

ISSN 2945-4069  
E-ISSN 2945-4220



**JOURNAL OF  
SCHOOL  
RESEARCH**

**VOLUME 4 2026**



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The journal is published annually (month of June) by the Center for Research and Evaluation (CRE) of St. Scholastica's College Manila. The CRE Office in coordination with the Editorial Board oversees the editing, compiling and printing of the journal.

ISSN Print: 2945-4069

ISSN Online/Electronic: 2945-4220

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# Journal of School Research

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Volume 4 2026

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# Words from the Editor

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Welcome to this thought-provoking volume of our journal, a collection that powerfully demonstrates the diverse and dynamic landscape of educational inquiry across various sectors and levels. This volume captures the critical engagement of researchers dedicated to understanding and improving the learning environment and outcomes for Filipino students.

The articles presented here span a compelling range of topics, reflecting both the practical imperatives of action research and the deep exploration of student experience and curriculum innovation.

- "Tracing the Status and Directions of Action Research at District I-A: Inputs for Creating a Culture of Research" by Pimentel and Beltran tackles the foundational necessity of building an evidence-based culture within educational institutions. Their work offers valuable data and strategic inputs crucial for fostering a sustainable environment for continuous improvement through teacher-led inquiry.
- "Blast from the Past: An Integration Culminating Activity in the Grade Nine Music Program" by Madridejos provides a vibrant look into pedagogical innovation. This study highlights how creative, integrated activities can enrich the curriculum, making learning more engaging, relevant, and memorable for students.
- "Navigating Religious Schooling and the Emergence of Nonbelief: A Phenomenological Study of Filipino Atheists' Educational Experiences" by Aldama is a significant contribution to understanding the complex intersection of education, identity, and personal belief. This phenomenological study offers a vital, often-overlooked perspective on how diverse students navigate the challenges of secular and non-secular learning environments.
- "Bridging the Gap to Work Readiness: An Analysis of Innovations in the Implementation of the Work Immersion Program in Public and Private Senior High Schools" by Tica, Bruza, Samson, and Magno addresses a crucial policy and structural challenge in the K-12 program. Their analysis provides critical insights into how the Work Immersion Program can be optimized to genuinely prepare Senior High School graduates for the demands of higher education or the professional workforce.

- Caparas’s Enhanced NSS Program serves as a visionary blueprint for revitalizing the Night Secondary School, ensuring that the Benedictine spirit of *Ora et Labora* continues to reach those most in need. It proposes a transition to a more flexible and comprehensive educational model that honors the institution’s 1970 origins while securing its future as a vital pathway to dignity and opportunity for the working youth.

Collectively, these papers represent robust scholarship that is deeply rooted in local contexts yet addresses universal educational themes. They are essential reading for educators, administrators, policymakers, and researchers committed to advancing the quality and inclusivity of education. We commend the authors for their diligence and insight, and we trust that their findings will spark further dialogue and action in their respective fields.

This volume would not have been possible without the invaluable support of several key partners. We extend our sincere gratitude to the School Administration, whose commitment to fostering a vibrant research culture provided the essential foundation and resources necessary for the compilation and publication of these studies. Their institutional support is a testament to their dedication to evidence-based practice and continuous improvement in education. Furthermore, we deeply appreciate the tireless efforts of all the Contributors, the authors, who dedicated their time, expertise, and passion to conduct rigorous research and articulate their findings with clarity. Finally, our profound thanks go to the expert and meticulous Reviewers, whose constructive feedback, keen insights, and dedication to scholarly integrity ensured the high quality and relevance of every article published in this volume.

**Elen Joy A. Bruza**  
Editor-in-Chief

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# **Tracing the Status and Directions of Action Research at District I-A: Inputs for Creating a Culture of Research**

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## **Abstract**

Being one of the biggest schools in the country, Antipolo National High School (NHS) confronts a number of problems, issues, and concerns every school year. These problems even multiplied due to the pandemic. One of the possible ways to address these problems is through action research. However, there are very few teachers who walk on this path despite several pieces of evidence that show that action research offers potential solutions to educational problems. Hence, this research aimed to map the status of action research at Antipolo NHS and identify the directions for improvement of its research unit in creating programs and projects that will create a culture of research not only in the school, but also in District I-A. Using mixed-methods design, the data that were analyzed in this study were taken from four survey questionnaires, a report from the monitoring and evaluation committee, transcripts from focus group discussions, and division memoranda from researchers in District I-A. Results show that (1) the significant profiles of teachers on conducting action research include teachers' knowledge on action research, number of ac-

tion research conducted, trend in promotion, and teachers with master's degree; (2) most teachers lack training on action research and are willing to attend future trainings; (3) teachers may be motivated to conduct action research if they have knowledge on conducting action research, available time, technical assistance, and confidence; (4) the challenges of action researchers are the pandemic itself, writing, time, availability of respondents, analysis of data, laziness / drive to finish / interest, other assignments, and apprehensions; (5) the best practices of action research completers include teamwork, technical assistance, focus and time management, communication, online tools, related literature, rest, action, openness for correction, and ethical considerations; and (6) some action researches are utilized and disseminated through a research conference, research journal, and other means of dissemination. The researchers offer recommendations to education stakeholders in District I-A to promote a culture of research for the next school year and beyond.

**Keywords:** action research, research, culture of research

### Introduction

Antipolo National High School (NHS) is composed of more than 12,500 students and more than 400 teaching and non-teaching personnel. It is one of the Top 5 biggest schools in the Philippines. Hence, the number of its students and personnel suggests the quantity of potential problems, issues, and concerns that confront the school stakeholders every school year.

