Tracer Study on the Graduates of the Open High School Program

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Abstract — This tracer study focused on the post-graduation status of graduates of the Open High School Program (OHSP) at Bayambang National High School, covering cohorts from School Year 2017–2018 to 2022–2023. Guided by Social Justice Theory, Human Capital Theory, Constructivist Learning Theory, Life Course Theory, and Social Cognitive Career Theory, the research adopted an explanatory sequential mixed-methods approach. The quantitative phase involved 26 graduates, followed by in-depth qualitative interviews with selected participants to gain a more comprehensive understanding of their post-graduation experiences.

The results indicated that most participants were young adults, largely male, and mostly high school graduates, with only a few advancing to tertiary education. Regarding employment status, half of the participants were already employed, primarily in the private sector, while the other half were either unemployed or self-employed. A computed overall weighted mean of 3.12 suggested that the post-OHSP challenges experienced by the graduates were generally mild. Common concerns included inadequate career guidance, difficulties in adapting to more structured academic or work settings, financial constraints, and limited access to technological resources. Notably, some respondents reported encountering little to no difficulty after completing the program.

The qualitative findings revealed several recurring themes, including academic and learning-related difficulties, pressures associated with balancing work and study, financial limitations, constraints in program design, and challenges during the transition period. Nevertheless, the graduates exhibited adaptive coping mechanisms. These included resilience,

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strategic time management, reliance on faith, support from family and teachers, and the utilization of technology and alternative learning opportunities to navigate post-program demands.

The study concludes that the Open High School Program (OHSP) effectively expands access to secondary education through its flexible learning structure. However, findings suggest the need to strengthen institutional support mechanisms to better assist graduates in transitioning to higher education and employment. In response, an intervention program that focuses on enhanced career guidance, strengthened academic support services, and improved resource provision to increase the program's overall effectiveness further was proposed.

Keywords: High School Program, challenges, flexible learning structure, higher education, tracer study

I. INTRODUCTION

Governments and institutions continue to implement innovative educational models to address challenges in accessibility, equity, and quality. Sustainable Development Goal 4 emphasizes inclusive and equitable educational opportunities and recognizes lifelong learning as a critical component of sustainable human development. A viable response to these challenges involves adopting flexible learning approaches that accommodate learners with varied educational needs, particularly those facing geographic, economic, or physical limitations. As emphasized in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2020), these reforms aim to recognize learners' varied identities and needs and dismantle barriers that limit their meaningful engagement in education.

The persistent issue of out-of-school children highlights the urgent need for alternative learning modalities. Open education programs, such as the Open High School Program (OHSP), offer non-traditional pathways for students who face barriers to formal schooling. These programs

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serve as essential interventions for reintegrating out-of-school children into the education system by offering flexible and accessible learning opportunities tailored to their needs. OHSP aligns closely with several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). For instance, SDG 4, Target 4.1, prioritizes the development of essential reading, writing, and numerical skills for youth and adult learners, and is directly supported by OHSP's mission to enable students, including working students and young mothers, to complete secondary education. Furthermore, Target 4.7 focuses on equipping learners with knowledge and skills for sustainable development, and OHSP integrates sustainable practices or promotes skills for sustainable livelihoods.

In the Philippines, all Filipino citizens are entitled to free and quality education. The 1987 Philippine Constitution requires the government to ensure that everyone has access to a good education, regardless of age, gender, race, or background. It is then clearly stated that the government must ensure and seek programs and alternatives to make education accessible to all. Education is recognized as a fundamental human right, providing people with the necessary skills and knowledge for full participation in society. However, in many instances, learners encounter obstacles that impede their access to and completion of basic education, particularly in developing nations such as the Philippines (Taguba, 2023).

To address this issue, the government enacted Republic Act 10665, or the Open High School System Act, which provides an alternative secondary education program. This program helps young people overcome personal, geographic, financial, and physical challenges, enabling them to complete their high school education.

