

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF MULTIDISCIPLINARY: APPLIED BUSINESS AND EDUCATION RESEARCH

2025, Vol. 6, No. 5, 2569 – 2576

<http://dx.doi.org/10.11594/ijmaber.06.05.32>

32.2551-Journal
Research Article

Implementation of Open High School Program at Dfломнhs

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Article history:

Submission 02 April 2025

Revised 30 April 2025

Accepted 23 May 2025

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ABSTRACT

This study assessed the implementation and challenges of the Open High School Program (OHSP) at Doña Francisca Lacsamana de Ortega Memorial National High School (DFLOMNHS), an alternative educational model designed for learners unable to attend traditional classes due to personal, economic, or geographic barriers. Using a mixed-methods descriptive-correlational design, the study surveyed 48 learners and 16 teacher-implementers through validated questionnaires, with reliability coefficients ranging from 0.931 to 0.986. Quantitative data were analyzed using means, t-tests, and Pearson correlations, while qualitative responses were subjected to thematic analysis.

Findings revealed that most learners were female (70.83%), aged 16–20, from low-income households (81.25%), and had parents with low educational attainment. While 35.42% of learners performed at an outstanding academic level, 20.84% did not meet expectations. The OHSP was generally well-implemented across four dimensions ($M = 3.37$ for learners, $M = 3.32$ for teachers), with no statistically significant difference in perceptions ($t = 0.24$, $p = 0.82$). Correlational analysis showed no significant relationships between implementation and learner or teacher profiles, underscoring the program's equitable reach. However, recurring challenges included limited parental support, inconsistent technology access, and gaps in teacher coordination and instructional delivery.

Aligned with global findings on flexible education and student engagement, this study highlights the potential of OHSP to promote educational equity. It recommends enhanced parent training, regular teacher upskilling in digital pedagogy, and stronger community-school collaboration to sustain and improve program outcomes.

Keywords: *Open High School Program, Flexible Learning, Educational Equity, Alternative Education, Program Implementation, Student Support*

How to cite:

Balbin, C. C. & Sumail, E. M. (2025). Implementation of Open High School Program at Dfломнhs. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary: Applied Business and Education Research*. 6(5), 2569 – 2576. doi: 10.11594/ijmaber.06.05.32

Introduction

Quality education is essential to individual and societal development. From the time of Plato in ancient Greece to today's drive for inclusive learning, education has evolved as a powerful tool for improving lives. When individuals have access to quality education, they can break the cycle of poverty. According to the Global Education Monitoring Report Team (2016), if all adults completed secondary school and all children acquired basic reading skills, at least 171 million people could be lifted out of extreme poverty. Education facilitates socio-economic mobility by enhancing employment opportunities, increasing earnings, reducing inequalities, and promoting healthier, more tolerant, and peaceful societies.

Education is a fundamental human right throughout life. The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) is mandated to coordinate global efforts to realize Education for All (EFA). The EFA goals include expanding early childhood care, ensuring free and compulsory primary education, promoting youth and adult learning and life skills, reducing adult illiteracy by 50%, achieving gender equality, and improving education quality.

In line with this, the Philippine Constitution upholds every individual's right to quality and relevant education regardless of age, sex, race, political affiliation, or socio-economic status. The Department of Education (DepEd) implements the Open High School Program (OHSP) as an alternative delivery mode to provide flexible, self-paced, and independent learning opportunities for learners unable to attend regular classes due to time, distance, financial, or family constraints. The OHSP seeks to retain potential dropouts, encourage out-of-school youth aged 12–16 to return to school, and contribute to EFA targets of 100% participation and zero dropout rates (DepEd, 2006).

Adolescence is a critical developmental period characterized by psychological, physiological, and social changes, making individuals more susceptible to stress (Dahl, 2018). A meta-analysis of 136 studies during the COVID-19 pandemic found that 15–16% of the general population experienced anxiety or depression

symptoms (Cenat et al., 2021). Educational disruptions during the pandemic particularly affected the mental well-being of adolescents, with studies showing increased anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation among those in virtual learning environments (Hertz et al., 2022).