These problems even multiplied due to the pandemic. Several months after the outbreak, the Department of Education (DepEd) recommended a learning continuity plan, where students may still continue learning via alternative learning delivery modes such as online learning, modular learning, or blended learning. In this way, the students will not need to experience an academic freeze in the time that health security is on top of national concern. Department of Education released DepEd Order 12, s.2020, also known as "Adoption of the Basic Education Learning Continuity Plan for School Year 2020-2021 in the light of the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency." This encourages schools to create their own school learning

continuity plan that will address the students' needs and their preferred learning modalities, depending on the status of their respective communities. This poses a challenge among teachers to confront the problems that they will encounter as they proceed to the school year 2020-2021.

Various efforts have been initiated to address these pressing educational concerns. One of them is by conducting action research. Action Research refers to *"a disciplined process of inquiry conducted by and for those taking the action. The primary reason for engaging in action research is to assist the "actor" in improving and/or refining his or her actions"* (Sagor, 2000). Educators have been conducting action research mostly to improve their teaching and learning practices in the classroom.

Several action researches have already been conceived to determine immediate solutions. Educators are often guided by the mandate of the Department of Education (DepEd) to conduct research as a tool to improve the system. Chapter 1, Section 7 (5) of the Governance of Basic Education Act of 2001 (RA 9155) expresses that DepEd urge all levels to conduct educational research and studies that will serve as one of the bases for necessary reforms and policy development. In particular, action research refers to the *"process of systematic, reflective inquiry to improve educational practices or resolve problems in any operating unit"* (DepEd Order No. 16, s. 2017). Thus, educators have conducted action research to expand educational practices.

Action research has been an effective avenue to address the common concerns that happen in the educational system especially those that occur in the classroom. The Division Research Festival, which started in 2014, inspired a lot of educators to propose and implement more action research. The role of the teachers is crucial since they are the ones who work closest to the students.

To date, few educators at Antipolo NHS have conducted a number of action research. Based on the memoranda released by the SDO Antipolo, Antipolo NHS and Antipolo City SHS produced some action research. Meanwhile, there was no record of submitted action research from Sta. Cruz ES. Table 1 presents the number of action research in SDO Antipolo, and it shows the number of action researches in District I-A (UM 192, s. 2019; UM 431, s.2020; UM 023, s.2021; UM 119, s.2021)

**Table 1**

*Number of Completed and Submitted Action Research*

School Year	TOTAL	ANHS	ACSHS
2017 - 2018	<b>22</b>		
2018 - 2019	<b>19</b>	1	
2019 - 2020	<b>67</b>	11	2
2020 – 2021 (First Sem)	<b>65</b>	6	6

The proponents of this action research argue that if action research has the potential to yield positive impact in educational practice, the school has to have an organized system to manage and proliferate the action research outputs of its teachers.

Malco and Vytiaco (2020) conducted a study to determine if their action research workshop helped to capacitate master teachers on conceptualizing research. This study mapped the action research landscape of Antipolo City Senior High School. It revealed that only 62 percent of master teachers completed action research from 2016 to 2019.

What happens after the action research completion is one of the significant concerns. There is a need to trace the implementation, dissemination, presentation, and publication of research outputs to determine if these studies address the problems they posed and consider follow-up actions. Some teachers pursue action research endeavors, many still don't. If action research helps improve teaching and learning practices, then why do many teachers still refuse to conduct one and give it a try. Hence, these concerns may open possibilities for future technical assistance for teachers' continuous professional development.

Synthesizing previous works may provide a lens on the common practices in Antipolo NHS, and it may reflect what works and what else needs to be done. Since most projects, programs, and policies should be research-based to ensure its success and effectiveness, looking at research practices poses relevance among educators, school administrators, supervisors, and parents.

This study looked at the role that action research may play in creating positive change in teachers' practices. It also proposed a research management system that would map out the action research activities and outputs of researchers at Antipolo NHS. This endeavor may benefit present and future researchers and teachers taking up graduate courses for them to have a rich source of related literature. This may also help teachers improve their teaching and learning practices by adopting research-based strategies, which in turn may benefit their students to learn their subject and improve their 21<sup>st</sup> century skills. This may also serve as a way to come up with an effective and efficient system that will reduce the consumption of time, effort, and energy in locating relevant information.

Also, this research proposed strategies in promoting a culture of research in schools and districts through focus group discussions, technical assistance, learning action cells, infusion to in-service trainings, research conferences, and publication. In the process of conducting this action research, the proponents were able to spearhead each of these proposed innovations, and this research report aimed to discuss its significance in promoting a culture of research based on the findings of this study.

This research aimed to answer the following questions:

1. What are the significant profiles of teachers on conducting action research?
2. What is the status of training on action research among teachers?
3. What is the motivation of teachers in conducting action research for SY 2020-2021?
4. What challenges do action researchers encounter in conducting action research?
5. What are the best practices of action research completers?
6. What are the research outputs of Antipolo NHS researchers?

## **Method**

### **Research Design**

The researchers used mixed-methods design, wherein they utilized both quantitative and qualitative data gathering and analyses procedures. The researchers gathered data using Google Form and documents. The survey was provided through a school memo for the participants at Antipolo NHS. The surveys for the Sta. Cruz ES and Antipolo City SHS were provided through their coordinators. The responses of the participants were tabulated through Microsoft Excel. Focus Group

Discussion was also used. For the FGD, the researchers formed two groups. The first group included the researchers who already completed their action research for SY. 2020-2021. The second group comprised the researchers who have on-going action research. The lead proponents of each research in Group 1 were asked to walk through the process in their conduct of action research and share their best practices why they were able to finish their research. Group 2 were asked to identify the challenges that they encountered in completing their action research. The inputs of the participants were encoded by three documenters/weavers. To ensure anonymity, the researchers replaced their identification as Teacher A,B,C and so on for Group 1 participants and Teacher AA,BB,CC and so on for Group 2 participants.