Policies and programs covering both the formal and non-formal (alternative learning) systems were laid down in line with the Education for All (EFA) vision. One program initiated by the Department of Education (DepEd) was the Open High School Program, a non-traditional learning program within the formal system. The OHSP is an alternative way of delivering secondary education. It is open to individuals who can not attend regular classes due to time constraints, distance, physical disability, financial difficulties, or social or family constraints. Potential learners are working students, street children, young mothers, and students who have

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experienced difficult and abusive circumstances (Bautista & Torralba, 2020). OHSP is one of the programs offered in every school to address the needs of every learner. This program intends to minimize dropout rates nationwide. Individuals who are challenged to complete basic education due to various circumstances can meet their basic education needs through the OHSP. Nonetheless, OHSP is a program applicable only to Junior High School and Senior High School learners.

In 1998, the Department of Education (DepEd) started the Open High School Program (OHSP) as a pilot project. Its main objective was to address the high dropout rates and improve secondary school student completion and retention in 15 of the most economically challenged provinces in the Philippines. Alongside the Dropout Reduction Program (DORP), the program was incorporated into the regular school system ten years later. More recently, OHSP has also become a viable way to address overcrowded classrooms.

The Open High School Program supports the School Improvement Plan's (SIP) direction by contributing to the development of functionally literate graduates. These learners must demonstrate mastery of fundamental competencies, apply problem-solving skills effectively, and participate responsibly within their families and communities. As an intervention under the Dropout Reduction Program, the Open High School Program widens access to secondary education for elementary completers, former high school students, and individuals who qualify through the Philippine Educational Placement Test (PEPT). It also intends to prevent learners from leaving school and to encourage out-of-school youth to resume and complete their studies. Furthermore, the program seeks to reduce dropout rates, increase participation, and improve learners' academic performance by providing quality distance education (Department of Education, Bureau of Secondary Education, 2021).

Moreover, the OHSP is managed by a team that primarily consists of the school principal, OHSP coordinator, teacher-facilitators, school guidance counselor, local government officials, and representatives from various DepEd offices, supported by parents and/or guardians, as well as other key community stakeholders.

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According to Cena and Corpuz (2024), the Open High School Program seeks to produce graduates who are functionally literate, equipped with problem-solving abilities, and prepared to contribute positively to their households and the wider community. Designed for students following non-traditional learning pathways and adult learners seeking to complete their secondary education, the program provides flexible educational opportunities. It allows individuals to pursue their studies at their own pace while ensuring they receive a high school diploma upon meeting the requirements. Enrollment in the program requires mandatory registration, and students must undergo regular assessments to monitor their academic progress and determine their eligibility for graduation. To succeed, learners need to commit to their studies and actively participate in their educational journey. The OHSP also implements specific policies and guidelines, including attendance requirements and academic integrity standards, which students must adhere to throughout their studies. Furthermore, Cruz and Vargas (2021) argue that expanding the OHSP to include more secondary schools is essential for providing greater support to students and enhancing school retention rates, particularly for those who face challenges within the traditional high school system.

Literature Review

This study is anchored on several interrelated theories that collectively explain the foundations of the Open High School Program (OHSP) and its impact on graduates' educational, professional, and personal development. These include Social Justice Theory, Human Capital Theory, Constructivist Learning Theory, Life Course Theory, and Social Cognitive Career Theory. Together, these frameworks provided the lens through which the study assessed the long-term outcomes of OHSP graduates.

Social Justice Theory emphasizes fairness, equity, and inclusion in educational opportunities (Fraser, 2020; Rawls, 2020). Wenar (2021) explained that Rawls conceptualized

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justice as fairness, proposing a balance between liberty and equality so that people have comparable opportunities to pursue success. In this study, Social Justice Theory framed the OHSP as an educational innovation designed to promote equitable access to quality education for marginalized learners. By offering flexible learning modalities, the program aimed to bridge educational gaps and promote social inclusion among students facing economic, geographic, or personal barriers. This theory guided the assessment of whether the OHSP fulfilled its mission of reducing educational inequality and improving life opportunities for its graduates.

