Reaching-Out to Returning Students amidst Pandemic

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Abstract

Some learners who had untoward experience in life turn out to be school leavers, either by their own choice or through circumstance that they did not expect. But returning after a year or more of being out of school is a new beginning for them. This study focused on investigating the experience of returning students amidst time of pandemic. Twelve returning students from grades 8 to 11 became the participants in this study. Through social media connectivity, the researchers provided assistance to them in terms of peer tutoring in different subjects, having to stay at home while doing modular tasks due to COVID 19. Seven qualitative questions were given on a weekly interval for the participants to share their experience and idea on how returning learners can adjust in schooling through the aid of peers, teachers, school, family and community. Data gathered were encoded, processed through word cloud generator, interpreted and analyzed thematically in the light of sound principles so as to construct meaningful conclusion pertaining to the assistance that can be provided to returning students. Themes were developed which surround the concept of peer assistance, teacher intervention, school program, and family and community partnership. The school system should provide safe and motivating environment, practical implementation of curriculum, and positive discipline to create a better ground for returning students. Teachers should generally improve the strategies in providing moral support and showing compassion to returning learners as part of their intervention. Peer encouragement in the form of guidance and assistance academically and morally helps returning learners pursue studies. Parents and community can collaborate in bringing about projects that promote close-family ties and academic assistance as well.

Keywords: returning student; peer; teacher; school; family; community

1. Introduction

COVID-19 Pandemic delivers us through different circumstances this year, 2020. We almost disengaged and lost our willingness to learn because of what we are facing and how hard it is for everyone to cope up or to adjust to the new system. Thus, students re-think of what they should be choosing right now and what things are to prioritize. Most students that drop-out of school face this kind of dilemma. There are reasons to consider, first is financial resources were it is the major reason why students drop out of school. It also seems that, in terms of policies and practices, student-teacher relationship, financial resources and academic performance shows no significant difference while age, civil status and sources of tuition payment are primary factors that lead students to drop out of school.

In the Philippines, one of the reasons why number of dropout were enormous is due to the conflict or war in the Mindanao Region and due to the Natural Calamities used to devastate the country which is typhoon and earthquake. Second main reason is due to lack of family income to support the education of the family. In line with this, secondary school completion was significantly lower for students who did not reside with both parents, the family situation was not predictive of school completion. Furthermore, there are more factors why they consider dropping out of school; lack of credits and falling behind why students quit; moving, being

bullied, language barriers, and a combination of the factors were also listed as recurrent reasons; students also felt like monitoring progress, providing academic support, and creating a safe and inviting learning environment could prevent them from leaving prior to graduation. There are also reasons for returning to school, they were categorized as family, future opportunities, personal goals, peers, and boredom. Decisions to return were eased by elements of the new school, including the school structure and the new school environment. Students also feel that having someone who cared enough to check on them and make sure they were on the right track would have helped prevent them from dropping out of high school and what has led them, as adults, to re-enroll in an educational environment. Practically, 75% of high school dropouts eventually finish their education. Being dropped out of high school doesn't mean it's the end of the line.

Stating all of the factors, this study focused on the needs, progress and achievement our Balik-Eskwela learners who re-enrolled amidst the pandemic COVID-19. What motivated the Balik-Eskwela learners to return to school this school year 2020-2021? What are the needs of our Balik-Eskwela learners to make progress and attain their goals in this kind of situation?

1.1 Background of the Study

Deped Order 74, series of 2010 stipulates the following: "Find them, Reach them, Keep them and Make them Complete School" inspired the implementers of the Dropout Reduction Program (DORP) in the secondary schools to perform better. The effectiveness of the Dropout Reduction Program (DORP) in reducing dropout rate, in the attainment of zero dropout rates, in increasing participation rate and improving learning outcomes using formal, non-formal and informal approaches has been proven in many schools across the regions. To share the best practices of this Program, the Bureau of Secondary Education (BSE), this Department encourages all school heads to mainstream or integrate this Program in the conceptualization/formulation of their school improvement plan (SIP) in all public secondary schools. The DORP, formerly known as the Secondary Schooling Alternatives (SSA) under the Secondary Education Development and Improvement Project (SEDIP), is one of the holistic alternative delivery mode (ADM) offerings of the BSE. The Drop Out Reduction Program aims to facilitate access of every Filipino to quality basic education, which will equip the learners with the basic literacy tools and content that are essential for the growth and development as a person and as a citizen of a democratic society. In the program, they stated that likelihood of student leaving school could be reduced if the students' felt need are being satisfied and learning experiences are pleasurable. Approaches of Family, Individual, Community and School (FICS) analysis to facilitate the students-at-risk of dropping out (SARDO) will help to build up their self-confidence and the self-reliance. In able to understand and know the needs, progress and achievement of Balik-Eskwela learners who re-enrolled amidst the pandemic COVID-19, there should be a great collaboration of approaches from family, individual, community and school teachers that will help and care for them to make sure that they are in the right track. Having someone who will help them through their journey as a Balik-Eskwela learner would be a great help for them to have more courage to continue and perform better. This may not be confined into guidance, supervision and monitoring, as this study would like to explore. How much is the part of having someone is needed in the collaboration that will guide and check them through their progress as a Balik-Eskwela learner in order for them to prevent from dropping out of high school ? What are their reasons why they chose to return school amidst the pandemic COVID-19? How can providing academic support, and creating a safe and inviting learning environment could prevent them from decisions to drop out ? What are the strengths, weakness, learning difficulties and needs of Balik-Eskwela learners?

1.2. Theoretical Framework

Little is known about the reasons of learners' return to schooling after a year or more of being out of school. If there are numerous studies on reasons of dropping from the roll of enrolees, the reasons of returning

have not been fully studied. Schools just focus on projects that will help them stay, not knowing if those projects go side-by-side with the reasons of their dropping from school and return to study. But as Orr (1987) puts it, "By learning why students leave, it has been reasoned we can more ably design programs that will help them stay." This principle was the guiding rule throughout the exploration in this book. The researchers investigated on the different reasons why learners return to schooling after having a year or years of rest away from the premises of the school. By understanding the hopes and reasons of the learners in returning to school, administrators and partners can make a concrete plan on strategizing to help these learners stay and eventually finish a curriculum year or a level of study. The authors strongly believe that if there is a mismatch with the expectation of the returnees and the projects being implemented in the school, sooner or later, these learners might be seen dropping again from the list. A short survey could be implemented in school for learners who are returning even before the school year starts so as to capture or help them maintain their eagerness and interest in studying. If returning students know that the school implements projects that may not be available during their previous years in schooling, their reasons for dropping again would be mitigated.