The collected data were organized using graphs and tables. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and graphs. Qualitative data will be summarized and analyzed using thematic analysis. The researchers reviewed all the responses of participants that were collected from the surveys and transcript of FGDs. They highlighted the most significant responses and identified the major theme that encompassed similar responses.

### **Instruments**

This research used various sources of information to answer the research questions. The researchers reviewed the previous division memoranda: Completed and Submitted Action Researches SY 2017-2018; 2018-2019 (UM 192, s. 2019); Completed and Submitted Action Researches in the Second Semester SY 2019-2020 (UM 431, s.2020); and Completed and Submitted Action Researches for the First Semester SY 2020-2021 (UM 023, s.2021; UM 119, s.2021) as the main document. The researchers released a survey on December 8, 2020 to profile the teachers of Antipolo NHS. The survey sought to determine their educational background, conduct of action research experience (from SY 2014-2020), training, and willingness to attend training for conducting action research. This was answered by 364 teaching and non-teaching personnel. Table 2 summarizes the respondents of this survey. On the same date, another survey was also provided with the same questions for action research conducted in the current school year. It has 27 respondents.

**Table 2**  
*Respondents*

Subject	Respondents	Actual	Percentage
Filipino	55	55	100%
English	50	52	96%
Math	46	55	84%
Science	50	53	94%
AP	25	46	54%
TLE	47	56	84%
ESP	37	39	95%
MAPEH	49	49	100%
Non-Teaching	5	15	33%
	<b>364</b>	<b>420</b>	<b>87%</b>

The researchers released another survey entitled Survey on Action Research on April 5, 2021. This survey sought to identify knowledge, training, challenges, and intent to conduct action research in SY 2020-2021 among teachers in District I-A. The survey was answered by 302 teachers in District I-A. Table 3 summarizes the respondents of this survey.

**Table 3**  
*Survey on Action Research Respondents*

School	Total
Sta. Cruz Elementary School	134
Antipolo NHS and AC SHS	168
<b>Total</b>	<b>302</b>

The researchers also utilized the M&E tool used in the District I-A Online District Conference on April 6, 2021. The tool contains evaluation of the said activity, and it included a brief survey at the end that sought the intent of the participants to conduct action research and their willingness to attend a training or workshop. Table 4 summarizes the respondents to the evaluation tool.

**Table 4**  
*Survey on Action Research Respondents*

School	Total
Sta. Cruz Elementary School	205
Antipolo National High School	233
Antipolo City Senior High School	19
<b>Total</b>	<b>457</b>

The responses to the previous surveys that sought answers to open-ended questions in the surveys and M&E tool were also utilized as sources of data. To gather other qualitative data, the researchers also conducted two focus group discussions on March 30, 2021. The first group was attended by 16 teacher-researchers while the second group was attended by 16 teacher-researchers.

Hence, the participants of this action research included all teaching and non-teaching personnel who conducted and completed an action research and those who responded to the surveys provided. They were purposively selected because they were the ones who provided the data needed for this study.

## Results and Discussion

The first step in any successful program begins with identifying the community members. The researchers decided to select only the significant profiles that may be beneficial for accomplishing future action plans. These include knowledge on action research, number of action research conducted, trend in promotion, and teachers with master's degree.

### *Knowledge on Action Research*

Based on the survey provided, most teachers from Sta. Cruz ES reported low to average knowledge on action research. On a scale of 1 to 5, only 3 (2%) teachers rated themselves with 5 while 8 (6%) rated themselves 4, 60 (45%) rated themselves 3, 39 (29%) rated themselves 2, and 24 (18%) rated themselves 1.

On the other hand, out of 168 respondents from Antipolo NHS and Antipolo City SHS, most of them gave a rating of 4. Only 1 responded with 5 while 15 gave 4, 80 gave 3, 41 gave 2, and 31 gave 1,

The findings show that there is a need to capacitate more teachers from Sta. Cruz ES.

### *Number of Action Research Conducted*

Out of 134, 109 respondents from Sta. Cruz reported that they had not conducted action research and 14 respondents claimed that they conducted 1 action research. However, based on the memoranda examined, no action research was listed for Sta. Cruz ES. Hence, results reveal that there is a need to orient teachers on submitting their completed action research to the division.

On the other hand, out of 168 respondents, 126 teachers from Antipolo NHS and Antipolo SHS reported that they had not conducted any action research. Meanwhile, 29 reported that they had conducted 1 action research while the rest conducted 2 or more action researches. Data shows that although there are conducted action research in high school, there remains a number of teachers who have not been able to conduct any action research.

### *Trend in promotion*

Instead of just identifying the teaching positions of action researchers who have completed action research, the researchers decided to trace their professional development. Mostly, the researchers are Teacher III, HT, and MTs. Meanwhile, it is important to note that from completed action research (2019 to present), 7 teachers were promoted, two of which were promoted into a master teacher I position as summarized in Table 5.

**Table 5**

*Positions of Researchers before and after Their Completed AR*

Position before AR	Position after AR	Total
MT I	Supervisor I	1
MT I	MT II	1
HT I	HT II	1
Teacher III	MT I	2
Teacher III	HT I	1
Teacher II	MT I	1

### *Teachers with Master's Degree*

Based on the survey with 364 responses, there are 48 teachers with master's degree at Antipolo NHS. To earn a master's degree, a student needs to undergo thesis writing. Thus, the experience may lead and inspire graduates to pursue research work beyond their academic experience. Based on the review of the names of the respondents with master's degree, out of 48, only 18 teachers have conducted action research. Meanwhile, only 19 hard bound copies of master's theses were submitted to the library. In one of the LAC sessions, a participant suggested that previous research (including master's theses) should be available to all teachers for present and future studies.

### *Status of Training on Action Research among Teachers*

On the first survey on Action Research, out of 364 respondents, 112 (32%) admitted that they had no training on action research, while 95 (26%) said they

attended once, 42 (12%) twice, 18 (5%) thrice, 17 (5%) said they attended four and more. 80 (22%) skipped the question as reflected on Figure 1.