The Human Capital Theory of Becker (2020) posits that education is an investment in human capital that enhances individual productivity and economic potential. According to Becker (2020), human capital includes all activities that influence future real income through the development of skills, knowledge, and competencies (Fleischhauer, 2020). In this study, the theory explained how the OHSP contributed to the development of graduates' skills and employability. It supported the investigation of whether participation in the OHSP increased graduates' capacity to pursue higher education, secure employment, or contribute productively to society.

The Constructivist Learning Theory of Piaget, Vygotsky, and Bruner emphasizes that learners actively construct knowledge through experiences and reflection. From this perspective, learning is an active process in which individuals build understanding through their interactions with the environment (Montecillo, 2024). The OHSP's flexible, learner-centered structure aligns with constructivist principles, as it allows students to learn independently, set their own pace, and apply knowledge to real-life contexts. This theory provided the basis for analyzing how OHSP graduates developed autonomy, self-regulation, and problem-solving skills that supported lifelong learning.

The Life Course Theory of Elder (2021) posits that early experiences and transitions shape an individual's long-term development. This theory was relevant in understanding how OHSP influenced the life trajectories of its graduates. Many OHSP learners entered the program after experiencing interruptions in formal education; hence, the program represented a critical life transition that may have redirected their academic and career paths. The theory supported the

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study's aim of tracing graduates' educational and employment outcomes as indicators of the program's long-term impact.

Statement of the Problem

This study aimed to trace graduates of the Open High School Program (OHSP) and assess the program's impact on them. In particular, the study aimed to address the following:

1. What is the demographic profile of the OHSP graduates in terms of:

    a. age;

    b. sex;

    c. marital status;

    d. year graduated as an OHSP student;

    e. highest educational attainment; and

    f. employment?

2. What are the challenges encountered by the OHSP graduates?

3. What are the coping strategies of the OHSP graduates toward the challenges encountered?

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4. What program may be proposed to address the salient findings of this study?

II. METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Strategy

This study used a mixed-method research design, specifically an explanatory sequential design, to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the experiences of graduates of the Open High School Program (OHSP). This design used quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis to provide a holistic interpretation of the program's outcomes.

According to Creswell and Plano Clark (2020), the explanatory sequential mixed-method design allows researchers to use qualitative data to help explain or elaborate on quantitative findings (p. 77). The initial quantitative phase provided a general overview of the research problem. In contrast, the subsequent qualitative phase offered detailed insights into the participants' experiences, thereby enriching the interpretation of the results.

The quantitative phase was conducted first and involved administering structured survey questionnaires to OHSP graduates. This phase aimed to determine participants' demographic profiles, identify the challenges they encountered after graduation—particularly in further education and employment—and describe the coping strategies they used to address these challenges. The numerical data were evaluated using descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, and means, to summarize participants' responses.

Following the quantitative analysis, the qualitative phase was conducted. Participants for the interviews were intentionally selected based on the survey results to explore in more detail the

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challenges they encountered and the coping mechanisms they employed. This phase also explored the context behind the graduates' experiences and gathered their suggestions for improving the OHSP. The qualitative information was examined using thematic analysis to identify common patterns and meaningful accounts emerging from the participants' responses.

The research used an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design, which provided a platform for leveraging findings from the quantitative phase to develop evidence-based interventions and recommendations aimed at OHSP graduates. Through the integration of results with participant experiences, this study provided a comprehensive and nuanced examination of the program's long-term impacts.

Population and Locale of the Study

This study was conducted at Bayambang National High School, a public secondary school under the Schools Division Office I Pangasinan, that has actively implemented the Open High School Program (OHSP) since 2017. The school has consistently offered the program as an alternative learning delivery mode, making it an appropriate locale for this tracer study.

The participants of the study were graduates of the OHSP from School Year 2017–2018 to School Year 2022–2023. These graduates, having completed their secondary education through the program, provided valuable insights into the long-term effects of the OHSP on their academic progression, employment status, and personal development.