Before the pandemic, adolescents were already facing high levels of academic pressure, which negatively affected their mental health (Luthar et al., 2020). The transition to remote learning, cancellation of in-school activities, and limited peer interaction exacerbated these challenges (Hawrilenko et al., 2021; Golberstein et al., 2020). Support from peers and teachers plays a critical role in safeguarding adolescent mental health and academic engagement (Lessard & Puhl, 2022).

Coping mechanisms, both behavioral and psychological, help individuals manage stress and adapt to adversity (Hart et al., 2014). In the Philippines, stress is widespread, with 58% of Filipinos reporting high stress levels, making it the second most stressed country globally (Gallup, 2019). The COVID-19 pandemic intensified these stressors, particularly for students (Zach, 2023).

At DFLOMNHS, OHSP learners are encouraged to take initiative in their studies, set learning goals, and manage their schedules independently. The school has partnered with the Local Government Unit to assign para-teachers in each barangay to support home-based learning. This approach is grounded in constructivist theory, which emphasizes learner-driven knowledge construction and aligns with the self-paced nature of OHSP.

Supported by Republic Act No. 10665, or the Open High School System Act, and approved by the La Union Schools Division Office under Schools Division Superintendent Atty. Donato D. Balderas, Jr., the OHSP at DFLOMNHS was launched for School Year 2022–2023 following a rigorous evaluation by Dr. Lorna O. Gaspar, Education Program Supervisor.

The OHSP provides a distance learning alternative for learners who face barriers such as physical disabilities, employment, financial constraints, or geographical distance. Its objectives are to retain potential dropouts,

reintegrate out-of-school youth, and achieve full participation in secondary education.

An orientation for OHSP learners, parents, and teachers was held on September 29, 2022, led by Dr. Jima N. Escobar, Principal IV, and Mrs. Catherine C. Balbin, OHSP Focal Person. Municipal Mayor Hon. Joy Pinzon Merin expressed her full support for the initiative.

This study aims to evaluate the implementation status of the OHSP at DFLOMNS and identify challenges experienced by learners and teacher-implementers.

Theoretical Framework and Research Paradigm

This study is anchored on several theoretical foundations that support the implementation and evaluation of the Open High School Program as an alternative delivery mode.

Jean Piaget's Cognitive Development Theory (1968) underpins the study by highlighting the importance of learners actively constructing knowledge based on their experiences. OHSP encourages self-paced and independent learning, enabling learners to build understanding through engagement with content and activities suited to their developmental stage.

Skinner's Behavioral Learning Theory (1930) emphasizes the use of reinforcement and consequences to shape behavior. In the

OHSP context, learners are guided by structured study routines, expectations for task completion, and feedback from teachers to reinforce positive learning behaviors.

Bickman's Program Theory (1987) is applied to understand how program design affects outcomes. It identifies the relationship between inputs, processes, and intended outcomes, helping educators refine the OHSP by focusing on how the program is implemented and how learners interact with it.

Scriven's Evaluation Theory (2004) highlights the importance of formative and summative evaluation. It emphasizes the dual role of evaluation in improving program implementation and meeting stakeholders' informational needs. In this study, both learners and teacher-implementers provide insights into the effectiveness and areas for improvement of OHSP.

These theories collectively inform the evaluation of OHSP at DFLOMNS, ensuring that its implementation is both pedagogically sound and practically responsive to the needs of learners and educators.

The conceptual framework guiding this study is illustrated in Figure 1, which presents the independent variables (learner and teacher profiles), the dependent variable (OHSP implementation level), and the moderating challenges encountered.

