

EDUCATION BEHIND BARS: AN ANALYSIS OF THE ALTERNATIVE LEARNING SYSTEM PROGRAM OF THE BULACAN STATE UNIVERSITY EXTENSION SERVICES OFFICE**REMEDIOS O. AZARCON*****Bulacan State University, City of Malolos, Bulacan PHILIPPINES*****ABSTRACT**

Bulacan State University (BulSU) establishes linkages with various social entities to carry out its mandated functions; instruction, research and extension. One of such programs is the Alternative Learning System which at present is undertaken by the Extension Service Office for the inmates at the Bulacan Provincial Jail. The Alternative Learning System (ALS) is a ladderized, modular non-formal education program in the Philippines which envisioned to benefit the dropouts from elementary and secondary schools, out-of-school youths, non-readers, working Filipinos and even senior citizens. The objective of this study is to evaluate the extent and effectiveness of the services being rendered by the BulSU Extension office to the inmates of the Bulacan Provincial Jail through the ALS program. The subjects of the study were the 144 inmates that enrolled in the program. Results reveal that there is a significant relationship between the inmates rating and the perceived extent of services being rendered to them and in spite of the lower percentage of graduates, it has been considered as sufficient and efficient enough. Finally, the findings provided the basis for the necessary measures to be undertaken regarding the services being rendered by the extension office, specifically on the literacy program they are providing.

Key Words: *alternative learning system, prison, inmates, literacy program, extension*

Introduction

In the past, universities are expected to provide instruction and it is the only criterion to determine whether they are doing their tasks well or not. But today, university education cannot be imparted through mere instruction only. To fully live up to its responsibility of educating the young who are expected to be the future leaders and workers of the country, a university has to seriously take on its three-fold function of instruction, research and extension. One of the missions of the BulSU Extension office is to provide research-based information, educational programs, and technology transfer focused on the issues and needs of the people, enabling them to make informed decisions about their economic, social and cultural well-being.

Integral to the delivery of quality tertiary-level educational services, BulSU conducts surveys and applied researches and performs many public service functions through its research and extension programs and linkages with various stakeholders.

Adhering to the philosophy that a well-rounded individual through proper education and guidance ensures a productive and responsible citizenry, thus, the Extension Services Office has grown to become a diligent and dedicated unit in providing related services. One of the beneficiaries of its programs is the Bulacan Provincial Jail through the delivery of Alternative Learning System (ALS) Program and other vocational trainings and personality development.

The Alternative Learning System is a ladderized, modular non-formal education program in the Philippines for dropouts in the elementary and secondary schools, out-of-school youth, non-readers, working Filipinos and even senior citizens. It is part of the education system of the Philippines but an alternative to the regular classroom studies where Filipino students are required to attend daily. The alternative system only requires students to choose schedules according to their

choice and availability. In the case of the Bulacan Provincial Jail, sessions are based on the schedule of activities inside the jail with the teachers being trained by the volunteer teachers of BulSU.

It is in this aspect that the BulSU's Extension Office is trying to reach these inmates specifically as school dropouts with a hope that their lives will be different once they had been freed. This is viewed as a greater preparation for their return to the mainstream society; a way to becoming a productive citizen with willingness to contribute to the growth of society.

Since 1990, the literature has shown that prisoners who attend educational programs while they are incarcerated are less likely to return to prison following their release (Greenberg et. al, 2007). Studies in several States have indicated that recidivism rates have declined where inmates have received an appropriate education. Furthermore, the right kind of educational program leads to less violence by inmates involved in the programs and a more positive prison environment (Vacca, 2004).

Allowing for behavioral changes inside prisons necessarily implies education. In Thailand, the point is not only to organize professional training courses but also to make detainees aware of the fact that they belong to a community of values. Non-formal education allows the necessary flexibility to an individual approach of training that must take into account the particular needs of learners. The involvement of all the staff working in prison, as well as the training of the teaching staff, are the essential lines of policies currently developed in Thai prisons (Phatininnart, 2009). Participation in educational activities by the imprisoned group mostly depends on the desirable needs and interests of the convicts themselves - whether they wish to upgrade their educational background or see the benefit of education for improving their quality of lives. Some of them have realized to the fact that due to their poor education they have tended to be misled by ill-disposed individuals, or have been taken advantage of by other, more strong-willed people.