1.3. Conceptual Framework

This study looks at the lasting stay of the returnees to the school until graduation as a collaboration of several elements, as can be seen in the figure.
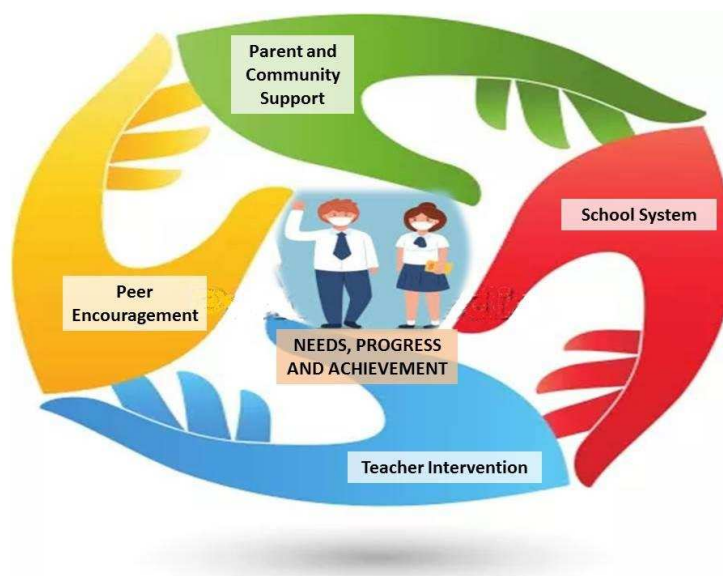

Fig. 1. The conceptual framework of the study

There are four contributing elements why returning students would push through studying: school system, teacher intervention, peer encouragement, and parent and community support. These four elements, if parallel in effort with each other, would secure the stay of the returning students, having no more reason to leave again or drop, except possibly for inadvertent circumstances. When these four factors or elements go hand-in-hand, returning students' needs, progress and achievement would be given proper perspective. Needs would be attended and be given solution. Progress would be noted and actions to maintain it would be the focus. Achievement would be celebrated, thereby giving motivation to learners to continue reaching for higher heights. On the other hand, if one of these four elements would not function properly, returning students' needs may not be given attention, thereby creating problems that they may have encountered

previously when they first leave the school. Progress would be evasive, that is, learners would be stagnant academically. Achievement would not be realized, instead, results would be low level output, non-performing status, or even failing grades.

1.4. Objectives

This book was written and conceptualized with the following salient objectives in mind:
1. Identify key characteristics of drop-out students to understand their unpredicted educational risk.
2. Investigate on drop-out students' attitude and insights towards pursuing their education.
3. Begin building a net of support to drop-out students by connecting home and school-based education.
4. Identify the national economic impact of having drop-out students to educational setting, and commence comprehensive plan for the government to assists students inside and outside of school.

1.5. Statement of the Problem

This project focused investigating the reasons of return of learners after leaving school for a year or more, and through that be able to maintain their interest in schooling through peer encouragement.
Specifically, it sought answer to the following questions:
1. What are the salient reasons why learners leave school and do other things instead of school tasks?
2. What school aspects do learners dislike that contribute to the factor of leaving or dropping?
3. What motivated the learners to return to schooling after a year or years of not being enrolled?
4. How can the school system be improved so the returning learners would pursue finishing a level of study?
5. What teacher intervention can be strengthened to reach out to learners who have returned in schooling?
6. How does peer encouragement help in boosting learners' performance in this pandemic? And
7. What support can parents and community extend to learners who have returned schooling this time of pandemic?

1.6. Significance of the Study

The study conducted in this research would benefit the following group of people:
- **Balik-Eskwela** Learners, as the prime beneficiary of this study, was deemed to have better encouragement in going back to learning because of the efforts of volunteers that helped them, including themselves as they chose to be back in learning again .
- **Teachers** would be part as also the encourager on the part of the learners, especially that learners would be having an adjustment in this situation.
- **Parents** would have quality time with their child, an opportunity to express their concern to their future.
- **School** would be at its best in delivering quality education to learners, now that the pandemic seems to hamper this mission and vision of the Department of Education.
- **Community** would have a pool of strong workforce in the near future because of the responsible young citizens that would be an inspiration for others in going back to school despite of the hindrances.

2. Review of Related Literature

This portion of the study contains literature which is relevant to the topic being dealt with.

Orion, Forosuelo and Cavalida (2014) had a study on the factors triggering drop outs from schools. When compared to others factors, financial resources were found out to be the highest reason why learners leave school. Across several school years, the factors that were found out to have significant differences are terms of policies and practices, student-teacher relationship, financial and academic performance, while the variable which has no significant differences across two school years is the curriculum. Upon looking at the factors that contribute to school drop outs, age, civil status and sources of tuition payment were found out to be contributing variables.

With a predictive tone in the study of Timbal (2019), three scenarios were found out to be significantly possible as to the dropping of learners or leaving the school. The first scenario is when the learner experienced being retained in a certain grade level, the student is more likely to become a drop out or school leaver. Second, if a student has greater than six siblings, then he is more likely to be drop out. And third, if the student has not experienced being retained in a certain grade level neither does the students has greater than six siblings, but has fairly satisfactory or satisfactory performance in the previous grade level, then the student is more like to be school leaver.

In the study made by Brooks (2015), three important interview questions were solicited to the participants. The first question deals with the reason of leaving the school. Respondents provided three salient reasons – (a) they lived in an unstable environment, (b) they are being taken cared of single parents, and (c) there is lack of number of guidance counselor in school. The second question deals with the program that can be initiated so that learners can stay in school until finishing a level. Participants motioned that having someone who really cares, whether it is a teacher, peer or family, would make them finish study and perform well. The last issue in Brooks' study is the motivating factor why school leavers decided to re-enrol. Participants stated that they realized that not having a diploma would give them difficulty in being hired n a certain job, or that they will be having difficulty to be promoted if hey haven't finished the required level of studies.