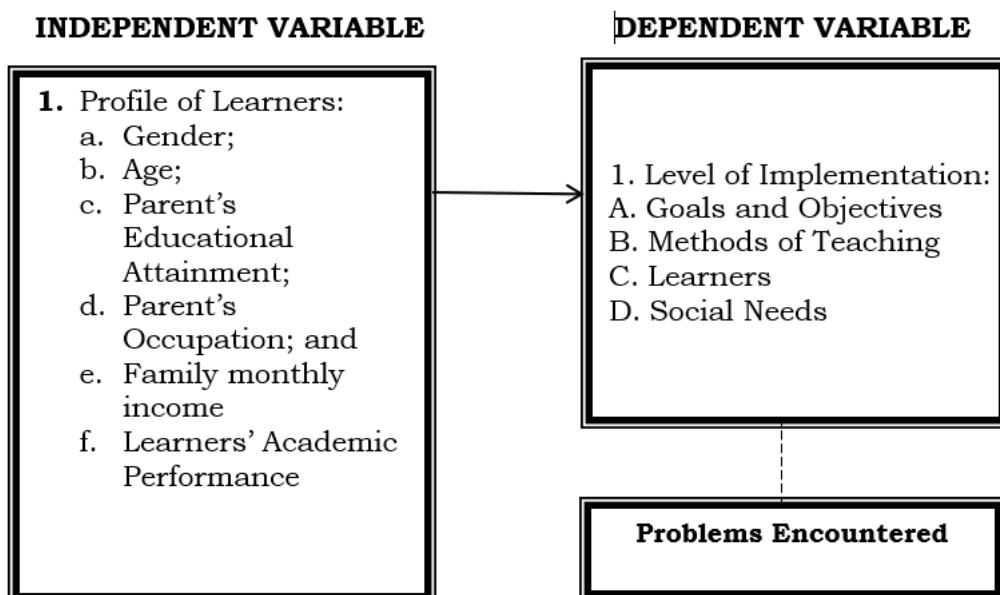


Figure 1. The Research Paradigm

Statement of the Problem

This study aims to assess the implementation of the Open High School Program (OHSP) and identify the challenges encountered, as perceived by the learners and teacher-implementers at Doña Francisca Lacsamana de Ortega Memorial National High School (DFLOM-NHS) during the School Year 2023–2024.

Specifically, the study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What is the profile of the OHSP learners in terms of: a. Gender; b. Age; c. Parents' educational attainment; d. Parents' occupation; e. Family monthly income; and f. Academic performance in the previous school year?
2. What is the level of implementation of the OHSP as perceived by: a. Learners; and b. Teacher-implementers; along the following dimensions: i. Goals and objectives; ii. Methods of teaching; iii. Learner roles; and iv. Social needs?
3. Is there a significant difference between the level of OHSP implementation as perceived by learners and teacher-implementers?
4. Is there a significant relationship between the learners' profiles and their perceived level of OHSP implementation?
5. What challenges are encountered by teacher-implementers in the implementation of the OHSP?

Review of Related Literature

The Open High School Program (OHSP) is an alternative learning delivery mode implemented by the Department of Education (DepEd) in the Philippines. It is designed to provide access to secondary education for learners unable to attend regular classes due to personal, economic, or social challenges. The OHSP aims to retain potential dropouts, encourage out-of-school youth aged 12–16 to return to school, and contribute to the achievement of Education for All (EFA) goals.

The Bureau of Secondary Education (2008) emphasizes that access to quality education is an inalienable right that enables individuals to become productive citizens. The Philippine Constitution mandates equitable access to quality and relevant education regardless of age, gender, or socio-economic status. The OHSP supports this mandate by offering a

flexible and learner-centered alternative for completing the high school curriculum.

In line with this vision, the Philippine Education for All 2015 initiative was signed by former President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, reinforcing the commitment to functional literacy for all (ASPBAE, 2007). E-Net Philippines (2010) further outlined policy recommendations to address school dropout rates, reduce education costs, and improve learning outcomes. These include identifying at-risk students, improving school accountability, and expanding alternative learning systems.

The Dropout Reduction Program (DORP), which includes the OHSP, was implemented to address the high dropout rates in Philippine secondary schools. According to the DORP Handbook (2008), the OHSP employs distance learning for students who cannot attend regular classes due to disability, work, poverty, or geographical barriers.

DepEd's 2011 press release highlighted the success of the DORP in reducing dropout rates from 12.51% in SY 2005–2006 to 7.95% in SY 2009–2010 (Luistro, 2011). This supports the OHSP's role in making education more accessible and inclusive.

Internationally, dropout is increasingly viewed as a long-term process rather than a singular event (Dupéré & Leventhal, 2014). Research shows that early family environments and school experiences play a critical role in shaping learners' educational trajectories (Alexander et al., 2001; Duchesne et al., 2008; Jimerson et al., 2000). Interventions must therefore start early and address not only academic but also socio-emotional needs.