According to Jacobi (2008), research on incarceration and educational access continues to reveal the stark reality for many adjudicated youth: without access to educational opportunities recidivism is probable. Yet conventional methods of teaching critical reading, writing, and thinking skills are not always successful for juveniles who have found little success (or hope) in traditional schooling. Jacobi argues that alternative literacy practices can effectively supplement conventional general education and vocational training courses by engaging juveniles through creativity, critical self-awareness, and a shift in how audience and authorship is understood. This research indicates that literate activity such as writing workshops, zine networks, peer and professional mentoring, and increased engagement can meet the unique needs and expectations of youth offenders while also working toward the democratic principles held by many correctional educators and the general public. It has been suggested that specific pedagogical approaches and practices for engaging juveniles by reviewing existing programs across the United States and articulates five core educational and life skills outcomes that can emerge as students learn to write beyond the sometimes limiting notion of school.

Meanwhile, Oesterreich and Flores (2009) in their research focused on strength-based approaches, originating in juvenile justice as early as the late 1800s. They situated the work of juvenile correctional facilities as assisting youth in utilizing their strengths and competencies to understand how they can apply their lives to effect change and growth. While strengths-based approaches might have originated philosophically in juvenile justice they have not persisted in practice. In this qualitative case study of an art program in a juvenile correctional facility, visual arts acts as a bridge between philosophy and practice to demonstrate how strength-based practices can affect change and growth with incarcerated youth.

Taken for granted that programs are good and appropriate, extension is operating in a new environment-an environment more open to criticism and demands for justification of actions. All publicly funded agencies, not just Extension, are vulnerable to these times. In an era of accountability, Extension must be able to defend who and how people are being served. It also needs to document that programs are achieving positive results (Rennekamp, 2009)

For the University of Wisconsin (2012), extension programs exist within a situation or environment that is often complex and changing. Understanding the situation is the beginning step in designing the educational response. With them, the more we know about the situation, the more solid will be the foundation of our program. In UW-Extension, situational analysis involves analysing needs and assets, problem diagnosis and examining relevant research, knowledge and experience. According to them, involving others in situational analysis could help to build a better understanding of the context or situation.

Meanwhile, the Oregon State University Extension Service uses cost-benefit analysis to evaluate its program. Its Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) had helped thousands of low-income Oregonians improve their lives by teaching them how to improve their diets.

A recent cost benefit analysis found that the program may have saved as much as \$1.6 million in potential annual health care costs through successful participation of the program's users. This figure represents an estimated savings of funds that might have been spent by government, health insurance companies and individuals for treatment of health conditions related to nutrition. The analysis is based on a complex formula that compares the dollar value of possible savings in health care costs to the costs of the program. The costs are defined as the value of the resources that must be used to develop and operate the program. According to them, this analysis can be a useful tool in measuring the effectiveness of these types of programs just like the focus of this study which is determining the extent and impact of the extension program being done(Schuster, 2012). .

Education programs help promote inmates' welfare and this extends to the society as well. A study conducted by the US Department of Education, spearheaded by Stephen J. Steurer (2008) of the Correctional Education Association, revealed that inmates who took classes while in prison, either vocational training or classes at high school or college level, are less likely to go back to prison within the first three years of release.

The study followed more than 3,000 prisoners in Maryland, Minnesota and Ohio. Results revealed that after three years of being released from prison, only 22 percent of the prisoners who availed of inmate education returned to prison compared to 31 percent of those who did not. Inmate education, therefore, will not only help the prisoner but will also help preserve the public's safety as well. Crime reduction is an indirect result of inmate education as proven by the findings.