Doll, Eslami and Walters (2013) conceptualized that there are push, pull factors and falling factors that cause drop outs. The push factor includes school-consequence on attendance and other school disciplines on seeming misbehavior. The pull factors include out-of school enticement like jobs and peer groups. Falling factors on the other hand are those elements which neither belong to push nor with pull factors. These are disengagement problems that are mainly caused by poor decision-making of the students despite of proper guidance at home and at school.

The result of the study made by Moore (2017) seems to resonate with the other studies being mentioned earlier. The primary reasons for leaving the school are: "(a) a lack of credits and falling behind was the most common reason why students quit; (b) moving, being bullied, language barriers, and a combination of the factors were also listed as recurrent reasons students dropped out; (c) respondents felt like monitoring progress, providing academic support, and creating a safe and inviting learning environment could prevent students from leaving prior to graduation."

Haley (2006) had a comprehensive look at returning students' feat or experience before, during and after returning in school.

"Reasons for leaving school fell under the five categories of care, relationships, school/class size, policies, and professionalism. Reasons for returning were categorized as family, future opportunities, personal goals, peers, and boredom. Decisions to return were eased by elements of the new school, including the school structure, school environment, and the AmeriCorps Program. *Influences on the participants' continuation in school since re-*enrolment included family, personal goals, a*nd the new school environment."*

Burrell (2020) found a light in the midst of the discussion of school drop outs. It was observed that around 75% who dropped from the roll and return to school eventually finish their education. This shows that the educational setting somehow offers hope, guidance and encouragement to returning students.

Whannell (2011) has a different notion with regards to experience of school leavers. Residential

situation and quality of student-teacher relationship were found to be contributing factors why learners experience drop outs, with the student-teacher relationship being prevalent among the two. With regards to residential issue, secondary school completion rate is lower for those who is not leaving with both parents. Nevertheless, family situation is not predictive of school completion; rather, it is the family dysfunction that causes discouragement among learners. This means that even if the learner is not leaving with both parents, if he is still having good relationship with the both the mother and the father, it is more likely that the student will still finish study, rather than the student who is living with both father and mother but experiences family conflict the radiates in his social interaction in school.

Re-enrolment in itself is not the contributing factor to the success of a student, but what he does when he reenrols. The poor attendance of the re-enrolees makes it difficult for to cope up with testing requirements, graduation or completion and other accountability requirements for them to succeed, according to Berliner and Barrat (2008).

Philippines is known for close-family ties and therefore, there are other reasons for school dropouts. Different calamities have always been constant visitors in the Philippine archipelago. Add to that is the conflict between Muslims and Christians that hamper smooth delivery of education in the southern part. Another main reason according to Kadil (2017) is the lack of family income to support the needs of education, though public education in the Philippines if free. Allowance and other expenses makes gives parents difficulty in sending students in school, in some cases.

Once again, the previous factors that were mentioned still ring out in the study made by Torres and Saromines (2016). Through focused group discussion the following reasons were found out to be contributing factors for school drop-out: (1) hostility in the family, (2) adversities at home, (3) peer influence, (4) learning difficulty, (5) low self-esteem and poor disposition, and (6) negative social interaction.

Three questions interests many researchers with regards to school drop-outs and returning students, and they are the following: ((1) what do students dislike about school; (2) what factors about the school lead to the students' decisions to drop out; and, (3) what motivated the students to return to school? Both the studies of Ekstrom, et. al. (1987) and Tanner, Krahn and Hartnagel (1995) deal with these three questions and it was interesting that learners dislike in school were found out to be the highest contributing factors why learners leave. But it was not clear in the studies mentioned what specific aspect of dislike were the learners referring to – was it the school system, the environment, the teacher-student relationship, the school facilities, the programs, or the curriculum. Many would mention that it is the teacher-student relationship but would not spoke of it plainly probably because the learners themselves are to be blamed about it.

All the above-mentioned readings would provide insight on the explanation, interpretation and analysis of the qualitative data that would be gathered in the exploration of the topic.

3. Resign Design and Methodology

3.1. Research Design

The exploration design used to accomplish the purposeful objective of this study is qualitative. Robson (2011) characterizes qualitative study as an prescriptive guide in which design is flexible rather than fixed. The characteristics of qualitative research used to explore the validity of the data is: (1) qualitative data collection is open-ended and adequately represented by a choice from prior topic ,(2) qualitative data analysis is based on text and centralized the significant goal of the study ,and (3) qualitative process is iterative in which it involves repetition in expressing a verbal action. The type of qualitative research accommodated was phenomenology for a reason that this book concentrates on the interactive nature and experiences of Balik Eskwela Learners. Maxwell (2008) address that his focus on designing a qualitative study is to arrive at valid conclusions and efficiently achieve its goals- also it emphasizes only the essential truth as a valuable component.

3.2. Participants

The table on the next page shows the participants of the study whose experience on leaving and returning the school would be noted, analyzed and be given themes. There were 1 returning learner from grade 8, four from grade 9, four from grade 10, and three returning learners from 11. Three of the authors were grade 12 learners, making their age with the participants not far from each other. Having same stage of adolescents, they can easily communicate with each other with regards to their ideas, thoughts and emotions.

Table 1. Participants of the Study

Subject/Participant	Frequency
Grade 8 returning students	1
Grade 9 returning students	4
Grade 10 returning students	4
Grade 11 returning students	3
Total	**12**

3.3. Data Gathering Procedure

The figure below shows the four main stages that lead to gathering of necessary data, enabling the authors to create comprehensive and meaningful conclusion.
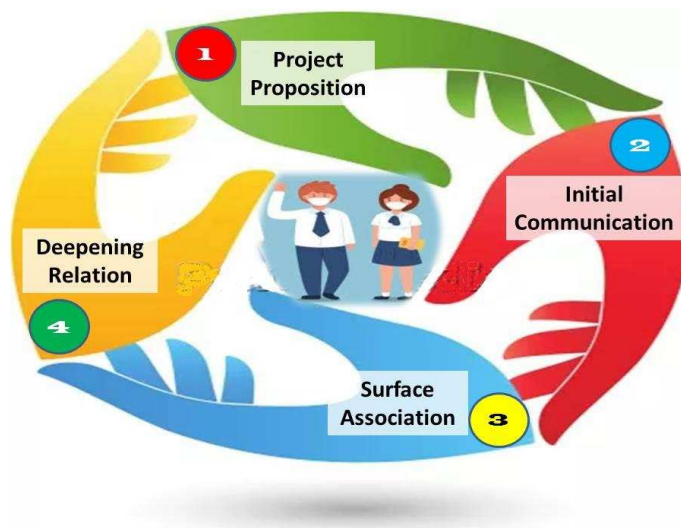