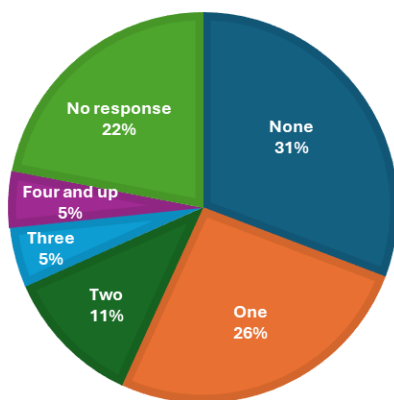


Figure 1: Number of trainings on Action Research

In terms of willingness to attend a training for action research, Figure 2 reveals that 82 (22%) participants revealed that they are “extremely willing” and 146 revealed that they are “willing.” Meanwhile, 46 (13%) claimed that they are “somewhat willing,” 45 (12%) said “not now,” and 8 (2%) said “no.” 40 (11%) did not respond to the question.

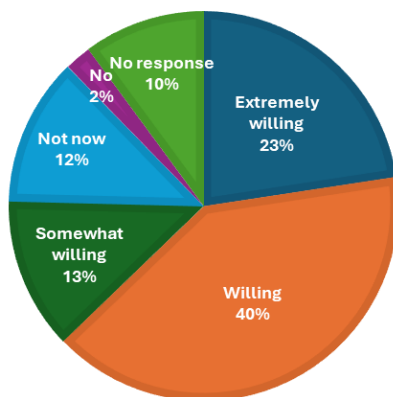


Figure 2: Willingness to attend training

Based on the survey, respondents from Sta. Cruz ES were interested to know about “how to start action research,” “the limitations in doing/conducting action research in terms of data validity,” “techniques in creating a useful action research,” “key concepts to consider when conducting action research,” “how to

gather the data,” “steps in conducting action research,” “different areas of action research and why do we do research,” “basic criteria and characteristics of an Action Research,” “identifying Research Questions.”

Meanwhile, respondents shared the desire to see “some copies of action research done by those knowledgeable individuals who already made one” and “another webinar on action research.”

On the other hand, teachers from Antipolo NHS and Antipolo City SHS reported almost the same concerns as far as getting to know more about action research: “how to conduct action research,” “the basic steps in conducting an action research,” “how to write a research output for journal publication,” “interpretation, process, and flow,” “effective tools for data collection in the new normal,” “any new guidelines in conducting Action Research this New Normal,” “the importance of conducting an action research,” “why is it necessary to conduct an action research,” and “the format and the content.”

One teacher remarked, “Mahina po talaga ako sa action research , feeling ko lagi ang gawaing ito ay para lang sa matatalino at napakahuhusay na guro.” Another teacher shared, “Alamin ang tamang pamamaraan at proseso sa pagsasagawa ng action research.”

The survey included in the M&E tool revealed important data. Figure 3A shows that 31.6 percent of Sta. Cruz ES teachers answered “maybe next time, but not now” when asked if they were interested to conduct an action research for the second semester while 31.2 percent were “interested,” 20.9 percent were “somewhat interested,” and only 13.4 percent were “extremely interested.”

Are you interested to conduct an action research for the second semester?

449 responses

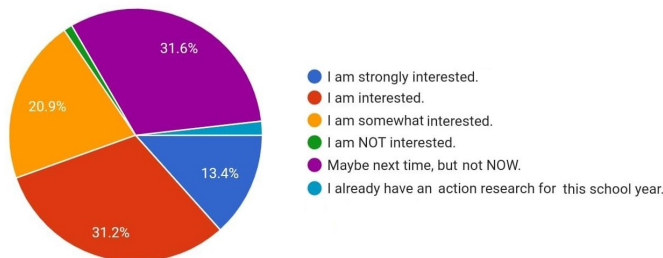


Figure 3A

Interest of Sta. Cruz ES Teachers in attending a workshop / training

Figure 3B shows that the majority of teachers from Antipolo NHS answered “maybe next time not now” while most of them answered that they were “interested” in attending a training or workshop. On the other hand, Figure 3C shows that the majority of Antipolo City SHS answered “strongly interested” in both conducting an action research and attending a training.

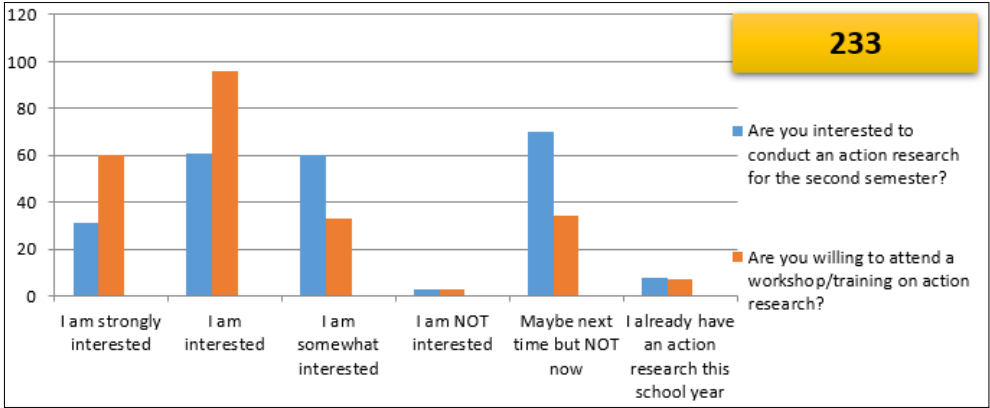


Figure 3B  
Interest of Antipolo NHS Teachers in (A) conducting action research and (B) attending a workshop / training