This analysis has provided a comprehensive review of the state of education delivered to children and youth in detention in the State of Connecticut (Macomber and Skiba, 2010). The information was collected and processed at multiple levels: the system itself, individual schools, teachers, and students (or rather their records). The analysis has revealed a wide range of findings depicting the presence of both effective and ineffective practices and everything in between. The most remarkable observation from this analyses is that, in the absence of proper legislative directives assigning specific responsibilities for educating children and youth while in detention to particular parties and delineating the mechanisms of financial support and quality assurance, the resulting system is extremely diverse in quantity and quality of education as was the case in the State of Connecticut. In addition, numerous observations at each of the levels of analyses suggest the need for a substantial and urgent enhancement of educational services in the detention centers.

Denise Garcia (2013) had done a similar study in her thesis entitled “An Evaluation of the Prison Education Project at the California Institution for Women.” This study evaluated the effectiveness of PEP modules from the perspective of CIW inmates. Their responses strongly support that the PEP modules offered at CIW are meeting their goals of increasing their knowledge of academic opportunities, motivating them to further their education, expanding their understanding in navigating the educational system and labor market, and increasing their self-esteem, confidence and desire for a better future.

Conceptual Framework

The study was done based on Judith M. Ottoson’s Evaluation Theory (2005) of which includes three components; use, program and valuing. For the first component, evaluation is intended to be useful for stakeholders to make decisions. A useful evaluation is credible, timely, and of adequate scope. The second component seeks to understand what is being evaluated, such as specific aspects of outreach programs. A transparent understanding of the ways outreach achieves intended goals, its activities and linkages, and the context in which it operates precedes any attempt to measure it. The third component of this theory is concerned with the process by which value is placed on outreach. What will count as outreach success or failure? Who decides?

The way each of the components of evaluation theory is understood shapes the practice of evaluation. For community-based outreach, in this case the extension program, these components may be translated into the following questions:

Use: How will evaluation findings about outreach be used? By whom (e.g., teachers, students, and other community-based organizations that would become collaborators in the outreach/extension program) will findings be used?

Program: What is outreach/extension program? How is it intended to work? What internal and external factors influence outreach?

Valuing: By which values will the success or failure of outreach be judged? Who judges the success or failure of outreach?

The Bulacan State University is rendering services to the Bulacan Provincial Jail through the ALS Program for several years now and yet seems to be unaware how the program has been effective and what kind of impact it has been producing.

Thus, the study is significant as this will provide objective data to the University particularly the College of Education and to other interested learning agencies on the issue of efficient and effective extension program as well as in meeting the accreditation standards. Also, the data generated may serve as documentary evidence to the accrediting agencies that the University is serious in meeting their recommendations and the university is desirous to succeed in giving quality education and in finding solutions to some areas which need to be strengthened. The findings may also provide valuable insights into the present state of the College of Education Extension program, to wit: improvement of the program, effective planning and selection of faculty and personnel that are qualified and are very much willing to render extended services. This also may open the way for the provincial government to see the need to work hand in hand with other institutions in providing services to their constituents and prioritizing their welfare thus seeing the need of providing whatever support they could extend and undergo development programs.

Statement of the Problem

The main objective of the study is to make an inquiry on the extent and effectiveness of the services being rendered by the BulSU Extension office to the inmates of the Bulacan Provincial Jail through the ALS program.

Specifically, the study sought answers to the following questions:

1. How may the beneficiary- inmates in Bulacan Provincial Jail be described based on gender, age, educational attainment, financial status, perception of their present and future life and desire to pursue schooling?
2. What are the kinds of offenses committed by the respondents that led to their imprisonment?
3. How may the beneficiary-inmates and the other people involved perceive the quality of services being rendered by the BulSU Extension Office in terms of commitment and competence of the extension agents; adequacy of materials and implementation and supervision?
4. Is there a significant relationship between the inmates' rating and the extent of services being rendered as perceived by the BulSU Extension Office as described by the number of extension agents; adequacy of materials and implementation and supervision?
5. Based on the results of the study, what implications and measures are to be undertaken to further enrich the services being rendered by the BulSU Extension Office?

Methodology

Participants

The program maintains a number of 165 student-inmates every year that are being incarcerated in the adult prisons for male and female and from the rehabilitation center for juvenile delinquents that had committed serious crimes. Out of these, the researcher was able to retrieve a total of 144 questionnaires that served as the subject of the study.