Fig. 2. Flowchart of data gathering procedure

The first step is **Project Proposition**. In this stage, permission is asked form the school head with regards to the conduct of this study. Also, informed consent was secured from the participant learners and their parents as well. This would ensure support from parents so as to attain the objective of this project. Second is **Initial Communication**. Through this the authors seek to establish a friendly tone in giving academic assistance to returning learners. Peer encouragement can thus be realized on this stage of the study. Third, **Surface Association** opened up the door for participants to share the reasons why they left schooling, and during this pandemic decided to return and study again. This stage of communication gave way for gathering data that answers Statement of the Problem numbers 1 to 3. The last stage, **Deepening Relation**,

geared toward gathering qualitative response on learners' expectation from the school, teachers, peers, parents and community that answers Statement of the Problem numbers 4 to 7. The last three stages covered eight (8) weeks that were part of the first quarter for this school year 2020-2021.

3.4. Data Gathering Technique

Qualitative questions were channelled to the respondents through Facebook messenger. Soliciting questions started at first quarter of the school year (2020-2021), which from then on, every week another qualitative question and an academic assistance would be provided. Eight weeks comprised seven questions to be answered in at least three complete sentences in order to have a comprehensive thought of the idea towards gathering responses on learners' reasons and expectations from the school, teachers, peers, parents and community that the Balik- Eskwela learners wished to evoke out of the issue being raised. A private messaging (PM) with their respective authors that was associated to contact them weekly was designed for the Balik-Eskwela learners. Whenever there are unclear responses from the participants, different techniques of proving were employed. Encouraging was one way the researchers was able to lead the participants in expounding on their answers. Challenging made the participants depend their answers. Showing understanding was also a way of making the participants feel comfortable in providing their ideas and thoughts about question being raised. Responses were put into transcript, ready for processing by an electronic Word Cloud generator.

3.5. Data Gathering Instrument

Qualitative questions were the main instrument in gathering data for this study. As there were probing questions when the responses were not yet clear or has hanging thoughts, so there are also beginner questions that would make the participants at ease in conversation in social media. Listed here is the general group of questions that the researchers gave to the participants. The term "general" signifies that the researchers developed probing questions during the interview which may not be recorded here, but these questions guided them in smoothly manoeuvring the conversation in order to gather important data for the topic of the topic. The first questions were light issues. The second questions were linking ones that were related to the third ones (leading questions), the main focus of the researchers to explore. Only the leading questions were analyzed and interpreted so as to develop themes for this study.

Table 2. Instrument of 8 weeks of exploration with returning learners

	Light Question	**Linking Question**	**Leading Question**
Week 1	How is your study? What is your favorite subject?	Aside from having modular distance learning, what else do you do in a week?	What are your reasons of leaving the school in the previous year/s instead of doing school tasks?
Week 2	Were you able to finish all the tasks last week? What gave you difficulty if there is?	What made you decide to choose Talangan Integrated National High School in returning to study?	What school aspects do you dislike that contribute in leaving the school before?
Week 3	Maybe we have similar hobbies and pastimes. What are yours? Do you also love learning new things?	How many months or years did you stop schooling before you enrolled again?	What motivated you in returning to school after a year/s of not being enrolled?
Week 4	When was the last time you visited our school? Were you able to see our school head already?	What initiative of the school do you know already that is helping you in your modular distance learning?	How do you think the school system be improved so the returning learners like you will pursue finishing high school?
Week 5	Do you always communicate with your adviser? How about	Aside from the self-learning modules, what else are the	What teacher intervention do you think needs to be strengthened so teachers can

		interventions of your teacher so you can understand the topic?	reach out to returning learners like you?
Week 6	Who among your classmates has already become your close friend?	What help are you getting from your classmates in doing the tasks in modular distance learning?	How does peer encouragement boost your academic performance in this pandemic?
Week 7	Is your community in strict rules about COVID-19? Are you able to go out like for example you have academic needs or materials?	Do your parents assist you in getting the module from the school or from the barangay?	What support can you think parents and community extend to learners who have returned schooling this time of pandemic?
Week 8	This week was designed for continuous encouragement for returning learners, giving them free tutorial online on subjects they were having difficulty, and appreciating their effort in being part of the study.		

3.6. Ethical Considerations

To protect the rights of the Balik-Eskwela learners, the following ethical considerations were followed:

• Respondents' freedom of cooperation – Balik-Eskwela learners received an invitation to be part of the exploration. They were not forced or given a mandatory rule to share ideas and thoughts of their experience as a returning student amidst pandemic.

• Informed Consent - Those who positively responded to the invitation to be part of the study were informed of the terms and approach in gathering response from them, and the showed consent through digital consent of the terms and conditions.

• Expert Validation – The qualitative questions were confirmed by the expert (International Research Reviewer) as appropriate and will elicit the needed information towards arriving at a concrete conclusion.

• Responses were sent in privacy through Private Messaging (PM) - The responses were kept between the author and every single respondent because the manner in which responses were gathered or harvested is through private messaging. Ideas were all welcomed and included in the process of formulating themes for this study.

• Token of appreciation for valuable contribution – All respondents were mentioned in the acknowledgement portion of this book. Their participation was given importance.

• Disclosure of salient findings to the respondents – Balik-Eskwela learners who participated in this study were updated with the findings and conclusion so that they would be able to apply the learning that they can acquire out this study.

3.7. Data Analysis

Responses of Balik Eskwela Learners that were gathered from Facebook Messenger through private message were rendered in a Word Cloud generator available online. The Word Cloud and word frequency table formed from the online application lead the study to complete data analysis and formulate themes. These coded themes show the features of the Balik Eskwela learners in a particular question posted at the beginning of the study. No statistical tool was used since qualitative approach already shows explicitly the transparency done in this research. Subjectivity do not affect the forming of conclusion because the outcome of Word Cloud generator application could not be controlled and manipulated. The themes drawn were applicable to the community, vicinity or school where this exploration was conducted.