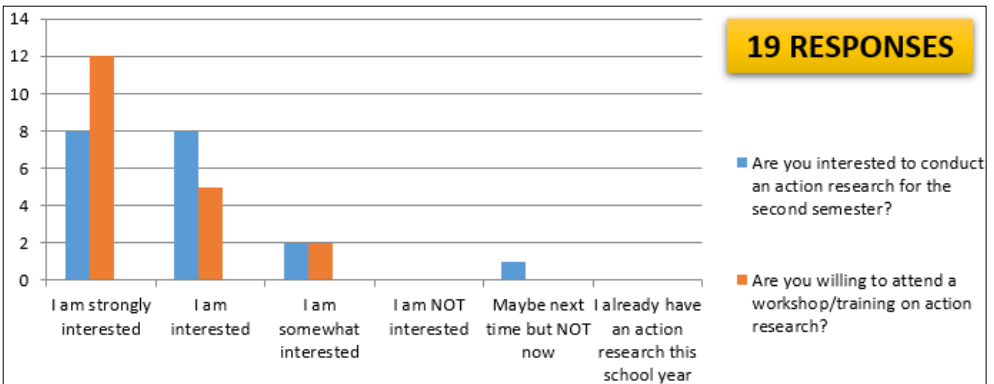


Figure 3C  
Interest of Antipolo NHS Teachers in (A) conducting action research and (B) attending a workshop / training

*Motivation of Teachers in Conducting Action Research for SY 2020-2021*

When asked in the first survey if they would conduct an action research for

SY 2020-2021, 88 (66%) respondents from Sta. Cruz ES reported that they would not conduct action research while 46 (34%) would conduct. On the other hand, 85 (52%) respondents from Antipolo NHS and Antipolo City SHS reported that they would conduct action research (Table 6).

**Table 6**

*Preference in Conducting Action Research*

School	Yes	No
Sta. Cruz ES	46	88
Antipolo NHS and Antipolo City SHS	85	83
Total	<b>131</b>	<b>171</b>

What are the motivations of teachers from Sta. Cruz ES? To answer that question, the researchers examined their answers to the open-ended questions:

***Reasons for Answering “YES”***

*I was challenged and I have the desire to help my student thru action research.*

*Our group started an action research regarding Teacher's reflection on INSET last December. We look forward into the development of this AR during the New Normal.*

*I think yes because we are not in loaded schedule in this new normal.*

*My research must be in line with this new normal in order to be successful in my research*

*If needed*

*I want to experience to conduct action research*

*For my professional growth*

*Because I want to know more about action research.*

*I'd love to conduct an action research. I need technical assistance how to do it.*

*It will help us in adapting new challenges that will or have arise during this time of pandemic*

*This new normal will give us more opportunity and time in doing action research*

***Reasons for Answering “NO”***

*Why not*

*There are so many papers works to be done.*

*Difficulty in deciding the topic for research.*

*We're not given the chance to make an action research  
We will not meet the action research if we have no funds for this kind of  
research.  
Because of Pandemic, its very hard to conduct an action research.  
We are not yet COVID free.  
Not yet, because of too busy schedule and other equally important  
matters.  
Fear of failure  
I don't have yet capability to conduct of research.  
Doing a research is quite hard.  
Because i have only a few knowledge on how to access in computer  
Many challenges we encounter in time of new normal because of limited  
place and people we ask for.  
Because I have no experience in doing it.  
I have no idea on what and how to do it.  
I am not interested in action research  
It is difficult to do a research  
In this new normal, we are still in pandemic situation and I don't think so  
this will be easier for us to conduct action research.  
My answer is no because I need to study more about on how to make an  
action research  
because of the pandemic we have and many reports that we need to  
finish and no available time  
I haven't conduct action research yet due to work loads.*

Meanwhile, the teachers in Antipolo NHS and Antipolo City SHS had a half-half sentiments on whether or not to conduct action research in the New Normal.

### ***Reasons for Answering "YES"***

*For my Professional learning  
At present due to the changes in education there are lots of challenges  
and issues need to be addressed to help our learners , teachers and  
even parents to cope up with the kind of situation we have today  
I have long dreamt of conducting an action research but I do not have  
enough knowledge on how to go about it.  
I would like to conduct an action research specially during this time  
because it is easier to gather data via online platform. Aside from  
that, more concerns in education are arising because of the  
challenges this pandemic.*

*I will conduct an action research to deepen knowledge into the new normal*

*It will benefit our students during pandemic crisis.*

*There are a lot of things to study*

*Yes because I am inspired to somehow gather data and actions to help solve or addressed some problems encountered by teachers.*

### **Reasons for Answering “NO”**

*I am not equipped yet with the knowledge conducting action research. I am currently starting a research but don't have the guts to pursue*

*For now, I am hesitant to do an action research but would love to learn and understand more of what will I be needing soon as I started.*

*Not this time of pandemic, due to limited space(madaming bawal)*

*For now, I need to know on how to do it before i wil start doing it.*

*I dont have any experience in Action Research. I dont know where to start.*

Results reveal that teachers will most likely conduct action research if their concerns are addressed. These concerns include knowledge on conducting action research, available time, technical assistance, and confidence.

### **Challenges in Conducting Action Research**

It is also important to note the challenges that teachers see whether or not they already conducted an action research. Based on the survey, respondents from Sta. Cruz ES reported some of the following challenges: “additional workload and lack of time,” “resources,” “knowledge on this matter and how to manage my time properly,” “too much paper work,” “money,” “collection of data,” and “internet connection.”

Another teacher confessed, “In my own experience, we started our AR last December and yet, minimal progress has been completed. We were challenged in monitoring the completed phase of our AR.” A teacher also claimed, “lack of motivation, lack of self-confidence, poor time management, limited support, lack of relevant experience.” Another teacher shared, “The challenges are how we conduct this action research in this time of pandemic because we need to consider the health safety protocol and who can be our available respondents to this new normal.”