Data Collection

The study included two samples: (1) juveniles from ages 14 to 21 in Tanglaw ng Pag-asa Home for Juveniles and (2) inmates ages from 22 and older in the Bulacan Provincial Jail.

The 144 respondents were asked to answer the survey instrument that is consisted of four closed-ended questions in areas about their personal profile, types of offenses, perception about their present and future life, the quality of services being rendered to them. The last two questions in the study were answered from the compiled data of the extension office.

Another set of questionnaire were given to the six teachers, wherein one of them served as the head, to the jail secretary and to the warden in order to sustain the credibility of the findings.

Responses obtained from the two sets of questionnaires were analyzed separately.

Data Analysis

The results of the survey were treated quantitatively and qualitatively. Quantitative data were treated using the SPSS version 19. Percentage, frequency and means were utilized for each closed-ended question with the inclusion of Pearson r in correlating the answers of the respondents with the data that came from the extension office. Correlation was determined to make an analysis if there

would be a significant relationship between the inmates' perception and the data provided by the extension office as to the nature of services they are rendering.

The following ratings and verbal equivalence were used in relation to the inmates' responses:

- 3 – Strongly Agree
- 2 - Moderately Agree
- 1 - Disagree

A personal interview was done among a number of inmates to validate the answers they have given especially the cases of the minor ones.

The following ratings and verbal equivalence were used in relation to the responses of the teachers and jail administrators based on the second set of questionnaires:

A five-point Likert scale with interpretation of “very poor” to “very good” were used in rating the commitment and competence; another five-point scale having the verbal equivalence of “not at all” to “to a great extent” on the question that pertains to the inmates' evident changes in prison life; as to the impact of the program, another 5-point scale interpreted from very poor to outstanding. For the overall impression, a three-point scale with interpretation of below average, average and clearly outstanding were used.

Personal comments and suggestions were also solicited.

Research Limitations

There are some limitations to this research. One, is that this study relied on the responses of beneficiary-inmates. The responses represents the inmates' perception and does not providing an actual measurement of how much knowledge they acquired in the ALS program, and whether or not they will be able to utilize the information once paroled or freed.

Results and Discussion

Findings revolved around five areas: the profile of the inmates; the nature of the committed offenses; their perception of their being and future life; the inmates' perception of the quality of services being rendered to them and the efficiency of the extension agency and services given.

On the part of the other people involved, they were asked to answer a questionnaire that revolved around five areas also such as their profile and the nature of their involvement in the program; their perception of the competence and commitment of the people in the BulSU extension program; the extent of evident changes and its impact on the prison life of the beneficiary-inmates; and the overall impression on the quality of the services being rendered.

Profile of the Student Inmates

Majority of the respondents are between the ages of 21-25 which is composed of the 68% of the group, 115 are males and 29 are females. Educational attainment range from elementary to secondary level with 70 of them reached the elementary level and 74 secondary level, and 66.7 % having a family income that range from five thousand pesos to ten thousand pesos (US\$116 -233).

Majority were being incarcerated due to illegal drugs, followed by property crimes and the rest due to violent crimes and the rest were due to petty crimes.

Concept of their own being and Future

Having obtained a weighted mean of 2.24 signify that the respondents are still having a high regard to themselves based on their answers to the questions if they had lost their self-concept and if they could not forgive themselves, and if life is still worth living for everything that happened.

With questions if they still believe that they can and still be able to learn, answers obtained a weighted mean of 1.88 indicating a slight doubt and uncertainty. On the other hand, with regards to questions about having hope, and if they believe that they can finish their schooling, the result obtained is 2.34 interpreted as moderately agree. With questions whether they joined the ALS program as a coping mechanism and if they were just being encouraged by others to join got a mean of 1.28 that could mean they have joined the program voluntarily having known the benefits they might obtain. On questions about their future, if they believe that they still have chances to be freed, a very high mean score of 2.71 was obtained. With question if they have grudges on the world around them, their answers resulted to a mean score of 1.42.