4. Presentation, Analysis and Interpretation of Data

This portion of the study highlights the findings in this study. The presentation is through graphics of

the mostly appearing words from the participants, summary of the responses, internal analysis, external analysis, and the theme that emerged.

4.1. Reasons for Leaving School

The figure shows the eight frequently appearing words when the participants were asked this question, "What are your reasons of leaving the school in the previous year/s instead of doing school tasks?
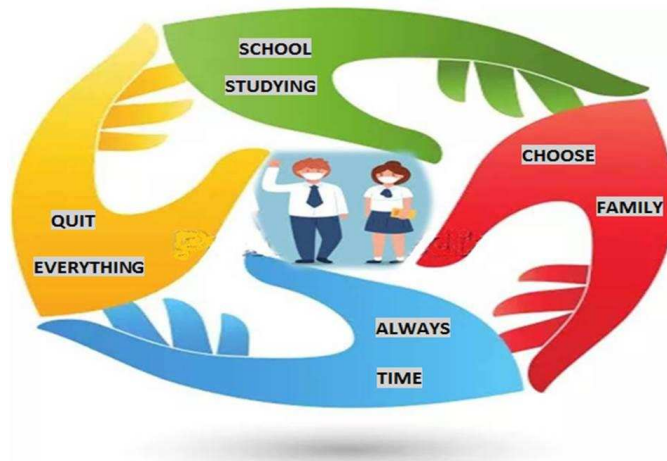

Fig. 3. Word cloud on reasons for leaving school

Eight words frequently appear in the responses of the 12 participants: "school", "studying", "choose", "family", "always", "time", "quit" and "everything". Their responses were summarized into four ideas:

a. Learners associate their decision leave school to the relational problem they have with their **family** or parents who are not **always** there to support them.

b. Having the consciousness of expenses associated with daily living while **studying**, learners' **choose** to work and earn for a living, or stop studying so as not to be blamed for financial problems.

c. Learners' peers have a strong influence not only in attitudes, ways and choices, but even to the extent of thinking to **quit** in going to **school**.

d. Because of the desire to explore many things, the **time** that should be spent in studying is wasted in trivial things, in which, little by little, **everything** about studying is clouded with the desire of belongingness with peer groups.

Consequently, the pull factors that Doll, Eslami and Walters (2013) are mentioning in their analysis of seven representative studies is the same with the findings in this study. They said that pull factors for having drop-out in schools include out-of-school enticements like jobs and family problem. Other reasons relate to peer influence or pressure in which at first, learners do not o recognize it as something that would affect their desire to pursue finishing study, but when they are already hooked into the routines of their peers, their choices are already affected as to the real value of studying.

Based from the frequently appearing words, summary of participants' responses, and the external analysis, the first theme developed is this:

"Learners' misguided desire to prove something worthy with their family and peers causes them to quit schooling."

4.2. Aspects of School that Hinders Learners' Stay

The figure shows the eight frequently appearing words when the participants were asked this question, "What are your reasons of leaving the school in the previous year/s instead of doing school tasks?
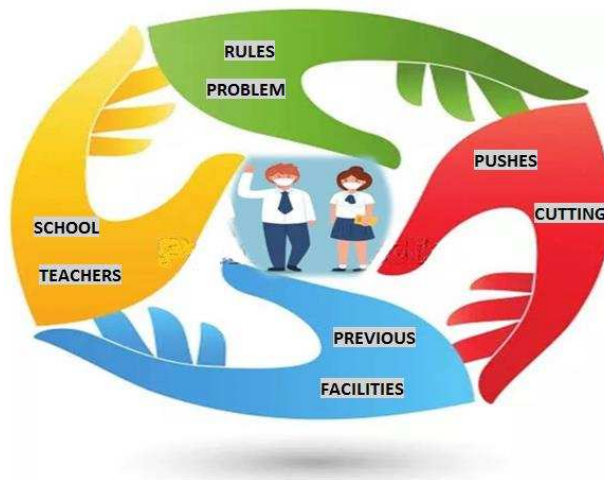

Fig. 4. Word cloud on aspects of school hindering learners' stay

Eight words frequently appear in the responses of the 12 participants: "school", "teachers", "rules", "problem", "pushes", "cutting", "previous" and "facilities". Their responses were summarized into four ideas:

a. Conflict within the **school** environment and indirect relation to **teachers** contributes to the aspects that the learners dislike.
b. Pressure from classmates **pushes** them to do **cutting** classes even they don't like to do this kind of action.
c. Some of the learners' **previous** school might have inadequate **facilities**, leading the learners to feel uncertain and leave their school.
d. Strict school **rules** also give **problem** to learners in dealing with their school days.

Moore (2017) has similar observation with the findings in this study. Her study lined up three main factors: (1) lack of credits from teachers and school, (2) bulling and distraction from peers, and (3) school rules, system of monitoring and provision of support. In three simple senses, they are teachers, peers and school rules. The present study adds one to this list, and it is the school facilities. It can be said that these factors make them inconvenient and probably hinders them to given their utmost performance in school. It can be surmised that at the beginning, before actually leaving the school, they are having irregular attendance, until such a time that they are not anymore seen in the school premise. This eventually results into drop out of school enrolment.

Based from the frequently appearing words, summary of participants' responses, and the external analysis, the theme developed is this:

*"Unexp*ected or inconvenient school experiences and environment can highly contribute to a learner's decision about leaving the school."

4.3. Reasons for Returning after Leaving School

The figure shows the eight frequently appearing words when the participants were asked this

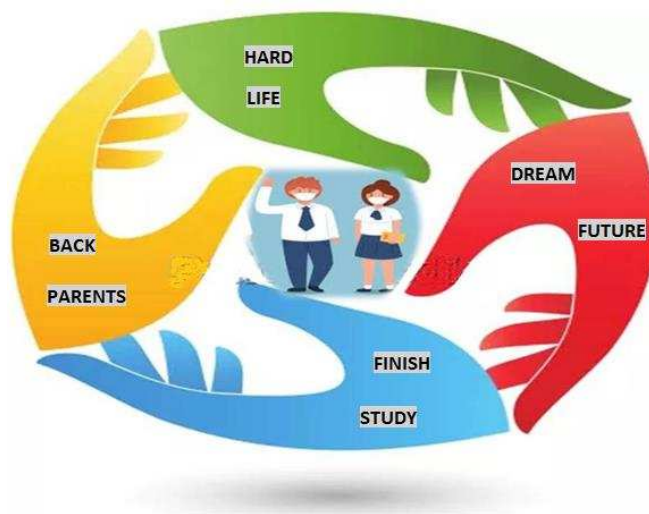question, "What motivated you in returning to school after a year/s of not being enrolled?"