On the other hand, teachers from Antipolo NHS and Antipolo SHS also re-

ported some challenges: “time,” “resources,” “lack of knowledge,” “workload,” “availability of members,” “covid problems,” “true data,” “I have no idea,” “the process of gathering research data amidst this pandemic,” “lack of support,” “writing anxiety,” “time and effort you will exert in doing and conducting it,” “financial,” “hectic schedule,” “availability of respondents,” “ang magsimula,” “approval,” “other commitments,” “restrictions brought by the pandemic,” and “lack of interest and theoretical guidance.”

A teacher expressed, “Maybe lack of confidence, lack of relevant experiences and just stuck up in a certain comfort zone.” Another teacher responded, “I think time and workload as a teacher/researcher and the efficacy of my research because of the pandemic.” Another teacher disclosed, “Challenges in an action research I guess will be your time management, and close encounters with your respondents, that in this new normal will be more difficult to do.” Another teacher claimed, “It’s hard to collect data because of the pandemic.”

Based on the transcripts from the focus group discussion, the researchers also discovered various challenges. Table 7 summarizes the themes that were harvested from raw data and the exact narratives of teachers.

**Table 7**  
*Challenges in Conducting Action Research*

Theme	Narratives
Pandemic itself	“The challenge was because of the situation and protocol that we experienced in this time of pandemic.” – Teacher A
Writing	“We need to seek assistance from the English teachers because It was difficult for us to write and finalize it.” – Teacher A “If you are going to read a research of course you don’t want to read “sabaw na article or paper”. As much as possible, make it sure that you will do your best para hindi kahiya hiyang basahin.” – Teacher I
Time	“First, the time or availability of time of my partners. As proponent, I don’t want to demand on their time because my partners were artists, they were so busy and they always had their appointments. Of course, I needed to adjust my time based on their availability after their appointments.” – Teacher B

Theme	Narratives
Time	<p>“The challenge that I encountered this time was the time because I took up the Masteral Degree (MA) for now. Then, all of my subjects had the research too.” – Teacher C</p> <p>“The availability of my members” – Teacher E</p> <p>“Time is also our problem and one of the reasons why we sometimes can’t move on to the next part of our action research.” – Teacher H</p> <p>“Kaya isa rin talaga sa naging challenge don yung time management kasi maliban sa nagsasalita ngayon si Banini, nagcocontemplate din ako na “paano to, nag aalaga ako ng bata tapos nagrereseach ako.” – Teacher AA</p>
Availability of respondents	<p>“The portion of data that we collected was not enough then that time March 25 we released plenty of questionnaires and it will return to us within this week. Then we had another lockdown. We couldn’t give online questionnaires to our targeted students because they were the students who don’t have gadget or no technological device, no cell-phone, no means to communicate and to study. That’s why, we really need to have face-to-face. That’s the most challenging for us so far but we will find ways to collect the data and to have the authenticity of the questionnaire. The only way for us was the face-to-face or there were parents who lived near to us. Anyway, we can visit the chosen students only to give the parent consent.” – Teacher B</p> <p>“Next na challenge na naencounter ko dito yung availability ng teachers na kailangan ko mainterview kasi 12 ang kailangan naming mainterview na teachers sa tatlo sa bawat level. Nagkaroon kami ng konting problema kasi nga iba iba kami ng araw ng pasok sa school.” – Teacher FF</p>
Analysis of data	<p>“Then, the statistician, the one who read our result. Although, we acquainted Math teachers but, of course, we have to make sure that the data should be right and what will be the situation if we will pay them or just only thank you. But we can’t say thank you only.” – Teacher B</p>
Laziness / drive to finish / interest	<p>“It is undeniably that sometimes laziness occurs in our system that’s why we were not able to finish some parts of our research.” – Teacher D</p> <p>“Wala po talagang gustong mag conduct ng research pwera lang po sa mga gustong mapromote.” – Teacher CC</p>

Theme	Narratives
Other assignments	<p>“It’s kinda hard for us to finish some parts of it because you know, lot of school-related matters should be prioritized.” – Teacher D</p> <p>“number one challenge because there are some works that we need to do, prior commitment something like that, next, I am also an online teacher sometimes its kinda hard also for me to do it because I still need to prepare the things that I will be using during synchronous class and other school related matters.” – Teacher F</p> <p>“Workload is our major problem that we encountered, the needed things that should be prioritized.” – Teacher G</p>
Apprehensions	<p>“Never ko pong naimagine na makakasama akong magconduct ng AR kasi kahit po nakapag thesis na tayo nung college tapos sa MA ko, parang pag sinabing research parang hala, kakainin nito yung time ko, paano yun gagawin, kung kelan walang pasok tsaka ka mag AR kasi kung dati nga hindi ko siya inattempt gawin or never akong nag attempt sumama sa mga may AR, what more ngayong pandemic.” – Teacher DD</p> <p>“Since ito po yung una kong action research, of course meron din akong mga apprehensions and hesitations sa paggawa ng action research. Unang una, nung tinanong kami ni Sir and Ma’am at ako po yung magkakasama dito sa action research. Gaya po ng iba, naisip ko din kung kaya ko ba sya, mag enough knowledge ba ko para gumawa ng action research, and kung matatapos o ba sya on time. So, ano yung mga expectations namin.” – Teacher EE</p> <p>“Unang challenge, on my part, siguro yung self-doubt. Kasi natakot talaga ako dito sa action research namin ni Sir Muyana kasi nga palagay ko I’m old enough. Matanda na ko para dito, kaya ko pa ba?” – Teacher FF</p>

Results reveal that teachers consider the following as challenges in conducting action research: pandemic itself, writing, time, availability of respondents, analysis of data, laziness / drive to finish / interest, other assignments, and apprehensions.

