, identify colors and shapes, relate stories they learned, memorize the alphabet, and identify letters and numbers. They are also showing big improvements in observing proper hygiene. Parents noticed that their children are now keen on washing their hands and brushing their teeth. They also learned proper grooming and social etiquettes, like respect for parents and elders. Parents have observed that their children learned to value prayer. As shared by one parent, her child would invite her to pray during meals.

School Readiness

Parents asserted that the program had prepared their children towards a smooth transition to kindergarten. They had observed that there was an appreciable social and emotional improvement in their children when they noticed that they interact within their age group, that they show initiative in learning, and that they show cooperation and responsibility. A most telling observation also was made by parents regarding their children's language and literacy development. They have noticed that their children are showing interest in storytelling, and they have displayed understanding and retention of what they have heard.

Independence

Parents were most happy to observe that their children have acquired a basic understanding of the following instruction and making decision about what has to be done and must not be done. Being parents who are busy eking out a living every day, they are now less worried about leaving their children at home. The children are able to do simple errands with little supervision.

Improved Interaction with Peers

Children who have attended the Playgroup Project exhibited improved interaction with their peers over time. Prior to joining the program, parents noted that learners were reluctant to mingle with other children in their community, and at the same time, the first few weeks into the program, the kids would not participate and play with their playgroup mates, nor would they respond to their volunteer teachers.

Themes from the ALS Teacher and Learners

School Absenteeism Linked to Family and Financial Problems

ALS learners face adversities and challenges that hinder them from attending formal schooling. The most common problem that the learners openly admit were family issues and financial problems. At first, they were reluctant to share their experiences, until they were comfortable enough to talk about their personal backgrounds, with the assistance of the mobile teacher and the facilitators. Learners mentioned that to survive on a daily basis, they work on micro-businesses such as attendants for school canteens and bakeries, babysitters for neighbors, strippers at department stores, among others. The mobile teacher noted that the learners' jobs and other sidelines make it difficult for her to keep them in full attendance during their learning sessions. Some learners would be absent for a month or two without further notice, and then decide to come back after a few home visits and persuasion.

A few learners also open up on family issues such as separation of parents and even the death of parents that urged them to stop schooling. It also pushed them to support their own needs and also for their dependents.

Provision of Support for Families

Like any other person, ALS learners also aim to provide support for their families. Being workers at present, they have seen the difficult side of employment, especially when you lack credentials for a specific job. One learner mentioned that jobs will always be available, but education needs an urgent investment of time and effort so that you can land on the job you want. With the advent of senior high school education, they are apprehensive that the additional two years would mean extra years for them, and so, the older learners who have been on-and-off with ALS for the past years, want to finish the program by the end of the school year to be able to enter tertiary education.

Pursuance of Dreams and Chosen Professions

Learners believe that by attending ALS sessions and completing the program requirements, they can pursue their personal dreams and careers, notably seafaring, teaching, going abroad, and also the field of medicine. As far as age is concerned, these learners are mostly in the age bracket of 16-22 years old, and they fear that they have less time to accomplish their life goals. They believe that ALS opens up opportunities for them to attend Senior High programs, and for older learners, earn a college diploma, and finally be a part of the workforce.

Following the footsteps of accomplished ALS graduates

Having joined various ALS programs such as the ALS Caravan and UCLM ALS Culminating Programs, ALS learners met accomplished learners who have graduated successfully from the program and proceeded to earn college diplomas and live better lives with their persistence. One learner also noted that his neighbor was an ALS graduate, and he has already improved his lifestyle with a secured job and pay and that he wants to start with that concrete example to actually change his life.

Importance of Learning Environment in the Teaching-Learning Process

The mobile teacher and the learners stressed that the present ALS learning center in Village Looc needed a touch-up. On rainy days, the center would usually be deluged by flood up to their ankles, and that the time for a session would be used up for cleaning the classroom. The teacher also thinks of improving the facility of the center by shouldering expenses from her personal money by buying plywood and paint, and payment for carpentry services, but being a newly widowed woman, she also has to face personal financial constraints.

The learners would also compare learning centers across Mandaue City, and found their center inferior in terms of classroom designs and materials. But surprisingly, the majority exclaimed that even though the learning environment is not the best place for learning, what is essential is the learning they get from the teacher and the interaction they have from each other. They said that they have become open-minded when it comes to location and facilities.

CONCLUSIONS

The community extension programs of the College of Teacher Education are aligned with the goals of UNESCO's "Education for all" and responds to the needs of its partner communities in Mandaue City, Cebu, Philippines. The college

has integrated its community extension programs into the academic and non-academic activities of the learners. Student teachers, as part of the curriculum, and grading system, render service to the Playgroup Project or the Alternative Learning System Program, the latter being implemented in partnership with the Department of Education. Both programs are funded by the university and supported by the faculty and stakeholders at the community level.

In the Playgroup Project, parents are satisfied with the implementation of the program. They believe that the program yields favorable results and would benefit more families in the community if continued. The Playgroup Project is implemented by Faculty, students, non-teaching staff, and alumni volunteers, and utilizes the resources and facilities of the university. It was established from the parents' testimonies that there is a strong association between the participation of their children in the playgroup program, their learning competence, and their social and emotional well-being. Furthermore, the basic training the learners get in the playgroup has given them the readiness for a smooth transition to kindergarten. Considering the economic background of the families involved in the program, the improvement of the learners' dependability level has somehow helped the parents ease their concern for their children's safety while eking out a living.

On the other hand, the ALS Program with DepEd Mandaue City continues to involve the student-teachers and volunteers in the mapping of potential ALS learners, learning sessions, and culminating activities. It is apparent that ALS has touched lives across different socio-economic backgrounds. In the interview with the learners in Village Looc, Mandaue City, Cebu, the researchers noted the prevalence of absenteeism in the learning sessions. With learners facing various family and financial challenges, it becomes difficult for them to pursue their studies. Still, the perception of the learners with ALS is positive, since they are eager to finish school the fastest way possible, so as to keep up with their peers, to support their families, and also to achieve their dreams. Moreover, the researchers believe that the learning environment of the learners should be improved for a better learning atmosphere. There is also a need for a continued partnership between the government and the private sector (or the academe) to ensure a uniform, sustained, and active support for the program. The testimonies of the learners have underscored one very important value on the program, though it was not mentioned by them directly, that ALS is a beacon of hope.

TRANSLATIONAL RESEARCH

The College of Teacher Education shall continue to support international and national educational policies such as the EFA 2015 and other related declarations. To engage in the development of Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) programs, the Playgroup Project, which has been implemented from 2011 up to the present, and has produced five batches of graduates, shall continue to monitor learner attendance, culminations, and involvement of stakeholders. Though the program adopts a play-learn atmosphere, it can also use a more structured curriculum for the learners to ensure retention of basic skills learned in preparation for kindergarten and grade school.

At the same time, the integration of community extension service to the academic and non-academic programs of the university must be continued to provide consistent support for institutional programs and external tie-ups, such as the Alternative Learning System Program. Moreover, the college, in collaboration with the UCLM CARES, may also consider providing support for the improvement of the learning center in Village Looc, Mandaue City, Cebu, to ensure a better and more conducive learning climate for the ALS learners. Seminars on livelihood and financial literacy can also be done to help the learners have options for earning and saving money. Counseling and regular monitoring of the learners must also be done to avoid absenteeism and drop-out incidents.

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