Fig, 5. Word cloud on reasons for returning after leaving school

Eight words frequently appear in the responses of the 12 participants: "hard", "life", "back", "parents", "dream", "future", "finish", and "study". Their responses were summarized into four ideas:

a. Learners experiences and realization how **hard life** is when they tried stop studying helped them to be more dedicated to study hard.

b. Having the desire to give **back** for all the hardships of their **parents** and provide them a high quality of life, keeps them motivated to return to school and strive more.

c. Eagerness to achieve their **dream** becomes their initial motivation that pushes them to have more courage in building a brighter **future**.

d. Because of the desire to achieve their goals in life, learners become motivated about the possible out comes when they **finish** to **study** and how it can truly change their life.

Burrell (2020) declared a relevant information that majority of those who were dropped from school roll were able to return and finish study. Most learners looked at it as not yet the end of their dream to attain something in their life. This is in consonance with the experience of the participants with regards to returning school. Their reasons can be summarized as follows: realization in life, recognizing parents' effort, following dreams, and desire to achieve goals. The society somehow provides hope whenever someone stumbles. The people around gives energy to someone who has experienced life adversity, making them to stand again and reach heights they have never stepped on before.

Based from the frequently appearing words, summary of participants' responses, and the external analysis, the theme developed is this:

"Learners' realization in life, parents' effort, and desire to build a better future provide school leavers' motivation in returning school".

4.4. Improvisation of School System for Returning Learners

The figure shows the eight frequently appearing words when the participants were asked this question, "How do you think the school system be improved so the returning learners like you will pursue finishing high school?
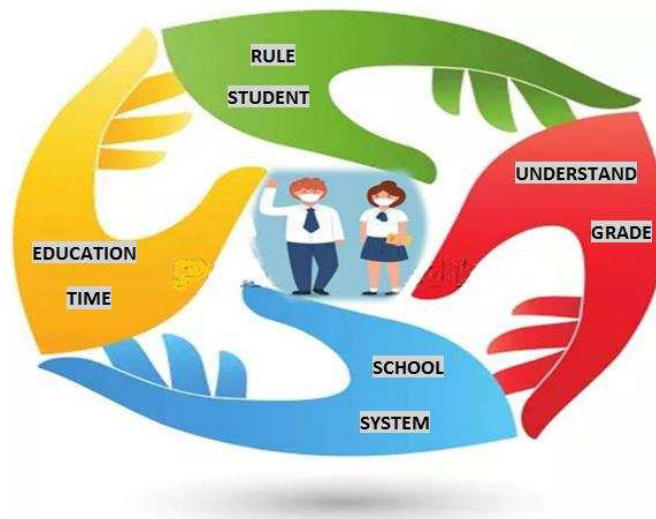
Fig. 6. Word cloud on school system to facilitate learning

Eight words frequently appear in the responses of the 12 participants: "school", "system", "education", "time", "rule", "student", "grade", and "understand". Their responses were summarized into four ideas:

a. The **school** itself should be conducive for learning and have a **system** that will emphasize and protect learners from discrimination.

b. It is also important to evaluate the **education** being provided by the school system during a certain **time** to try giving overload works for the learners.

c. Implementation of strict school **rules** affects the positive mind-set of a learner that causes them to question themselves and it should be monitored for the sake of the **student** that they're obeying those.

d. Because of high competition around them, encouragement from the school will give a great chance of attaining a desirable **grade** because it will aid them to better **understand** the lessons being taught.

Four words ring-out in understanding the ideas of the participants: security, study-load, rules, and ambiance. These are included in the push factors of Doll, Eslami and Walters (2013). Returning learners still need to adjust in the system when they return to school, and being bombarded with so many tasks or study-load may not be beneficial to them. Some of the returning learners may still be working to earn a living while studying to fulfil their dreams. Proper guidance and an orientation to the system should be provided to them. It would be helpful if the guidance office would provide program to aid them in proper time management so that they can go along with the phasing of other learners. Constructive, positive discipline should also be implemented because these returning learners may have adopted some concepts outside the school which may estrange them because they are considered new comers in school. It is important to note that they may not want to disobey some rules; it's just that some school rules are not yet fully explained to them, therefore they are reluctant to submit to them.

Based from the frequently appearing words, summary of participants' responses, and the external analysis, the theme developed is this:

"The school system should provide safe and motivating environment, practical implementation of curriculum, and positive discipline to create a better ground for returning students."

4.5. Teacher Intervention to Returning Learners

The figure shows the eight frequently appearing words when the participants were asked this question, "What teacher intervention do you think needs to be strengthened so teachers can reach out to returning learners like you?
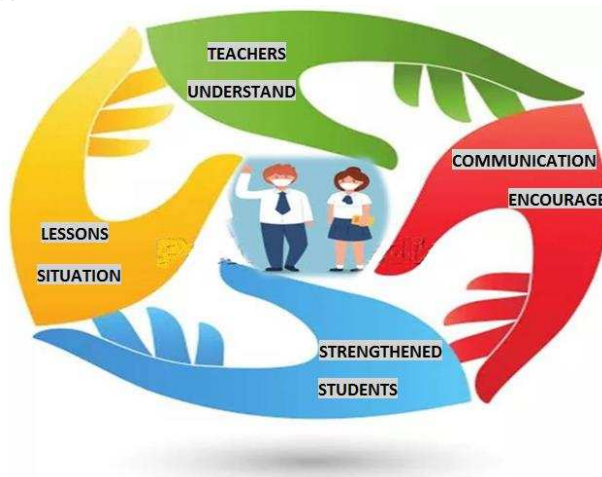

Fig. 7. Word cloud on teacher intervention to returning learners

Eight words frequently appear in the responses of the 12 participants: "teachers", "understand", "communication", "strengthened", "encourage", "students", "lessons", and "situation". Their responses were summarized into four ideas:

a. Connection to the life of learners can be measured effectively if the **teachers** can expand their strategies to clearly **understand** the state of returning learners.

b. To specify a good relationship, the **communication** between teachers and learners should be **strengthened**.

c. Teacher's improved interventions should **encourage** the **students** to embrace the nature of education.

d. Easiest way for teachers to implement the **lessons** to returning students is to appreciate them despite of their **situation**.