A purposive-convenience sampling technique was employed to select participants who met the criteria of being OHSP graduates within the specified school years and were accessible at the time of data collection. This sampling method was appropriate considering the limited availability and mobility of graduates after completing the program. It ensured that participants who were both

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qualified and reachable could be included in the study. This approach enabled the researcher to gather comprehensive, relevant data from actual OHSP completers, providing a well-rounded assessment of the program's outcomes and challenges.

Moreover, this study was focused only on graduates of the Open High School Program (OHSP). The study included learners who completed the OHSP at the school, received their official completion or graduation documents, and agreed to participate in the research. They were also required to have attended the school years covered by the study, as documented in school records. On the other hand, students who enrolled in OHSP but did not complete the program, those who transferred to another school, and those who were not officially listed as OHSP graduates in the school records were excluded. Graduates who could not be reached after several attempts were also excluded to ensure the gathered information was complete and reliable.

Data Gathering Tool

This study employed a mixed-method approach, specifically an explanatory sequential research design.

For the quantitative phase, a survey questionnaire was used. This instrument consisted of two parts: the first part gathered the demographic profile of the OHSP graduates, including age, sex, marital status, year graduated, highest educational attainment, and employment status. The second part of the questionnaire consisted of 20 items that measured the challenges encountered by OHSP graduates after completing the program. These items were grouped according to key indicators, including employability concerns, difficulties in social and emotional adjustment, challenges in pursuing higher education, and issues related to personal growth and life skills. A 4-point scale response format was employed in which participants selected from Strongly Disagree (4) to Strongly Agree (1) to show how much each situation reflected their experience.

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For the qualitative phase, an interview guide composed of open-ended questions was employed. These questions explored the graduates' coping strategies for addressing challenges after leaving the OHSP. The interviews provided deeper insights into their lived experiences, allowing them to describe in their own words how they navigated life after graduation. The guide included prompts encouraging reflection on how the program influenced their current circumstances, the support they received or lacked, and the factors that helped them overcome difficulties.

Data Gathering Procedure

After the refinement and validation of the survey questionnaire, the researcher asked permission to conduct the study by submitting formal request letters to the Schools Division Office I Pangasinan, and the Principal of Bayambang National High School. Approval was granted, ensuring that the study complied with institutional and ethical research standards. With the permission of the school administration, the researcher was also allowed to post and disseminate the online questionnaire through the official Facebook page of Bayambang National High School to reach graduates of the Open High School Program (OHSP).

The tracing and data collection procedures were conducted from June 9 to November 8, 2025. The researcher used both online and offline approaches to locate OHSP graduates, maximizing reach through social media, referrals, and school records.

The study used a mixed-methods explanatory sequential design, beginning with the quantitative phase and followed by the qualitative phase to deepen understanding of the results. The target participants were graduates of the Open High School Program (OHSP) from School Year 2017–2018 to 2022–2023. A purposive-convenience sampling technique was employed to identify participants who satisfied the set inclusion requirements and expressed readiness to join the study.

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III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter comprehensively presents the findings from the data collected in the study of twenty-six (26) graduates of the Open High School Program (OHSP) of Bayambang National High School. In accord with the explanatory sequential design, information was addressed quantitatively and qualitatively in this study. Numerical findings were reported using frequency and percentage distributions and means, while narrative findings were analyzed using thematic approaches. The results are presented in accordance with the study's statement of the problem.

Profile of the Participants

The first problem of the study sought to determine the demographic profile of OHSP graduates, including age, sex, marital status, year of graduation, highest educational attainment, and employment status.

TABLE 1
DISTRIBUTION OF PARTICIPANTS ACCORDING TO AGE

Age Bracket	Frequency	Percentage
18–20 years old	2	7.7%
21–23 years old	15	57.7%
24–26 years old	9	34.6%
Total	**26**	**100%**

The majority of the participants (57.7%) were between 21 and 23 years old. It shows that most OHSP graduates were young adults, suggesting that many pursued the program immediately after completing their formal studies. The result aligns with the program's intent to serve out-of-school youth and young adults who wish to complete secondary education at a flexible pace.

