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**SELAMAT DATANG KEMBALI: KEMBALINYA MAHASISWA PUTUS
KULIAH KE DUNIA KAMPUS**
WELCOME BACK: THE RETURN OF COLLEGE DROPOUTS TO SCHOOL

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Abstrak: Sebagian besar literatur berfokus untuk menemukan penyebab mengapa mahasiswa putus kuliah tetapi masih kurang penelitian tentang mengapa mereka kembali ke kampus. Penelitian fenomenologi ini bertujuan untuk mendeskripsikan pengalaman mahasiswa putus kuliah yang kembali ke dunia kampus. Penelitian ini melibatkan sepuluh mahasiswa Jurusan Informasi dan Teknologi sebagai responden kajian. Data wawancara dianalisis secara tematis. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa faktor penyebab responden berhenti kuliah adalah terkait dengan faktor keuangan, pengaruh dari mahasiswa lainnya, faktor kesehatan, dan faktor keluarga. Adapun faktor yang menjadi alasan mereka kembali kuliah antara lain faktor keluarga, faktor teman sebaya, dan pendidikan gratis. Ketika mereka dikeluarkan, mereka dipandang rendah dan dihakimi secara negatif, dan merasa direndahkan dan ditinggalkan. Ketika mereka kembali ke kuliah, mereka melihat diri mereka bersyukur, sukses, dan ingin bekerja pada profesi yang mereka inginkan di masa depan. Temuan penelitian ini dapat menjadi masukan penting untuk menyusun program yang dapat membantu mahasiswa, khususnya mantan putus kuliah untuk menyelesaikan program sarjana mereka.

Kata kunci: Kampus, Putus kuliah, Fenomenologi, Kembali ke kampus

Abstract: Most of the studies in the literature have focused on finding the causes why students are dropping out but not on why they are coming back to school. This phenomenological research aims to describe the experiences of dropout college students who returned to school. Ten information and technology students participated in the research. The interview data was thematically analyzed. The results affirmed that the factors why the respondents stop attending school are financial-related, student-related, health-related, and family-related. The factors why they returned to school include family factor, peer factor, and free education. When they were dropped out, they were being looked down and adjudged negatively, and feeling down and left behind. When they returned to school, they see themselves grateful, successful, and fortunate of working in the job they want in the future. The findings of this study can be a vital input to crafting programs that can help college students particularly, those former dropouts to finish their baccalaureate degrees.

Keywords: College, Dropouts, Phenomenology, Return

INTRODUCTION

Recent studies show that among the worlds' common problems today is out of school youth. The result of the 2010 Annual Poverty Indicators Survey, revealed that one of eight Filipino is an Out-Of-School-Youth aged between 6 to 24. This drives to indicate that it is a rampant issue needed to be addressed. The United States of America in 2013 Bureau of Labor Statistics stated that the higher the degree of educational achievement, the more likely one has to be working. Relative to individuals who have not completed their studies, the unemployment rate is high. Individuals who drop out of school can have limited skills and applications when faced in the industry. It is essential to finish a college degree to find a stable job and have a lower chance of being unemployed, but it disappears when they choose to leave school because they will have low abilities and credentials in the industry (Nengsih, Sari, & Helmi, 2018; Patterson, Hale, & Stressman, 2007, YWDO, 2000).

The Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS) said the Department of Education (DepEd) must address health and poverty concerns as a result of the 2016 Annual Poverty Indicators Survey (APIS) to maintain the growing number of children and young people in the basic education sector. The data indicated that 42.3 percent of school dropouts don't go to school because of marriage and family problems, while financial issues came second with 20.2 percent and followed by a 19.7 percent lack of interest.

Some studies found some factors that cause a student to stop attending school. Family-related factors including the socio-economic status and the family environment also cause students to leave school (Wells et. al. 1989; Syuraini, Sunarti, & Zukdi, 2019). However, whether an individual will finish their study or quit going to school, family support is essential (Hale, 1998; Weiss, 2017). When parents support their child's educational career it gives them a higher chance to be successful in school (Nengsih, 2017).

It is the student action that usually happens both in and outside of the school and is described as the student-related factors. This can be the student's behaviors, attitude, academic performance, and attendance. Some research shows that student behaviors and academic performance correlate with the dropout rates. Students who choose to leave school have either disciplinary issues or they just don't excel in school. ("Youth Who Drop", 2000). Students with disciplinary issues and lower academic performance have a higher chance of dropping out. (Ekstron et. al., 1986; Cairns, Neckerman, 1989; Weis, Farrar, & Petrie, 1989; Rita, Muliana, & Handrianto, 2021). Students who failed and have retained choose to drop out. (Alexander and Entwisle, 2000).

There has been a drop in out-of-school youth number that was reported by the Department of Education (DepEd), from 3.8 million people in 2016 to 3.6 million in 2017. Nepomuceno Malaluan has noted, there is a decrease in the number of out-of-school youth viewed by people between the ages of 16 and 24, as many of those

returning to school after dropping out. Concerning the information, the study wanted to understand the experience of students who come back to school after dropping out their courses because most of the studies in the literature have focused on finding the causes why students are dropping out but not on why they are coming back to school.