Studies also recognize variability among at-risk learners: some students persist and graduate despite adversity, while others leave school later due to emerging stressors (Bowers et al., 2013). This underscores the importance of adaptive and supportive interventions throughout students' academic journeys.

Programs like OHSP contribute to this support system by providing flexible learning opportunities and re-engagement strategies. Evidence shows that even among high-risk youth, improved circumstances during adolescence—such as supportive mentoring or access to

learning facilitators—can reverse early academic disadvantages (Dobbie & Fryer, 2011).

Ultimately, successful implementation of the OHSP depends on how well schools, families, and communities collaborate to support learners. Strengthened partnerships, adequate training for implementers, and robust monitoring mechanisms are essential to ensuring the program achieves its goals.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a mixed-methods descriptive-correlational research design. The quantitative component assessed learners' academic performance and perceptions of OHSP implementation, while the qualitative component explored the challenges faced by teacher-implementers.

Population and Sampling

The study utilized total enumeration sampling, including all 48 learners enrolled in the OHSP and all 16 teacher-implementers at DFLOMNHS during the School Year 2023–2024. This approach ensured full representation of the program's key stakeholders.

Research Instrument

The primary data collection tool was a structured questionnaire comprising three parts:

1. Profile of Respondents – Included questions on gender, age, parents' educational attainment and occupation, family monthly income, and previous academic performance. This section was adapted from the validated instruments of Cruz and Vargas (2019).
2. Level of Program Implementation – Evaluated four dimensions: goals and objectives, teaching methods, learner roles, and social needs. This section used researcher-developed items validated by five educational administrators.
3. Problems Encountered – Gathered qualitative data through open-ended questions about challenges experienced by teacher-implementers in delivering the OHSP.

Reliability and Validity

The questionnaire was pilot-tested among 32 OHSP learners from a nearby school. Cronbach's alpha coefficients demonstrated excellent reliability for all subscales:

- Goals and Objectives: 0.931
- Methods of Teaching: 0.986
- Learner Roles: 0.980
- Social Needs: 0.969

Data Collection Procedure

After securing ethical clearance and permissions from the Schools Division Superintendent and the school principal, the researcher personally administered and retrieved the questionnaires to ensure data completeness. Informed consent was obtained from all participants.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using:

- Descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage, and mean)
- T-test for comparing perceptions between learners and teachers
- Pearson's correlation for examining relationships between respondents' profiles and program implementation

Qualitative responses were analyzed thematically and categorized into three main themes: role-based challenges, instructional challenges, and general challenges.

Results and Discussion

The findings indicate that the Open High School Program (OHSP) at DFLOMNHS is generally well-implemented, based on the perceptions of both learners ($M = 3.37$) and teacher-implementers ($M = 3.32$). The implementation was assessed across four key domains: goals and objectives, teaching methods, learner roles, and social needs.

The absence of a statistically significant difference between learner and teacher perceptions ($t = 0.24$, $p = 0.82$) reflects a shared understanding of the program's implementation, aligning with Scriven's (2004) evaluation theory, which emphasizes consensus among stakeholders as a hallmark of effective programs.

However, certain challenges persist. Notably, learners and teachers reported difficulties in integrating educational technologies, consistent with findings by Taguba (2023) and Bernal and Vergara (2017). For instance, the low mean score for the use of educational apps ($M = 2.80$) suggests a gap in digital pedagogy and infrastructure. This calls for systematic teacher training and technological investment.

Regarding learner profiles, a majority were from low-income families (81.25%) and had parents with low educational attainment. These findings are consistent with previous studies linking socio-economic status to academic support structures (Leganio, 2017; Graetz, as cited in Balsomo, 2019). While the study found no significant correlation between learner profiles and perceived program implementation (e.g., academic performance vs. teaching methods, $r = -0.013$, $p > 0.05$), the influence of external factors on student engagement remains evident.

Weak but statistically significant correlations were observed between gender and two implementation dimensions: goals and objectives ($r = 0.344$) and learner roles ($r = -0.305$). This suggests that gender may influence perceptions or experiences within the program, though not strongly.

Teacher profiles, including age, educational attainment, and years in service, showed no significant correlation with their implementation ratings, indicating consistency in perception across different teacher demographics.

