

Incarcerated Education: A Phenomenological Case Study

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Abstract: *One of the government's effort is to educate the incarcerated, where a special program under the Alternative Learning System (ALS) is being offered to them. The researchers would like to explore the perception of children in conflict with the law towards the Alternative Learning System (ALS). The study is qualitative research, wherein a naturalistic inquiry that seeks an in-depth understanding of phenomenon within the natural setting. It is conducted in Bahay ng Pag-asa ng Valenzuela located at R. Jacinto St. Barangay Canumay West Valenzuela City, Philippines. The respondents believed that through ALS they will be able to finish their studies, achieve their dreams, help their families, help other people and improve the quality of their life.*

Keywords—alternative learning system, lived experience, children in conflict with the law, juvenile

1. INTRODUCTION

As defined “Education” is the sensible, optimistic and reverential cultivation of one’s knowledge commenced in the certainty that all should have the fortuitous to share in life. The cultivation of one’s knowledge is a cognitive, emotional and social activity. It is one of the basic human rights of every citizen regardless of race, creed and social status. The right to social security wherein inherent dignity and of equal and absolute rights are recognized gearing toward independence, justice, and harmony in the world (UN – Declaration of Human Rights, 1945). The right to education should be enjoyed even those in conflict with the law. Thus, regardless that these people are behind the cold bars of the jail they can still continue their aspiration to finish their education. This would mean that rehabilitation includes seeing these persons away from incarceration.

Despite the government effort in the delivery of alternative education particularly to those in a conflict, there is still an impression that there is a low quality of excellence. But nonetheless, this education alternative leads to flexibility, participation, transformation and responsible members of the society [1].

The flight of those behind bars pursuing to earn diploma become an interest. The standards and quality of education registered in the alternative education and the possible effect of the latter upon the personhood of these people would be an important formula in determining the applicability in the teaching-learning process. Hence, the researchers would like to know the perception of children in conflict with the law towards alternative education.

2. RELATED WORKS

In the advent of the recent educational revolution, traditional formal education had evolved. There are various means of instructional delivery. Even those in the far areas of the countries are reached and illiteracy diminishes. Formal education programs have been effective in the aspect of the deliverance of competence and excellence. In today’s scheme even those in the custodial are educated through Alternative Education System (ALS). It prepares the inmates to be

employed and self-reliant upon the release. In this process, the persons in conflict with the law are being equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge wherein they would be competitive in terms of employability upon mainstreaming [2].

ALS makes the person a productive member of society. Giving them a sense of dignity that every individual aspires [3]. This program would provide the inmates with a means of coping with their lives behind bars. Giving them the opportunity that one day they would be given parole or the case filed be dismissed or had already served their sentence they will be blending with the world of the freeman. This gives them the privilege to learn and earn a diploma or even college degrees.

Most of those enjoying this prospect was not able to have formal schooling before incarcerated [4] It is vital that the educational style is customized according to the knowledge and skills mastered by a person. This would be the springboard that gives the prisoner a chance for personal and professional development. With this platform, a prisoner expects a life-free from discrimination and stigma [6][7][8].

3. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The focus of the study is to answer the central question: “How do children in conflict with the law perceive alternative education?”

Specifically, the study sought answers to the following secondary questions:

1. What are the experiences and views of children in conflict with the law concerning the relevance and effectiveness of the alternative education program?
2. What impels children in conflict with the law to continue their studies through alternative education?
3. What aspects may be incorporated into the education of children in conflict with the law?

4. METHODOLOGY

The study uses a qualitative phenomenological case study method of research. Through interviews with children in conflict with the law, the researchers sought to understand the

educational environment and needs of the student in a juvenile rehabilitation setting. The lived experiences and the perspectives of the participants are the main source of information. Observations are also conducted to investigate in details the situation being faced by the participants. The method is based on the phenomenology as the researchers wished to describe their perceptions and lived experiences. Purposive non-probability sampling was the method used in selecting the respondents, and the data gathered were analyzed using the thematic content analysis.

Phenomenology is an approach to qualitative research to arrive at a description of the nature of the particular phenomenon. It also focuses on the commonality of a lived experience within a particular group. The concentration of the phenomenological interview is the description of the meanings of phenomena. Also, it will help to verify the information obtained and allow the participant the opportunity to expand on the details of the information. Therefore, this is the best design and method that was used to explore the experiences of the respondents with regards to the alternative delivery of education in a correctional setting [5].