This study aims to understand the experience of the dropout students who returned to school, currently enrolled in a State University. Specifically, the study sought to identify the factors causing the students to quit school, the factors causing the students to return to school, and the struggles they experience as a school dropout. It is hoped that this study would provide understanding to schools and policy makers for the generation of programs and projects that encourage the youth to pursue schooling and discourage them from dropping out. The study could help teachers to understand the situations of their students and become good counselors rather than strict and reprimanding. With a good understanding of the phenomenology of returning to school after dropping out, school stakeholders could be more sensible in deciding about academic policies i. e. toward lessening the number of school dropouts.

METHOD

This study adopts a phenomenological method. Phenomenology is a science whose aim is to describe a particular phenomena or the existence of objects as lived experiences (Streubert & Carpenter, 1999; Flynn & Korcuska, 2018). In this study, phenomenology was used to describe why college dropouts return to school. Purposive sampling technique was used in this study. The participants were ten former dropouts currently enrolled at Isabela State University-Roxas Campus specifically in Bachelor of Science in Information Technology (BSIT). The participants belong to 21 to 26 age bracket.

We asked permission from the respondents to participate in our research. We assured that their answers were kept with utmost confidentiality. After the permission was granted from the participants, the questionnaire was sent thru messenger and email of the respondents. It was administered online because of the Corona Virus 2019 pandemic and the strict health protocols to be followed which made face-to-face interviews to be impossible. The interview questions asked about the reasons why they stop attending school, factors that encourage them to return to school, the struggles they experienced as a dropout, how they see themselves in the future, and how they describe a competent graduate. Responses were analyze through the aid of thematic analysis. The responses were coded to organize data into categories, codes, and themes to arrive at meanings and responses to specific research questions (Saldana, 2009).

RESULTS

The respondents identified four factors of why they stopped attending school. The most common factors that the respondents identified are a *financial-related factor*, *student-related factor*, and *health-related factor*. This is followed by family-related factors. Three respondents identified that the factor in why they stop attending school is financial-related. The financial-related factor is the socio-economic status of the family, it the financial difficulties that the respondent encounter.

Table 1. Factors Causing the Students to Quit School

Theme	Participant (P)
1. Financial-related Factor	(P ₃ , P ₇ , P ₈)
2. Student-related Factor	(P ₁ , P ₄ , P ₆)
3. Health-related Factor	(P ₂ , P ₇ , P ₉)
4. Family-related Factor	(P ₅ , P ₁₀)

The respondents also identified that due to lack of interest and failing grades they stop attending school. One respondent responded, "*Hindi na ako na-focus sa pag-aaral, nagsi-incomplete iba kong subject at nagsingko gang sa huminto ako.*" (I can't focus on my studies, I got incomplete in some of my subjects and got failing grade until I stopped attending school). These were categorized into the student-related factor. A student-related factor is an attitude, student's behavior, and academic performance that contribute to the respondents to stop attending school.

The respondents mentioned, the reason they stopped attending school is they got pregnant and some health problems. This is the general health of a person who falls under the health-related factor category. The family-related factor that is identified by some of the respondents is the problems they encountered in their family which created inconveniences among the respondents to continue their studies.

Table 2. Factors Causing the Student Return to School

Theme	Participant (P)
1. Family Factor	(P ₁ , P ₄ , P ₇ , P ₈ , P ₉ , P ₁₀ , P ₂)
2. Peer Factor	(P ₅ , P ₆)
3. Free Education	(P ₃)

The factors that cause the student to return to the school that was identified by the respondents are a family factor, peer factor, and free education. Among the three the most common factor is the family factor which is the encouragement and support that they get to continue their studies. Also, two respondents mentioned that peer factor causes them to return to school, which is friends influence. Furthermore, one of the

responses stated “Free education has been established so I took the opportunity to attend school”.

Table 3. Struggles They Experience as a Dropout

	Theme	Participant (P)
1	Being looked down and Judged Negatively	(P ₁ , P ₄ , P ₆ , P ₉)
2	Being Left Behind	(P ₂ , P ₃ , P ₁₀)
3	Feeling Down	(P ₁ , P ₇)
4	Earning for a Living	(P ₅)

Four of the respondents identified that the most common struggle they experienced as a dropout student is being looked down on and judged negatively. Looked down on and judging negatively is making someone feel less important and making them feel that other people are better than them. Three respondents identified that they are being left behind, seeing someone moving forward but you're still stuck on where you are, which the second most common struggle they experience. It is followed by feeling down; it is the feeling of being unhappy and worthless or having self-pity. Also, one of the respondents mentioned that the struggle he experiences is earning for a living. “*Tumulong sa bukid para sa pang-araw-araw naming pangangailangan*”.