In simple terms, the respondents desire for the teachers to (a) be acquainted with their situation, (b) have a good relationship with them, (c) encourage them, and (d) show appreciation. Moore (2017) reported that teachers should provide or create safe and inviting learning environment so that they would not anymore leave school until they finish a level of study. This is true because returning learners have already had enough of negative experiences when they were out of school in previous year/s, and they don't want to encounter another negative experience, this time that they return schooling. In our pandemic situation in which distance learning is being applied in almost all institutions around the globe, teachers can send encouraging text messages or words of wisdom to returning learners, and answer queries about the subjects in school in a gentle manner. Advisers can inquire of the learners' status every now and then, to let the returning learner know that someone is having concern about him. They can also provide a notepad messages inserted in the module or supplemental materials being provided to them.

Based from the frequently appearing words, summary of participants' responses, and the external analysis, the theme developed is this:

"Teachers should generally improve the strategies in providing moral support and showing compassion to

returning learners as part of their intervention.*"*

4.6. Peer Encouragement as Academic Booster

The figure shows the eight frequently appearing words when the participants were asked this question, "How does peer encouragement boost your academic performance in this pandemic?"

Eight words frequently appear in the responses of the 12 participants: "someone", "encouragement", "help", "keep", "harder", "learning", "pandemic", and "time". Their responses were summarized into four ideas:

a. There is an effect to a learner when **someone** leads and gives them **encouragement** to pursue studies.

b. Giving **help** is a way to **keep** their confidence up in studying and striving hard to be academically good.

c. **Learning** is quite challenging in this situation but the **harder** it gets, the more willing peers want to help them and be someone to lean on.

d. In this **pandemic**, keeping up with studying and getting into shape takes **time** for learners to be in tune again, but peers are instruments to guide them in getting back.

Fig. 8. Word cloud on peer encouragement as academic booster

The four ideas show that returning learners expect from peers to encourage them, enkindle their confidence, provide them assistance and guidance. It is not surprising that most returning learners have low confidence because of the probably new environment, new young faces in the classroom, either online or face-to-face. They might be looking for former peers that have advanced to higher grade level, and so, building up new friends would be another challenge for them. Encouragement may come as peer tutoring or boosting up morale when one seems to lack energy because of inability to cope up with lessons in school. Torres and Saromines (2016) mentioned negative social interaction as barriers so that learners can enthusiastically focus on their studies, thereby resulting to, or having a risk of dropping out. This negative social interaction being mentioned includes the learners' skirmishes with his classmates or peers that when not given attention, might lead to learners' collapse of energy to continue and finish a certain level of study. They suddenly become absentees in school or learners having poor performance. Therefore, it is a need of

returning learners to find encouragement among their peers.

Based from the frequently appearing words, summary of participants' responses, and the external analysis, the theme developed is this: Peer encouragement boost learners' confidence

"Peer encouragement in the form of guidance and assistance academically and morally helps returning learners pursue studies."

4.7. Parent and Community Support to Returning Learners

The figure shows the eight frequently appearing words when the participants were asked this question, "What support can you think parents and community extend to learners who have returned schooling this time of pandemic?"

Eight words frequently appear in the responses of the 12 participants: "support", "parents", "encourage", "enough", "study", "pandemic", "needs", and "learners". Their responses were summarized into four ideas:
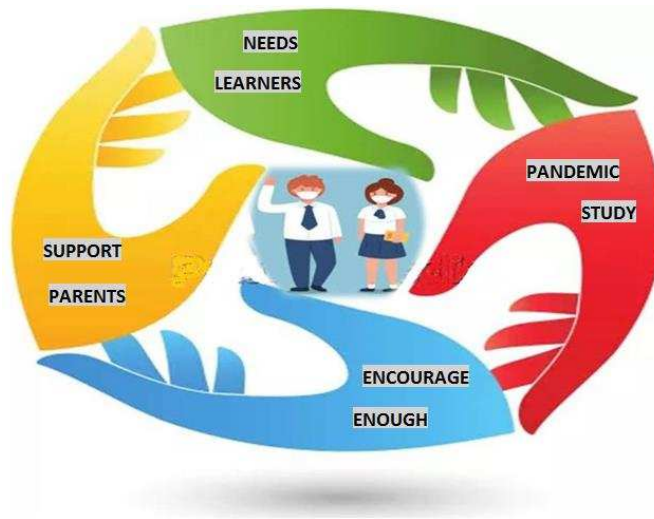

Fig. 8. Word cloud on parent and community support

a. Moral **support** from **parents** and community gives the returning learners the power of encouragement that helps them cope up with the different steps in their lives during these times.

b. **Encourage** learners by saying hopeful and optimistic language is **enough** for them to boost their eagerness on achieving their goal as they returned schooling this time of pandemic.

c. Having personal relationships with the learners are uniquely positioned to guide and support the returning learners at home to **study** during this global **pandemic**.

d. Parents and Community **needs** to provide **learners** a strong guidance and deep understanding during these exceptional times.

Family problems are hypothesized to cause poor school experience, thereby resulting into under-achievement in studies, or even non-performance and failure to complete secondary school (Whannell, 2011). Together with the community, family should bring about positive learning experience to returning learners especially in this time of pandemic so that they may be able to survive and emerge successfully till the end of school year. Smooth personal relationship at home that gears toward having close family ties can be strengthened specially in this time of pandemic when people need to always stay at home. On the other hand,

holistic rules and regulation in the community can boost learners enthusiasm to do worthwhile things at home, including focus on studies. Community can do some reach out programs or academic assistance to returning learners so that they can cope up with requirements in school. Para-teachers can be installed in small communities with whom learners can ask assistance to subjects or topics they are having difficulty with. In some areas in Metropolitan Manila, mayors have installed learning hubs where learners can call or connect and ask free tutorials for learners' modular activities.