Quality of Services Rendered

As to the competence and commitment of the teachers and extension agents, the responses given got a mean score of 2.79 and 2.84 respectively. A mean of 1.72 indicates that the availability of resources is moderately adequate. As to the implementation and supervision of the extension program, the respondents believed that it is good enough based on a score of 2.72.

With regards to the answers of the six teachers and the two administrators, they found the commitment and competence of the people involved in the program to be good to very good having obtained a mean of 4.5.

On the question if they believe there have been evident changes with the beneficiary-inmates, got a very high mean of 4.63 which was interpreted as to a great extent.

As to the impact of the program on the lives of the beneficiary inmates, the findings revealed that it was just satisfactory as follows: on the academic and cognitive skills, for them it is more than satisfactory based on a mean of 3.5, adaptability to prison life is plainly satisfactory from a mean of 3.0, discipline is a bit high from a mean of 3.63, 3.5 for perspective in life and relationship with each others and with changes on their plans after serving their sentence obtained a mean of 3.38.

But as to their overall impression on the quality of services being rendered to their constituents, they found it to be on the average based on a mean of 2.5 although the head teacher had rated it to be clearly outstanding and commented that it is very beneficial for them.

Efficiency of the ALS Program

Those who are serving as extension agents are the four personnel in the BuLSU Extension office and the present director that also serves as the ALS supervisor. Those who are serving as teachers are those inmates that are considered to possess a high literacy level as revealed by their educational attainment and nature of work before they were incarcerated. From these six teachers, one of them obtained a masteral degree in administration and supervision and a former division school superintendent that made her to be the head, 4 are college graduates and one who have reached the secondary level only.

These individuals serving as teachers are being given a seminar workshop every year especially if there are new teachers since there are times that some of those who are serving as teachers are being freed.

During the administration of the Accreditation and Equivalency Examination, those who are serving as proctors and test registration officers are the teachers from the College of Education of BulSU that are being commissioned by the extension office.

With regards to the outcomes, three consecutive years were considered with the following data.

Table 1

	Total No. of Learners	No. of Learners who took the A&E Exam		Percentage		No. of Graduates		Percentage		Percentage based on the total no. of Learners	
		Elem	H.S	Elem	H.S.	Elem	H.S	Elem	H.S.	Elem	H.S.
2011-2012	165	41	22	24.84%	13.33%	17	18	26.98%	28.57%	10.30%	10.90%
2012-2013	165	33	37	20%	22.42%	2	17	2.86%	24.29%	1.21%	10.30%
2013-2014	165	27	51	16.07%	30.36%	2	13	2.56%	16.67%	1.19%	7.74%

Relationship of the Inmates Perceived Extent of Services Rendered and the BulSU Extension Office Implementation

From the obtained computed r of .310, it reveals that there is a correlation between commitment and competence of the people involved in the extension service and that of the inmates' perception at 0.05 level of significance. Meanwhile, on the obtained computed r of .211, signifies that the availability of materials is highly correlated with how it is being provided to them by the Extension office.

These results only show that in spite of the low percentage of graduates, the survey conducted had proven that the services being rendered by the BulSU Extension Office can be considered as sufficient and efficient.

In spite of a moderate sufficiency of the materials being provided, the results only proved that those are a big help for the inmates to benefit and acquire learning from the ALS program that is being provided to them.

Conclusion

For the first component of the evaluation using Ottoson's theory (2005), re: use; as can be gleaned from the results and based on the interviews that were done, the ALS program is providing the inmates a way to cope with their prison life, providing them hope especially to those who have the possibility to be freed and is giving them the opportunity to learn and discover new things and experience schooling from which was deprived from majority of them before they were incarcerated. As the case of the one being interviewed, he was illiterate and does not know how to read but made it possible through the ALS program. Consequently, the program leads to a peaceful prison environment

since they are preoccupied and has been very evident as the administrators have proven. Furthermore, as proven by Vacca (2005) the right kind of educational program leads to less violence by inmates involved in the programs and a more positive prison environment. Moreover, the researcher assumed that just like the case in Thailand prisons (Phatininnart, 2009), that they have realized also the fact that due to their poor education before their imprisonment, they have tended to be misled by ill-disposed individuals, or have been taken advantage of by other more strong-willed people as some cases had been the reasons of committing offenses against the law.