To sufficiently collect the necessary information, the study will involve five (6) cases of children in conflict with the law from Bahay ng Pag-asa ng Valenzuela located at R. Jacinto St. Barangay Canumay West Valenzuela City, Philippines who participated in the alternative education program. Participants are between 14-18 years old and are purposively selected for the study.

The study is conducted at Bahay Pag-asa ng Valenzuela. The Bahay Pag-asa ng Valenzuela is located at R. Jacinto Street in Barangay Canumay West. It is a 423.9 square-meter, two-storey building on 639.2 square-meter walled grounds. It is built on the mandate of Republic Act 9344 or the Juvenile Justice Act of 2006. Section 49 provides for the establishment of youth detention homes by the local government unit.

Semi-structured interviews which are interviews that allow the researchers to have flexibility were utilized in interviewing the participants. Questions were validated by the experts in the field to ensure that the needed data would be elicited. Likewise, the researchers wished to accurately capture the data and as a result, all the interviews were tape-recorded. After the interviews were transcribed and analyzed, the data were treated and kept carefully for confidentiality purposes.

For the smooth flow of the data collection, the following procedures were carefully followed by the researchers:

- 1.The researchers briefed the respondents about the study and informed them that participation is voluntary. They were given a choice if they wanted to be part of the study or not.
- 2.The audio-recording consent form was then presented to them, which asked for their permission for the interviews to be recorded.
- 3.The researchers wished to be transparent, and as a result, the participants were given the interview guideline.
- 4.The respondents were interviewed individually and as a group.
- 5.The audio recorder was used during each interview. Making use of an audio recorder allowed the researchers to record fully

and accurately what was being said rather than taking notes during the interviews.

The researchers record the experiences with the phenomenon to help set boundaries on limiting the influences of those experiences. A semi-structured method of inductive data analysis is employed. The individual transcript is read numerous times to further immerse the researchers and highlight key concepts. After the initial immersion, the following steps will be taken:

□Horizontalization is performed by giving equal value and importance to each statement and coding it with a descriptive label.

□Reduction and elimination of statements that were not a horizon of the experience is done to determine the invariant constituents of the experience.

□Clustering is executed to group related constituents together, and each category is given a thematic label.

□Final identification of the themes is made by rereading the complete transcripts to verify that the theme and accompanying invariant constituents were explicitly expressed and compatible with the participants' words.

Corroboration by participants and agreement between coders are some of the commonly used approaches during the process of validation under phenomenology.

Corroboration with respondents consists of presenting and deliberating the data analysis between the researcher and the respondents to confirm that the essences and meanings are certainly only those expressed directly or indirectly by the respondents. The researchers may also contribute to the process of encoding data and primarily look for correspondence between the relevant themes (and subthemes) and the categories that emerge from the data analysis. With this, it is understood that phenomenology is a genuine manner of representing the realities that participants experience in their lives.

This research considered the ethical standards set by the generic research ethics. In so doing, the participants were informed about all the steps that are taken in this research. The respondents were more important than the study, and therefore always respected. The participants were informed that the study was completely voluntary and would not affect their lives as a person in any way. Collected information are all treated with confidentiality.

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The results for this phenomenological study developed through the data collected from six (6) face-to-face interviews involving children in conflict with the law who participate in the Alternative Learning System (ALS) inside the juvenile rehabilitation center. After listening to their lived experiences, data gathered are presented below:

Problem 1. What are the experiences and views of children in conflict with the law concerning the relevance and effectiveness of the alternative education program?

Finished studies. All respondents agreed that participation in the alternative education system will give them the

opportunity to finished their studies since they have attended already regular schooling before they enter the correctional facility.

Inside the facility, they attended classes at least one (1) hour per day or five (5) hours in a week. They also devote extra time for studying after each class sessions to further strengthen their learnings.

“Nag-aaral pa rin po ako kahit tapos na yung klase... wala naman po kase akong ibang gagawin kaya nagpupunta po ako sa parang library namin o sa dining para magbasa... minsan nagbabasketball para malibang. Pumasok po ako kaagad sa program para din po may matutunan ako kesa naman po sa wala akong gawin sa maghapon. Bali.. para may matutunan ako sa mga pinag-aaralan ko po rito... kunwari may exam may maisasagot po ako. Para ano po... yung di ko po natututunan ngayon sa labas, kasi habang nadito ako natututunan ko po rito. Para pag-labas ko maibabahagi ko rin po sa labas at makasabay po ako sa kanila.” according to respondent B. While respondent D mentioned, “Pag may mga activity po dito pinapatawag po. Sinalihan ko lahat upang malibang ko po yung sarili ko. Yung pag-aaral ko po uunahin ko para po pag labas ko po dito may natutunan po ako.” And respondent E added, “Lahat po ng pinag-aaralan namin dito gagamitin po namin sa labas.”