### *Best Practices of Action Research Completers*

The best practices were identified during the focus group discussions. Table 8 presents the identified themes from raw data and the exact narratives of teachers.

**Table 8**  
*Best Practices in Conducting Action Research*

Themes	Narratives
Teamwork	<p><i>“Isa po sa naintindihan ko dun po sa naging talk po about action research ay dapat at least may kasama ka para kung saan ka nahihirapan, may kasama ka.”</i> – Teacher AA</p> <p><i>“Yung mga kateam ko, talagang inauplift nila yung spirit namin na matapos yung research. Yung rapport between the members and of course, it is a learning experience.”</i> – Teacher EE</p>
Technical Assistance	<p><i>“Teacher A once na nakacollect po ako kasi ng data, napacheck ko na po kasi sa isang master teacher ‘yung form, once na nakapagcollect ng data, agad agad mo siyang iinterpret. Pero syempre, with the guidance of a Math teacher na kakilala mo. Tinulungan niya po ako sa pag consolidate lamang po. Once na nakacollect po ako kasi ng data, napacheck ko na po kasi sa isang master teacher ‘yung form, once na nakapagcollect ng data, agad agad mo siyang iinterpret. Pero syempre, with the guidance of a Math teacher na kakilala mo. Tinulungan niya po ako sa pag consolidate lamang po.”</i> – Teacher AA</p> <p><i>“And then sa bawat ginagawa mo namin, humihingi po kami ng technical assistance from the expert. Tinatanong po naming sila kung tama po ba yung ginagawa namin. Lalo po yung sa mga questionnaire namin. Make sure po namin na nachecheck po siya ng expert, pati po sa final paper po namin ganun din po. Yung pag-tally na po ng survey. Mahirap po kasing mag thematic analysis. Nanghingi po kami ng help sa mga expert kung tama po yung mga ginagawa po namin.”</i> – Teacher BB</p> <p><i>“Since na kami ay major in MAPEH, nag seek din kami ng help sa mga Math major. Malaking tulong din talaga, nag TA din kami about sa information, ang kagandahan lang talaga ay naayos din namin agad yung mga suggestion na revision.”</i> – Teacher CC</p>
Focus and Time Management	<p><i>“Yung una po, focus po, kailangan po mag set tayo kung ano po ba yung goal natin. Diba po, sa paggawa po ng action research, kailangan may timetable po tayo. So yung timetable po kailangan po nating sundin talaga. Kailangan mamotivate po tayo na sundin natin yung timetable natin. Kung anong gagawin sa week na to, para continuous po tayo. Ifollow lang po talaga natin yung timetable o yung Gantt chart po.”</i> – Teacher BB</p>

Themes	Narratives
	<p>“You need to prepare a timetable. Dapat time-bounded so yun need to prepare Gantt chart for that.” – Teacher GG</p> <p>“The first thing that I did was to make a timetable. Napakaimportante sa akin yung timetable kasi dito naka specify kung anong araw ko gagawin yung proposal for example. Ano yung advantages ng having timetable once you start an action research? When doing an action research, it’s compared to extra-curricular activities of the students. Ginagawa nila yung activities na hindi nasasagasaan yung kanilang regular classes. So the same thing with us, kapag nagconduct tayo gn action research, pag may timetable tayo, hindi nasasagasaan yung klase natin even in the new normal so hindi nasasacrifice yung regular classes natin. Second advantage of this timetable, you will meet the target on time. Third, we all know that the reason why we are conducting research is because we have a problem and we have to give immediate action so kapag may timetable ka, well-guided ka and there’s a possibility na masolusyonan yung problem on time.” – Teacher HH</p>
Communication	<p>“We need to have open communication with other members of the group. Sa bawat member po dapat cinocommunicate po natin yung task po nila, yung tingin po nila sa study po natin, ano po yung mga pwede nilang suggestion para mapadali po natin yung paggawa ng action research. At the same time po, bawat member po dapat binigyan po natin ng task so kailangan po natin ng cooperation ng bawat isa. Bawat isa kailangan gagawin niya yung task niya katulad po sa grupo namin.” – Teacher BB</p>
Online tools	<p>“Best practices, ginamit na rin namin yung internet, Gforms, mabilis na rin namin nakuha yung mga data, masipag lang din magfollow up.” – Teacher CC</p> <p>“Yung availability po ng iba’t-ibang online platforms tulad ng FB Messenger, ngayon na hindi kami nagkikita, dun nalang kami ang uusap. Gumawa din kami ng FB group na nandun yung mga announcement. Tapos yung availability po ng ating Gmail. Una po yung sa Google docs, nag eedit po kami ng AR gamit ang Google Docs. Nung time na yon, dun ko lang din naexplore yung google Docs na habang synchronously nag eedit, nakikita mo yung scroll arrow so nakikita mo kung saan na silang part nag eedit. Yung Gform nagamit namin para magcollect ng data. Napakaconvenient po kasi hindi na kailangan na magpaphotocopy o magprint ng maraming forms para magcollect ng data. Isa sa mga challenges na Nakita ko is ang hirap mag backread. Kasi yung GC namin hindi lang po siya Gc pang AR pero para din sa mga kwentuhan, kamustahan, parang kahit anong topic napaguusapan doon. Natatabunan na po yung mga files kaya later on, gumawa na si Ma’am Kath ng G-drive, dun na namin hinuhulog yung mga forms. Kapag kailangan namin balikan ulit, punta nalang kami doon.” – Teacher DD</p>

