

Implementation and operational dynamics of the Open High School Program in Bangar, La Union: A mixed-methods evaluation

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Abstract

This mixed-methods study evaluated the implementation and operational dynamics of the Open High School Program (OHSP) at Doña Francisca Lacsamana de Ortega Memorial National High School in Bangar, La Union, during School Year 2025–2026. An explanatory sequential design combined survey data from all 48 enrolled OHSP learners and 15 implementer-teachers with qualitative responses from teacher-implementers. Both groups rated the program as implemented overall (learners: $M = 3.37$; teachers: $M = 3.32$). Social-needs support received comparatively strong ratings, while teachers rated program goals and objectives most positively ($M = 3.59$). The reported group comparison showed no statistically significant difference in overall implementation ratings ($F = 0.22$, $p > .05$). Exploratory associations between selected respondent characteristics and implementation ratings were also non-significant. Qualitative analysis, however, identified persistent implementation constraints: role ambiguity and workload strain among teachers, difficulties in module distribution and learner tracking, limited connectivity and device access, reduced interaction, and weaknesses in timely formative feedback. The study contributes a school-level, multi-stakeholder evaluation of an established Philippine alternative secondary education program by showing that generally favorable implementation ratings can coexist with substantial operational barriers. Educationally, the findings indicate that sustained OHSP quality depends not only on policy compliance but also on protected teacher time, stronger learner-support and feedback systems, offline-capable learning resources, and school–community mechanisms for follow-up.

Keywords: Open High School Program, alternative delivery mode, educational inclusion, mixed-methods evaluation, secondary education

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1. Introduction

Ensuring that adolescents and young adults can complete secondary education remains a central concern in educational equity. School discontinuation is rarely a single event; it often develops through cumulative disengagement shaped by academic, family, economic, and school-related conditions (Alexander et al., 2001). Flexible pathways are therefore especially important for learners whose schooling is constrained by employment, poverty, distance, health, caregiving responsibilities, or other circumstances that make daily attendance difficult. In the Philippines, the Department of Education (DepEd) introduced the Open High School Program (OHSP) as an alternative mode of secondary education emphasizing independent, self-paced, and flexible study for learners who cannot participate consistently in conventional classroom instruction (Department of Education [DepEd], 2006). The policy direction was later strengthened through Republic Act No. 10665, the Open High School System Act, which formally established open learning as part of the country's alternative secondary education provision (Republic of the Philippines, 2015). The need for flexible educational delivery became even more visible during and after the COVID-19 period. Research on remote and disrupted schooling documented concerns related to student well-being, school connectedness, academic worries, and unequal access to learning resources (Hawrilenko et al., 2021; Hertz et al., 2022; Lessard & Puhl, 2021). These issues are highly relevant to alternative delivery programs because flexibility can improve access while simultaneously increasing the importance of learner self-management, teacher follow-up, communication, feedback, and access to learning materials.

1.1 Literature gap and contribution of the study

Although OHSP policy documents specify program goals and implementation expectations, published empirical evaluations remain relatively limited and are often based on single-site descriptions. Cruz and Vargas (2021), for example, documented learner and teacher experiences in an OHSP setting and highlighted concerns involving supervision, module compliance, motivation, attendance, and academic performance. What remains less visible in the literature is how learners and implementer-teachers within the same contemporary school context assess implementation across common program dimensions and how those ratings correspond with the day-to-day operational difficulties reported by implementers.

The present study addresses this gap by combining quantitative assessments from the complete population of OHSP learners and designated implementer-teachers at one school with qualitative evidence on operational challenges. Its contribution is therefore not a claim that the findings represent all Philippine OHSP sites. Rather, the study offers a context-rich implementation evaluation showing where stakeholder perceptions converge and where implementation difficulties persist despite generally positive ratings. This distinction is important for education-focused readers because successful policy implementation is not only a matter of whether a program exists, but also whether the school can provide workable instructional, technological, logistical, and relational support.

1.2 Conceptual framework and research questions

The evaluation is principally informed by program theory, which emphasizes examining how a program is expected to operate, how its components are implemented, and where implementation conditions may explain observed strengths or weaknesses (Bickman, 1987). In the OHSP context, policy goals, instructional methods, learner-related processes, and social-support mechanisms can be treated as interconnected implementation components. The study also recognizes the pedagogical demands of self-paced learning: flexibility can expand access, but it requires sufficient guidance, feedback, learning resources, and opportunities for interaction.