Achieved dreams. When children were asked, if they have dreams that they want to fulfill, they affirmatively say “Yes!”.

According to respondent C, “Tatapusin ko po yung pag-aaral ko po para makuha ko po yung pangarap ko.”

Help the family. According to respondent A, “Para makapag-aral ng mabuti para paglabas ko may ipagmamalaki ako sa mga magulang ko at matulungan ko po sila. Gusto ko pong matulungan ang mga magulang ko po... bigyan sila ng magandang buhay... yung mabubuhay ko po sila ng ano... habang kasama ko sila ng matagal po.”

Help other people. According to respondent E, “Pag may natutunan po kami... makakatulong din kami sa iba... pede din namin silang turuan.”

Improve life. All of the respondents agreed that they want their life to be changed. When the time comes that they will be allowed to exit the correctional center, they will do what is right. Aside from returning to school, they wanted to be a better person and they will not commit any wrongdoings again. According to respondent B “Itatama ko po ang mga pagkakamali ko po at ipagpapatuloy ko po yung pag-aaral ko.”

Problem 2. What impels children in conflict with the law to continue their studies through alternative education?

Self. Most of the respondents mentioned that it is their personal choice to join the alternative learning system. They are not force but rather voluntarily attend classes to learn.

Peers. “Naririnig ko po sa mga kasama ko na nag-aaral sila... kaya sumama na din po ako.”, said Respondent F. “Sumali na po ako para may libangan tapos may matutunan din ako.”, he added.

Family. According to respondent B, “Yung Nanay ko po madalas ako dinadalaw... sabi nya mag-aral po ako.”

Problem 3. What aspects may be incorporated into the education of children in conflict with the law?

Values and Religious Education. As the children entered the correctional center, they realized that what they have done are wrong and they wanted to make things right. They accepted that it is their fault and asking for another chance in life. Therefore, aside from finishing their education they also wanted to become better persons.

According to respondent A, “Gustong kong matutunan ang gumalang sa matatanda... tapos po bigyan ng kahalagahan yung mga nagtuturo sa amin.”. While respondent B reiterate, “Gusto ko po yung life skills... parang edukasyon sa pagpapakatao kasi para sa pakikipag-usap sa ibang tao at sa mga kaibigan ko po. And respondent C added, “Bukod po sa mag-solve, mahalaga po na matuto tayo na tumawag sa Panginoon. Kaya nagbabasa po kami dito ng Bible at nagdarasal din po.”

Composite Summary on Grounded Theoretical Framework Drawn from the Findings of the Study

From the explication of the respondents, their perceived importance of the alternative learning system may be summarized in Figure 1.

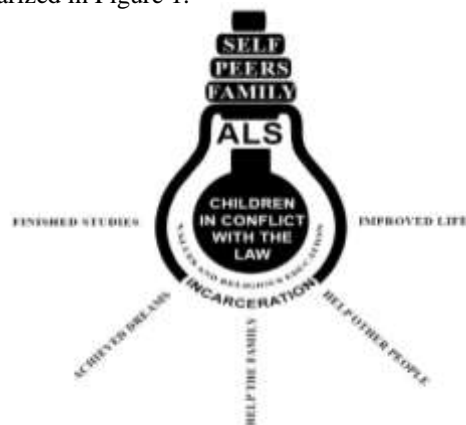


Figure 1. Grounded Theoretical Framework of How Do Children in Conflict with the Law Perceived Alternative Education

6. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions were drawn:

Children in conflict with the law are allowed to continue and finish their studies through the Alternative Learning System (ALS). They consider that participation in ALS will give them a better life as they exit the juvenile rehabilitation center. They believe that through ALS they will be able to finish their studies, achieve their dreams, help their families, help other people and improve the quality of their life. Their participation in the program is voluntary, however, it may also be influenced by their self-decision, their peers and their families. More than education, children in conflict with the law wanted to become a better person with faith in God and doing good things for others.

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