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Challenges Encountered by the OHSP Graduates

This section presents the challenges encountered by the graduates of the Open High School Program (OHSP). The data were gathered using a 4-point scale and analyzed using the weighted mean to determine the extent to which respondents experienced these challenges.

Given the overall weighted mean of 3.13, which indicates moderate variability in responses, Table 6 on the following page shows that participants tended to disagree with the statements regarding the difficulties they faced after completing the Open High School Program (OHSP). These results imply that although graduates encountered some difficulties, most participants did not view these difficulties as significant or common.

With a weighted average of 3.12, the data indicate that OHSP graduates generally found the challenges listed in the questionnaire somewhat difficult. The least difficult concerns were "I felt discriminated against because I came from an alternative learning program," "I had limited opportunities to develop my social interaction skills," and "I lost the motivation to pursue further education or employment," gaining the highest weighted mean of 3.31, classified as Slightly Challenging. This implies that despite some initial adjustments, graduates felt capable of handling these aspects. On the other hand, the most challenging was "I lacked the network or connections needed to find a job," which got the lowest weighted mean of 2.85. This still means it was "Slightly Challenging," but it shows that navigating a career after graduation was harder.

TABLE 2
WEIGHTED MEAN OF THE CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED BY THE OHSP GRADUATES

Item No.	Challenge Statement	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation
1	I had difficulty adjusting to traditional classroom or work settings after finishing OHSP.	3.19	Slightly Challenging
2	I felt that my OHSP credentials were not recognized by some employers.	3.19	Slightly Challenging
3	I struggled to find job opportunities even after graduating.	2.96	Slightly Challenging
4	I encountered difficulties getting accepted into higher education programs.	2.96	Slightly Challenging
5	I felt less confident because of the stigma surrounding alternative education.	3.15	Slightly Challenging
6	I had limited opportunities to develop my social interaction skills.	3.31	Slightly Challenging

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Item No.	Challenge Statement	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation
7	I did not receive enough career guidance or counseling during my time at OHSP.	3.12	Slightly Challenging
8	I had a hard time finding scholarships or financial support for further studies.	2.92	Slightly Challenging
9	I lacked the network or connections needed to find a job.	2.85	Slightly Challenging
10	I developed poor time management habits due to the self-paced nature of OHSP.	3.15	Slightly Challenging
11	I did not gain enough hands-on or practical experience.	3.15	Slightly Challenging
12	I experienced learning gaps because I was mostly studying on my own.	3.15	Slightly Challenging
13	I had limited access to technology for job applications or continuing education.	3.15	Slightly Challenging
14	I lost the motivation to pursue further education or employment.	3.31	Slightly Challenging
15	I found it difficult to adjust to structured work or school schedules.	3.23	Slightly Challenging
16	I experienced emotional stress or anxiety about my future.	3.08	Slightly Challenging
17	I did not have mentors or professionals to guide me after graduation.	3.00	Slightly Challenging
18	I felt discriminated against because I came from an alternative learning program.	3.31	Slightly Challenging
19	I continued to face financial struggles even after completing OHSP.	2.96	Slightly Challenging
20	I felt unprepared for the responsibilities of adult life and the real world.	3.23	Slightly Challenging
Average Weighted Mean		**3.12**	**Slightly Challenging**

Legend:

Point Value	Statistical Limits	Verbal Interpretation	Descriptive Equivalence
4	3.51 – 4.00	**Not Challenging**	The participant perceives the item or task as extremely demanding, requiring advanced skills, deep understanding, and significant effort to accomplish. It indicates that the participant faced considerable difficulty and may have experienced pressure or cognitive strain while performing or responding.
3	2.51 – 3.50	**Slightly Challenging**	The participant finds the item or task considerably difficult but still manageable with effort and persistence. It suggests that the activity involves moderate complexity, prompting critical thinking and problem-solving without overwhelming the participant.
2	1.51 – 2.50	**Challenging**	The participant perceives the item or task as relatively easy but with minor elements that still require thought or adjustment. It indicates that the task poses minimal difficulty and can be completed with basic knowledge or skills, demanding limited effort.
1	1.00 – 1.50	**Highly Challenging**	The participant considers the item or task very easy, straightforward, and requiring little to no effort or higher-order thinking. It implies full confidence and comfort in performing the activity without encountering any significant obstacles.