Based from the frequently appearing words, summary of participants' responses, and the external analysis, the theme developed is this:

"Parents and community can collaborate in bringing about programs that promote close-family ties and academic assistance as well."

5. Conclusion, Recommendation and Reflection

This portion of the study intends to summarize all the proceedings of the study, and thus provide conclusions, recommendations and reflection at the very end.

5.1. Summary

It would have been a tough time for students who have left school because of dropping, or just leaving, to return during this pandemic, and therefore this exploration was conducted with the struggles of returning students in mind. Twelve participants were chosen from grades 8 to 11. As they receive modules and other materials from school, it is not impossible that they will have difficulty in different subjects, especially that there would be no teacher in front to answer his queries. The researchers provided assistance to them, guiding them if there are topics they can't comprehend. Alongside peer tutoring through social media connection, seven qualitative questions were provided to them, encouraging them to share (1) why they left school in the first place, (2) what is it that they do not like in school, (3) what made them decide to return after a long absence in school, (4) how can peers help them survive this tough times of schooling, (5) what teacher intervention can be done to encourage them, (6) what school programs need to be strengthened that will assist them in finishing their schooling, and (7) how can parents and community develop projects that will ensure their continuous education.

5.2. Findings

Each of the qualitative question solicited to the participants elicit at least four main ideas. Here are two of the ideas for each of the interview question:

- a. Learners associate their decision leave school to the relational problem they have with their family or parents who are not always there to support them.

  b. Having the consciousness of expenses associated with daily living while studying, learners' choose to work and earn for a living, or stop studying so as not to be blamed for financial problems.

- a. Conflict within the school environment and indirect relation to teachers contributes to the aspects that the learners dislike.

  b. Pressure from classmates pushes them to do cutting classes even they don't like to do this kind of action.

- a. Learners experiences and realization how hard life is when they tried stop studying helped them to be more dedicated to study hard.

  b. Having the desire to give back for all the hardships of their parents and provide them a high quality of life, keeps them motivated to return to school and strive more.

- a. The school itself should be conducive for learning and have a system that will emphasize and

protect learners from discrimination.

      b. It is also important to evaluate the education being provided by the school system during a certain time to try giving overload works for the learners.

      • a. Connection to the life of learners can be measured effectively if the teachers can expand their strategies to clearly understand the state of returning learners.

      b. To specify a good relationship, the communication between teachers and learners should be strengthened.

      • a. There is an effect to a learner when someone leads and gives them encouragement to pursue studies.

      b. Giving help is a way to keep their confidence up in studying and striving hard to be academically good.

      • a. Moral support from parents and community gives the returning learners the power of encouragement that helps them cope up with the different steps in their lives during these times.

      b. Encourage learners by saying hopeful and optimistic language is enough for them to boost their eagerness on achieving their goal as they returned schooling this time of pandemic.

5.3. Conclusion

The seven themes developed were the following:

• Learners' misguided desire to prove something worthy with their family and peers causes them to quit schooling.

• Unexpected or inconvenient school experiences and environment can highly contribute to a learner's decision about leaving the school.

• Learners' realization in life, parents' effort, and desire to build a better future provide school leavers' motivation in returning school.

• The school system should provide safe and motivating environment, practical implementation of curriculum, and positive discipline to create a better ground for returning students.

• Teachers should generally improve the strategies in providing moral support and showing compassion to returning learners as part of their intervention.

• Peer encouragement in the form of guidance and assistance academically and morally helps returning learners pursue studies.

• Parents and community can collaborate in bringing about programs that promote close-family ties and academic assistance as well.

5.4. Recommendation

Through the themes developed in this book ,the recommendations to targeted people or group of people are now laid:

• **Student leaders** initiate reaching to returning students in their school, through programs and activities they have in their respective organizations. Tapping the returning learners for specific fruitful tasks would energize returning students and give them a sense of worth.

• **Teachers** regularly check returning learners with regards to their progress in school, whether it be modular distance learning or other approach. This time of pandemic or even future ones when learners need to stay at home is a fine time to communicate with them and have a time of meaningful conversation.

• **School heads** mobilize classroom advisers in having a profiling of their learners, thereby securing the needs of every learner to be given proper attention. School learning action cell should have a slot on the discussion on how best care for learners who have special needs.

- **Education higher officials** initiate programs that would highlight the importance of close collaboration with families and the community towards having learners who look at themselves with great future. Education has a great role in inculcating to the minds of the youth today that they are not just heaps to be gathered and thrown, but they are future strong workforce of the nation.
- **Future researchers** should investigate on the effect of the collaboration of peers, teachers, school, family and community to the academic performance of learners. This would entail quantitative study wherein figures and statistics would be used to establish effect of the interaction these different elements.

5.5. Reflection

It is not always that we have a pandemic, especially now that vaccines have been created by several pharmaceutical companies and different countries have availed, and are now testing the use of vaccine to their citizens. But the sure thing is that, no matter how we don't like the idea, there would always be school leavers because of numerous untoward reasons that even the learners did not want to happen in their life. And because there will always be school leavers, there would also be returning students. In the small book by Antoine de Sainte-Exupery, a French writer and aviation engineer, the author narrates an event in his life when he was traveling and he noticed a small child with smudges on face and seems to be hungry. The book entitled "Wind, Sand and Stars" recorded the imagination of the writer in which he considered the small child as probably the next Abraham Lincoln, a great leader. If only that child would be properly taken cared off, given quality education, raised with moral and upright attitude, he can be someone who has a great destiny. But the truth is, many children and youth nowadays are left without guidance, without being given importance or encouragement to be at his best. No one has thrown on them a quality time for them to see their worth and be able to see life wonderful and worth living for. This study gave the writers a sense of pride in being of service to returning learners who may be seen by others as someone who won't have a great future ahead, let alone to finish study and that would be all for their life. The authors learned a lot in such a way that they are blessed enough to have not experienced leaving school because of supportive people around them, while these returning learners have less opportunity to grow, unless otherwise guided by someone who really cares. And so, in these ponderings, the words of the Lord Jesus rang in the hearts of the authors of this book,

"For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost."
Luke 19:10

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