Table 4. How the Students See Themselves in the Future

	Themes	Participants (P)
1.	Happy and successful	(P ₄ , P ₇ , P ₉)
2.	Better future	(P ₁ , P ₄)
3.	Working	(P ₃ P ₁₀)

Most of the participants see themselves as happy and successful. Being happy is having a feeling of contentment and being successful in achieving your goals. While some expect to have a better future, it is having a secure and stable future. Others expect to be working, having a job, and being employed, although some also cannot visualize themselves in the future.

Table 5. Students Describe How They Regard Competence

Theme	Participant (P)
1 Globally competitive	(P ₃ , P ₇ , P ₈ , P ₉ , P ₁₀)
2 Being professional in all aspects	(P ₃)
3 Being able to apply gained knowledge and skills	(P ₄)
4 Being resourceful	(P ₅)
5 Being able to land a job	(P ₆)

As a result of the responses, it is uncovered that most of the participants regard that competence is being globally competitive, professional in all aspects, able to apply gained knowledge and skills, resourceful, and able to land a job.

DISCUSSION

No Filipino Child Left Behind Act of 2010 aims to provide a chance for students to be in school. With the combined efforts of DSWD and DepEd, it is hoped that every child will be reached and be educated. But despite this government initiative, dropout in schools is yet remarkably observed. In the Philippine Statistics Authority's Annual Poverty Indicators Survey reported in an article of the Philippine Star on September 5, 2019, school dropouts have reached more than 2.97 million. Reasons for dropouts are marriage/teenage pregnancy, family matters, financial challenges, and students' lack of interest.

This report confirms the factors experienced by the respondents why they quit schooling. (1) *Financial related factors*. Family-related factors involving socio-economic status and the family environment cause students to leave school, due to poverty their parents can't send them to school anymore (Wells, Berchard and Hambly, 1998; Bounhir, 2020). College students are still dependent on their parents. Such that when something pop up in the family during their school days, say the father or mother got sick and cannot continue working, the tendency of the student is to drop out from school, since they cannot already be supported by their parents. (2) *Student-related factors*. Students show lack of interest, cannot focus on their studies, having failing grades, prioritizing gallivanting over studying. Students who failed and with lower academic performance have the higher chance of dropping out (Cairns, Neckerman, 1989; Alexander & Entwisle, 2000; Ekstron et. al., 1986; Rita & Handrianto, 2020; Weis, Farrar, & Petrie, 1998; Youth Who Drop, 2000). Students who are failing from

some subjects tend to drop out from school rather than repeating or re-enrolling the subject. They felt demotivated when they received their failing grades. (3) *Health-related factors*. Students who got sick and needed sometime to recover from illness usually leave the school. (4) *Family-related factors*. Some students are forced into marriage due to pregnancy, problems in the family. Students with problems in the family find stressful to balance study and family commitments (Syuraini, 2020). Since the respondents cannot focus on their studies due to problems in the family, they chose to leave school.

However, the Department of Education (DepEd) said that the number of school dropouts who come back to school has been steadily increasing due to the implementation of the K to 12 Program (Malipot, 2019). Students' reasons for returning to school are because of family and peer influences, increased future opportunities, and personal goals (Haley, 2007). The above reasons are similar to the findings of this study as the respondents state that they gained encouragement and support from their families and friends so they decided to go back to school especially that the government is now offering free higher education. Family support is essential, it can encourage you to strive hard and do better, (Hale, 1998; Handrianto, Uçar, Saputra, Nengsih, Kenedi, & Rahman, 2021).

Furthermore, dropout students decide to go back to school because of being emotionally challenged. Some participants felt being worthless, experienced being look down on, adjudged negatively, and even forced to help to earn a living for the whole family. The struggles they encountered while being away from school made them realized the significance of education/completing a degree. The participants believed that having completed a degree will offer them better opportunities in the future. They can find job and have a lower chance of being unemployed, but if they continue being an out of school youth the future they foresee will disappear as they will have low abilities and credentials in the industry (Patterson, Hale, & Stressman, 2007). Besides, education will give them the necessary competence needed in the world of work and to become a productive citizen in the community (Handrianto, Rasool, Rahman, Musta'in, & Ilhami, 2021). They also perceived that a competent graduate is being a globally competitive individual, working and being a professional, and able to apply gained knowledge and skills in the real world.

CONCLUSION

The respondents' response revealed that financial related factor, student-related factors, health-related factors, and family-related factors are factors that mainly contribute to why they stop attending school. It is also revealed that the respondents experience being looked down on and adjudged negatively, feeling down, being left behind, and earn a living as they stop attending school. However, family factor, peer factor, and free education encourage and influences them to return to school and look

forward to their future as they see themselves successful in the future. The respondents realized how education degree is important and how they should not waste opportunities.

This study provides information about the lived experiences of dropouts who returned to school. The findings may be used by higher education institutions in crafting programs to help college students particularly the former dropouts to finish their respective degrees. The study, however, is limited to the ten students of Bachelor of Science in Information Technology. Further study on dropout issues and challenges particularly on graduating college students in different departments may be conducted.

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