The study addressed the following questions:

1. What are the socio-demographic and academic characteristics of OHSP learners and the professional characteristics of implementer-teachers?
2. How do learners and teachers assess the level of OHSP implementation in terms of goals and objectives, methods of teaching, learner-related aspects, and social-needs support?
3. Is there a statistically significant difference between learner and teacher assessments of overall OHSP implementation?
4. Are selected respondent characteristics associated with perceived implementation levels?
5. What operational, instructional, logistical, and technological challenges are experienced by OHSP implementer-teachers?

2. Methodology

2.1 Research design and setting

A mixed-methods explanatory sequential design was used. The quantitative phase employed descriptive, comparative, and correlational analyses to examine implementation ratings and selected respondent characteristics. The qualitative phase used open-ended teacher responses to clarify the operational conditions underlying the quantitative findings. The study was conducted at Doña Francisca Lacsamana de Ortega Memorial National High School (DFLOMNHS), Bangar, La Union, where the OHSP had been implemented following Schools Division evaluation and approval.

2.2 Participants and sampling

The study used total population sampling. Participants comprised all 48 officially enrolled OHSP learners and all 15 designated OHSP implementer-teachers during School Year 2025–2026. Because the study included the complete accessible OHSP population at the site, no sampling fraction was applied. The learner group included both minors and adults, which has implications for the consent procedures described below.

2.3 Instrument and data collection

Data were gathered using a structured questionnaire covering respondent profiles and four implementation dimensions: goals and objectives, methods of teaching, learner-related aspects, and social-needs support. The instrument was adapted from prior OHSP evaluation work, including Cruz and Vargas (2021), and was subjected to content validation by five expert administrative personnel. Open-ended items were used to capture teacher-implementers' descriptions of role expectations, module distribution and retrieval, learner monitoring, instructional interaction, technology access, and feedback-related challenges.

2.4 Ethical considerations and participant consent

Participation in research involving learners and teachers should be voluntary and based on informed consent. For adult participants, written informed consent should document the study purpose, procedures, voluntary nature of participation, confidentiality, and the right to withdraw without penalty. For learners younger than 18 years, parental or legal-guardian consent and learner assent are normally required; learners aged 18 years or older may provide their own informed consent. Identifiable information should be removed or protected in the research dataset and reporting.

2.5 Data analysis

Quantitative data were summarized using frequency counts, percentages, means, and standard deviations. The original analysis reported an omnibus comparison of learner and teacher overall implementation ratings using analysis of variance (ANOVA), with statistical significance evaluated at $\alpha = .05$. Pearson product-moment correlations were also reported for selected respondent characteristics and implementation ratings. Because several profile variables are categorical or ordinal, these correlations are treated here as exploratory and should not be interpreted as establishing demographic independence or causal effects. For future analyses, statistical procedures matched to the measurement level of each predictor (e.g., point-biserial correlations, Spearman correlations, group comparisons, or regression with appropriate coding) would be preferable.

Qualitative responses from implementer-teachers were organized through thematic analysis. Recurrent statements were grouped into broader patterns describing role and workload issues, logistical processes, and instructional/technological barriers. The qualitative findings were then interpreted alongside the quantitative implementation ratings.

3. Results and discussion

3.1 Learner and teacher profiles

The learner group ($N = 48$) was predominantly female (70.83%), and most learners (79.17%) were 16–20 years old. Socioeconomic indicators suggested marked vulnerability: 81.25% reported monthly family income below ₱12,030. Academic histories were heterogeneous; 35.42% had previously attained an Outstanding general weighted average, while 20.84% had not met expectations. These data reinforce the function of OHSP as a pathway serving learners with diverse educational histories and substantial socioeconomic constraints.

Table 1

Selected socio-demographic and academic characteristics of OHSP learners ($N = 48$)

Profile variable	Category	f	%
Gender	Male	11	22.92
	Female	34	70.83
	LGBTQ+	3	6.25
Age bracket	16–20 years	38	79.17
	21–25 years	5	10.42
	26 years and above	5	10.41
Monthly family income	Poor (< ₱12,030)	39	81.25
	Low income (₱12,031–₱24,060)	6	12.50
	Low middle income (₱24,061–₱48,120)	3	6.25
Prior academic performance	Outstanding (90–100)	17	35.42
	Very Satisfactory (85–89)	7	14.58
	Satisfactory (80–84)	13	27.08
	Fairly Satisfactory (75–79)	1	2.08
	Did Not Meet Expectations (<75)	10	20.84

Among the 15 teacher-respondents, 60.00% were female and 60.00% had more than 10 years of teaching experience. A slight majority (53.33%) were assigned to Senior High School, while 46.67% were assigned to Junior High School. The group also included teachers with postgraduate preparation. The experience profile suggests that the implementation challenges reported later cannot simply be dismissed as problems of novice teaching; they appear to involve program structure and workload as well.