Qualitative thematic analysis of teacher responses revealed three core challenge areas:

1. Role-Based Challenges – Lack of coordination and unclear responsibilities among stakeholders.
2. Instructional Challenges – Insufficient training in flexible learning strategies and underutilization of digital tools.
3. General Challenges – Limited parental support and inconsistent learner access to technology.

These challenges reflect what Bickman (1987) termed as unintended outcomes of program implementation, which can undermine the intended goals without targeted intervention. Additionally, the limited engagement of

community institutions such as the Barangay Council for the Protection of Children (BCPC) and Municipal Council for the Protection of Children (MCPC), with a mean score of 3.32, underscores the need to strengthen inter-agency collaboration.

Overall, while OHSP at DFLOMNHS is achieving its goal of flexible access to education, the sustainability and impact of the program hinge on addressing these contextual barriers and enhancing support mechanisms for both learners and implementers.

Conclusion

Based on the study's findings, several conclusions can be drawn:

1. The Open High School Program at DFLOMNHS is generally well-implemented, as indicated by both learner and teacher-implementer perceptions. This consensus suggests the program successfully delivers its intended outcomes across key dimensions, including goals and objectives, teaching methods, learner roles, and social needs.
2. Learners and teacher-implementers differ in background characteristics, such as gender, age, educational attainment of parents, and income levels. Despite these differences, no significant relationship was found between these variables and the level of OHSP implementation, indicating that the program is being delivered equitably across demographic groups.
3. While no substantial differences in perceptions were found between learners and teacher-implementers, minor gender-related correlations suggest that learner experiences within OHSP may vary subtly based on demographic factors.
4. Teachers reported challenges in role coordination, instructional strategies, and technology integration, highlighting the need for capacity-building initiatives, clearer program management structures, and enhanced access to educational technologies.
5. The limited involvement of community-based institutions such as the BCPC and MCPC calls for stronger inter-agency collaboration to fully address the social and developmental needs of OHSP learners.

These conclusions affirm that while OHSP at DFLOMNS fulfills its mandate of expanding access to education, continuous improvement efforts are essential to strengthen implementation quality and learner outcomes.

Recommendations

In light of the findings and conclusions of the study, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance the implementation and outcomes of the Open High School Program at DFLOMNS:

- 1. Enhance Parent Support and Engagement**
Conduct regular capability-building seminars for parents to equip them with strategies to support their children's home-based learning, particularly for families with limited formal education backgrounds. Strengthening the home-school partnership can help improve learner motivation and academic outcomes.
- 2. Strengthen Teacher Training in Flexible Learning and Technology Integration**
Provide quarterly in-service training for teacher-implementers focused on digital tools (e.g., Edpuzzle, Kahoot, Quizlet), asynchronous instruction, and differentiated learning strategies. This will address instructional challenges and support more effective delivery of the OHSP.
- 3. Institutionalize Learner Support Programs**
Establish structured learner development sessions that focus on time management, independent study habits, and basic digital literacy. These sessions should be implemented at the beginning of each quarter to reinforce learner preparedness and resilience.
- 4. Develop a Monitoring and Feedback System**
Design and implement a digital dashboard to track learner attendance, submissions, and performance. This tool should be accessible to both teachers and learners to support transparency, timely feedback, and accountability.
- 5. Strengthen Community and Inter-agency Collaboration**
Formalize partnerships with barangays, the

Barangay Council for the Protection of Children (BCPC), and the Municipal Council for the Protection of Children (MCPC) through Memoranda of Agreement (MOAs). These partnerships can provide psychosocial support, learning facilitators, and logistical assistance to OHSP learners.

- 6. Institutionalize a Regular Program Evaluation Cycle**
Conduct annual review meetings involving all stakeholders—learners, parents, teacher-implementers, administrators, and local government representatives—to evaluate program implementation and inform decision-making.
- 7. Pilot a Peer Mentorship Program**
Select high-performing learners to serve as peer mentors for those at risk of academic failure or dropping out. This initiative can foster peer support, build leadership skills, and contribute to a stronger learning community.

These recommendations aim to address current challenges, strengthen implementation practices, and ensure the sustained success of the OHSP in promoting inclusive and flexible education at DFLOMNS.

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