To the other stakeholders such as the extension agents, the findings can be a moral boosting reality that their works are not in vain, for the teachers especially the BulSU College of Education faculty to be more involved and the provincial government to be more cooperative.

With the second component, the program: gleaning at the data, with the very low percentages of those who qualified to take the Accreditation and Equivalency Examination, and the small percentages of graduates, one may immediately conclude that the program is a failure and the outcome is a disappointment most especially the latest data. But upon reviewing the program, a clear goal is not evident as to what needs to be achieved. Are they really after producing graduates? Or is it really intended just to provide an extension and outreach services? With the number of extension agents and the people involved despite their proven commitment and competence, considering the number of learners, can we say that they are enough? As Rennekamp (2009) cited, in an era of accountability, Extension must be able to defend who and how people are being served. It also needs to document that programs are achieving positive results. Researches proved that the ultimate goal of correctional education programs is to generate a change in the inmates' behavior (Messemer & Valentine, 2004, Gordon & Weldon, 2010), and to help inmates become self-sufficient, enabling their reintegration into society (Garcia, 2013) on which the study had proven to be evident.

The basis of the third component came from the answer to these questions: By which values will the success or failure of outreach be judged? Who judges the success or failure of outreach? One of the scholars that conducted a study to criticize the effectiveness of prison education was Robert Martinson during the 70's (Garcia, 2013). Although this study asserted that educating prisoners had no meaningful effects, evaluations of prison education programs in the current time acknowledge that education has some effect on prisoners and rather what they criticize were the methodology flaws that weaken the validity of prison education studies. If we are going to look at the number of produced graduates, the ALS program is surely a failure. If one would ask, if the recipients could really use and practice what they have learned and acquired outside the prison, the possibility is very stark knowing the slow pace of justice system we are having.

But if we are going to analyze the impact of the program on the lives of the recipients especially after the interviews that were done, the researcher would proudly say that the ALS program is a success. Just like in Thailand (Phatininnart, 2009), may it be our point also that we are not only organizing professional training courses for accreditation purposes but also to make detainees aware of the fact that they belong to a community of values. Moreover, just like the findings of Steurer (2008), the ALS program is promoting inmates' welfare and may this extends to the society as well that those who have undergone classes while in prison may also be less likely to go back to prison when they were freed.

Having known that majority of the recipients are the youth being incarcerated at the Tanglaw ng Pag-asa Rehabilitation Center for juvenile delinquents, we could follow the analysis done by Oesterreich and Flores in 2009 with strength-based approaches that originated in juvenile correctional facilities. They situated the work of juvenile correctional facilities as assisting youth in utilizing their strengths and competencies to understand how they can apply their lives to affect change and growth.

In this qualitative case study of an art program in a juvenile correctional facility, visual arts acts as a bridge between philosophy and practice to demonstrate how strength-based practices can affect change and growth with incarcerated youth. In that manner, it could be recommended that visual arts lessons be given also to these incarcerated juveniles.

Researches have indicated and suggested also that effective educational programs for prisoners are those that could build social skills, artistic development, teach methods and approaches to deal with their emotions, and stress academic, vocational, and social education (Vacca, 2004; Gonzalez et al., 2007; Alemagno & Dickie, 2005 in Garcia, 2013). Considering that the services being rendered by the BulSU Extension Office is reinforcing and building social skills, confidence, self-esteem, and encouraging higher education, it can be implied that the ESO is providing an effective and responsive extension services that will enhance the rehabilitation of the beneficiary-inmates in the Bulacan Provincial Jail. Thus, the BulSU Extension Office has the potential to achieve its mission of providing educational program that is focused on the issues and needs of the people.

In all of these, it is the desire of the researcher that a more comprehensive review of the ALS program be done, this time on the cognitive aspect that will reveal how much knowledge were imparted and they have acquired. As the University of Wisconsin (2012) came up from their extension programs, understanding the situation is the beginning step in designing the educational response. With them, the more we know about the situation, the more solid will be the foundation of our program and we have just begun.

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