3.2 Perceived level of OHSP implementation

Both respondent groups rated overall implementation as Implemented, with closely similar composite means (learners: $M = 3.37$; teachers: $M = 3.32$). Teachers rated Goals and Objectives most highly ($M = 3.59$, Highly Implemented), while Social Needs Support received relatively strong ratings from both learners ($M = 3.43$) and

teachers ($M = 3.48$). The lowest teacher mean was observed for Learner-Related Aspects ($M = 3.06$), followed by Methods of Teaching ($M = 3.15$). This pattern is educationally important: institutional goals may be clearly understood and formally implemented even when instructional interaction, learner follow-up, and day-to-day learning processes remain more difficult.

Table 2

Overall OHSP implementation ratings by dimension

Implementation dimension	Learner M	Learner interpretation	Teacher M	Teacher interpretation
Goals and objectives	3.40	Implemented	3.59	Highly Implemented
Methods of teaching	3.35	Implemented	3.15	Implemented
Learner-related aspects	3.29	Implemented	3.06	Implemented
Social-needs support	3.43	Implemented	3.48	Implemented
Overall composite mean	3.37	Implemented	3.32	Implemented

3.3 Group comparison and exploratory associations

The reported group comparison indicated no statistically significant difference between learner and teacher overall implementation ratings ($F = 0.22, p > .05$). The appropriate interpretation is that the available data did not provide evidence of a difference between the two stakeholder groups. It should not be described as proving institutional alignment or equivalence, because a non-significant test does not establish that two groups are identical. The original analyses likewise reported no statistically significant Pearson correlations between overall implementation ratings and the selected learner variables (including age, family income, previous academic performance, and coded gender) or selected teacher variables (including length of service and present position), with p values above .05. These findings suggest that no clear bivariate pattern was detected in this particular sample. They do not demonstrate that implementation is universally independent of demographic background, especially given the small single-site sample and the categorical or ordinal nature of several variables.

3.4 Operational challenges identified by teacher-implementers

Three broad challenge clusters emerged from the qualitative responses. First, teachers described role ambiguity and workload strain. Monitoring expectations were not always clear, OHSP responsibilities competed with regular face-to-face teaching duties, and tracking learners who were not seen daily required additional time and coordination. Second, logistical bottlenecks affected module distribution, retrieval, and learner follow-up. Irregular submission schedules and inconsistent attendance during designated check-ins made it difficult for teachers to know whether learning tasks were progressing as intended. These logistical issues can undermine the flexibility that the OHSP is designed to provide if learners experience delays in receiving materials or feedback. Third, instructional and technological barriers constrained the quality of distance-supported learning. Teachers reported unequal access to devices and connectivity, limited real-time interaction, reduced opportunities for immediate clarification, and difficulty providing timely, high-quality feedback. These findings echo broader research showing that remote learning conditions can be shaped strongly by access, connectedness, and communication (Hawrilenko et al., 2021; Hertz et al., 2022; Lessard & Puhl, 2021).

3.5 What is new in this study?

The study adds three useful elements to the limited school-level evidence on OHSP implementation. First, it evaluates the program simultaneously from learner and implementer-teacher perspectives rather than relying on a single respondent group. Second, it pairs implementation ratings with qualitative evidence, revealing an important implementation paradox: a program can be rated as generally implemented while teachers still experience substantial operational barriers that threaten instructional quality. Third, the study identifies the practical conditions that appear most important for sustaining alternative delivery at the school level—teacher role clarity, protected time, learner tracking, timely formative feedback, digital access, and community-supported follow-up. The novelty therefore lies in connecting formal implementation status with the lived operational demands of delivery rather

than in claiming a new national model of OHSP effectiveness.

4. Practical educational implications

4.1 Implications for teachers

Teachers need clearly defined OHSP responsibilities, realistic caseloads, and protected time for learner monitoring and feedback. Professional development should move beyond general orientation to include concrete practices for asynchronous instruction, formative feedback on modular work, motivational follow-up, communication with families, and the use of low-bandwidth or offline learning tools. Shared monitoring templates and scheduled advisory periods may reduce duplicated work and role confusion.