As many participants noted:

"I don't think I faced any major challenges after graduating from the OHSP." (P4)

"Actually, wala naman masyado (problema)…" (P7)

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"Wala akong naging hamon pagkatapos kong matapos." (P12)

"There's not much challenge after OHSP because I was able to attend college after." (P16)

These findings imply that while OHSP graduates experience manageable levels of challenge across areas, there remains a need for stronger career support mechanisms within the program.

According to Balbin (2024), OHSP participants manage program demands but they need additional institutional support.

The results also align with Human Capital Theory which emphasizes that education should equip learners with not only academic skills but also the social and professional competencies needed for economic participation.

These findings highlight the importance of strengthening career guidance, alumni support mechanisms, and post-program assistance to improve transition outcomes for OHSP graduates.

Coping Strategies of the OHSP Graduates Toward the Challenges Encountered

To understand how OHSP graduates managed the difficulties they faced after completing the program, a qualitative analysis of their responses to open-ended questions was conducted. While the previous section discussed the challenges they faced, this part focuses on how they coped, adjusted, and sustained their educational and personal goals despite these obstacles. Their answers reveal a wide range of coping behaviors—some grounded in personal discipline and mindset, others dependent on external support from family, teachers, and community resources.

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Using thematic analysis, the responses were examined, coded, and grouped into broader patterns to capture the different ways graduates dealt with academic, financial, emotional, and structural challenges. These coping strategies were then organized into six major themes, each supported by participant verbatim statements to ensure authenticity and preserve the graduates' voices. The themes not only reflect their resilience and adaptability but also reveal the mechanisms that allowed them to survive and progress in both schooling and life after OHSP.

Overall, this section presents the coping strategies of the OHSP graduates as they navigated self-directed learning, balanced work and studies, relied on social support, strengthened their mindset, used available opportunities, and prepared themselves for future challenges. Through these findings, the study provides insights into the forms of support and interventions that can further strengthen the program and better assist future learners.

IV. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter outlines the conclusions and recommendations formulated from the analysis and interpretation of the study's results.

The participants' profiles show that most were young adults aged 21–23. Mostly male, single, high school graduates, and either employed or seeking work, which reflects that OHSP mainly serves working youth and young adults who need a flexible way to finish high school. The OHSP graduates faced various challenges, including adjusting to new environments, limited social interaction, learning gaps, financial difficulties, and limited guidance. Yet, they were able to cope and remain strong through their resilience, effort, and determination. The OHSP graduates were able to cope with their challenges by relying on their own determination, managing their time well, seeking help from family, teachers, and friends, using technology and other learning opportunities, and staying motivated by their personal goals and faith.

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Given the needs and challenges of OHSP graduates, a support program like the BRIDGE Program is needed to provide academic guidance, skills training, career assistance, and personal support to help them transition smoothly to further studies, work, and adult life. To better support learners of different ages, backgrounds, and situations, the school should continue promoting OHSP while also providing additional support services so that all learners can complete their studies. To help OHSP graduates manage the challenges they commonly face, the school should strengthen academic, emotional, and social support by offering regular teacher consultations, mentoring, and guidance services. The school should help OHSP learners build positive habits and coping skills by providing training in time management, independent learning, self-motivation, and seeking support when needed. To address the key needs identified in the study, the school and the division office should implement the BRIDGE Program to ensure that OHSP learners and graduates receive structured support in academics, career preparation, life skills, and emotional well-being.

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