4.2 Implications for students

For learners, flexibility should be accompanied by structured support. Schools can provide regular check-in schedules, progress trackers, clear module deadlines, accessible channels for asking questions, and early alerts when submissions are missed. Learners with limited connectivity should have equivalent offline access to materials and feedback. Because some OHSP participants may already have histories of academic difficulty or interrupted schooling, support should emphasize achievable milestones, belonging, and re-engagement rather than relying solely on independent study.

4.3 Implications for schools and educational leaders

School leaders should treat OHSP as a distinct instructional arrangement with resource requirements, not simply as an additional duty assigned to regular teachers. Operational plans should specify who tracks learners, who coordinates module distribution and retrieval, how frequently teachers provide feedback, and what happens when a learner becomes unreachable. Partnerships with barangay and community structures may strengthen follow-up, but such arrangements require clear safeguarding, accountability, and role definitions. Budget priorities should include offline-capable devices or learning resources, connectivity assistance where feasible, and administrative support for program monitoring. At the policy level, implementation monitoring should therefore assess educational quality indicators in addition to compliance indicators. Reporting that the OHSP is ‘implemented’ is not sufficient if teachers lack time for feedback or students cannot reliably access materials. Practical quality indicators could include turnaround time for feedback, frequency of learner contact, module completion and retrieval rates, learner persistence, re-entry or completion rates, and documented support for students at risk of disengagement.

4.4 Limitations of the study

Several limitations should guide interpretation. First, the study was conducted in one school and involved only 48 learners and 15 teachers; the findings are therefore context-specific and should not be generalized to all OHSP sites in La Union or the Philippines. Second, implementation was measured primarily through self-report, which may be influenced by social desirability, local expectations, or different understandings of the rating scale. Third, the study evaluated perceived implementation rather than objective program outcomes such as persistence, completion, attendance trajectories, module turnaround time, or learning gains. Fourth, the small teacher sample limits statistical power. Fifth, several demographic variables are categorical or ordinal, making Pearson correlations a weak choice for some of the reported associations; non-significant findings should therefore be regarded as exploratory rather than evidence of demographic neutrality. Sixth, the qualitative evidence was drawn from implementer-teacher responses; more extensive learner and parent interviews could reveal challenges not visible to teachers. Finally, the submitted draft did not include verifiable ethics/consent details, which must be reported accurately before publication.

4.5 Recommendations for future research

Future studies should extend the evaluation across multiple schools and Schools Divisions to determine which implementation challenges are local and which recur across settings. Larger samples would permit more appropriate multivariable analyses of learner and school characteristics. Researchers should also link perception data with objective indicators such as module completion, attendance or contact frequency, course grades, retention, re-entry, and graduation. Longitudinal designs would be particularly valuable for determining whether improvements in teacher feedback, connectivity, or community follow-up are associated with better learner persistence and completion.

Qualitative work should include learners, parents or guardians, school heads, and community partners to build a fuller account of how open-learning responsibilities are distributed. Comparative studies could examine schools using predominantly printed modules, blended approaches, and more digitally supported models. Intervention studies could then test specific educational improvements—for example, scheduled teacher advisory time, SMS-based learner reminders, offline digital content, structured feedback protocols, or community-based tracking—to move the literature from description toward evidence on what improves OHSP learning and persistence.

5. Conclusion

The OHSP at DFLOMNHS provides an important flexible pathway for learners who may otherwise face difficulty participating in conventional secondary schooling. Learners and teachers generally rated program implementation positively, and the available data did not show a statistically significant difference between their overall assessments. At the same time, teacher accounts revealed substantial pressures involving workload, role clarity, module logistics, learner tracking, digital access, interaction, and feedback. These findings caution against equating formal implementation with fully effective educational delivery.

For education practitioners and school leaders, the central message is that flexibility must be supported by structure. A sustainable OHSP requires clear teacher roles, adequate time for monitoring and feedback, accessible learning resources, reliable communication channels, and coordinated school–family–community support. Strengthening these conditions can help ensure that open secondary education functions not merely as an alternative route to enrollment, but as a viable route to meaningful learning and school completion.

Declaration on the use of generative AI - Generative artificial intelligence (ChatGPT, OpenAI) was used during manuscript revision to assist with language editing, organization, clarity, and reference-format checking. The author is responsible for reviewing and verifying the accuracy of the manuscript, the interpretation of the study findings, all cited sources, and the final submitted text. Generative AI was not treated as an author and was not used as a source of research evidence.

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