Themes	Narratives
	<p>“Yung action research po namin entirely online po ang pag uusap namin. Data gathering, analysis, pati po yung pag complete ng action research, lahat po online sya nangyari. Yung paggamit ng social media platforms and applications tulad ng Messenger, Google Meet, Drive, Document and Form.” – Teacher EE</p> <p>“Best practice naman siguro, apart from Gforms and Gdrive, PM ko nalang sila isa isa. Tiyaga nalang and then monitor kung nasagot na ba nila yung form namin.” – Teacher FF</p>
Related Literature	<p>“Malaking tulong pala kasi habang nagrereseach ka, talagang parang nag aaral ka ulit. Sa dami ng nabasa mo, kahit hindi mo mahanap panalo ka pa din dahil sa bagong information which is pwede mo ring magamit sa pagtuturo at pwede mo ring ishare sa mga teachers.” – Teacher CC</p>
Rest	<p>“Yung pagbibigay po ng time to rest. The whole week para sa Gawain ng pagiging teacher tapos pagconduct ng AR, pagdating po ng gabi na, stop na and then time to rest and yung weekend, as much as possible we respect yung time for the family. Naappreciate ko po yun.” – Teacher DD</p>
Action	<p>“I will start with this quotation: No research without action, and no action without research”. It is so important that we really move, lalo na ngayon na panahon ng pandemya. Kung hindi gagalaw ang tao, what will happen to us? Talagang we will be at a lost. Same is true with the action research, kailangan natin gumalaw. Wala kang matatapos if you are not going to move.” – Teacher GG</p>
Openness for Correction	<p>“Another one is we are open for corrections. If kailangan ipolish or irevise, hindi tayo dapat mahurt na ay parang ipinasa ko na ibinalik nanaman. Ok lang yon at least there’s a room for improvement. Yun yugn kagandahan ng ating pagiging open for correction. Dapat mahal mo yung ginagawa mo. Kaya mo rin to ginagawa for a sort of paper pero mahirap kapag yun lang ang purpose.” – Teacher GG</p>
Ethical Considerations	<p>“Take note po na kapag nagrereseach tayo, kahit ang respondents natin ay colleagues natin, kaibigan natin, estudyante natin, kailangan pa rin natin iobserve ang ethical consideration. These are the things that sometimes we ignore kasi kakilala naman natin eh. Pag nagbigay tayo ng questionnaire, kailangan well-informed ang ating participants kung anong purpose. Kailangan natin ng inform consent. Lahat ng pwedeng ibigay sa ating participants ay nakalagay sa inform consent.” – Teacher HH</p>

Results show that teachers consider the following as best practices in conducting action research: teamwork, technical assistance, focus and time management, communication, online tools, related literature, rest, action, openness for correction, and ethical considerations

*Research Outputs of Antipolo NHS Researchers*

One of the problems raised in this research is the utilization of the action research. What happens after the research proposal is an important question to ensure that action research in the school is actually utilized for the improvement of its systems, most of which included teaching and learning processes.

Table 9 shows that there are few researchers who are implementing and disseminating research results before SY 2019-2020, where the number of action researches conducted rose. Hence, there is a need to campaign for research utilization among the researchers at Antipolo NHS. It is one of the important recommendations of this study.

**Table 9**

*Number of Teachers Who Accomplished Research Outputs*

Research Output	Total					
	2014-2015	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018	2019-2020	2020-2021
Submitted Research Proposals						27
Approved Research Proposals						19
Data Gathering						12
Completed Research						6
Submitted Full Paper		4	2	4	15	5
Introduced an innovation, strategy, and intervention		1	2	1	8	
Presented in a conference		1	2	1	3	6
Published in a journal	1		1	1		
Disseminated	2	3	3	3	7	
Implemented and/or Disseminated						2

**Conclusion**

The findings reveal that the propensity for teachers to conduct action research is significantly influenced by key professional factors, including their existing knowledge of action research, the number of studies previously completed, their trajectory toward promotion, and the attainment of a Master's degree. A majority of teachers currently lack formal training in action research but express a strong willingness to participate in such professional development opportunities. Motivation to engage in research is strongly linked to having adequate knowledge, availa-

ble time, technical assistance, and increased self-confidence. The primary challenges educators face in undertaking action research are the limitations imposed by the pandemic, difficulties with technical writing, lack of time, challenges in securing respondents, issues with data analysis, personal lack of drive or interest, numerous other work assignments, and general apprehensions. Conversely, successful action research completion is associated with best practices such as utilizing teamwork, securing technical assistance, effective focus and time management, maintaining open communication, leveraging online tools, conducting thorough literature reviews, prioritizing rest, taking decisive action, remaining open to correction, and strictly adhering to ethical considerations. Finally, the study confirms that completed action research projects are being utilized and disseminated through various platforms, including research conferences and academic journals.

### **Recommendations**

1. The teachers who conducted action research, finished a master's thesis, and have knowledge on action research may mentor their fellow teachers.
2. The school, district, or division may provide training for teachers to capacitate them in conducting action research.
3. Capacity building may ensure to promote teachers' knowledge on conducting action research, available time, technical assistance, and confidence.
4. There is a need to promote a researcher mindset among teachers to confront the overwhelming challenges that researchers encounter in the conduct of action research.
5. Researchers need to observe teamwork, technical assistance, focus and time management, communication, online tools, related literature, rest, action, openness for correction, and ethical considerations in conducting action research.
6. The school, district, or division may continue to spearhead research conferences, publish a school-based research journal, and other means of dissemination.

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# **Blast from the Past: An Integration Culminating Activity in the Grade Nine Music Program**

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## **Abstract**

This study documented students' experiences during the preparations, practice sessions, and performance proper of the "*Blast from the Past*" culminating activity in Grade Nine music. This integration activity with the other subjects served as the major assessment for the music program. The data was collected through students' feedback on the run of the activity and was supported by the teacher's narratives, which provided a holistic perspective on the entire process. The evidence collected revealed that this integrated music activity with the other subjects highlighted the manifestation of the musical outcomes, which include singing (S1), playing instruments (S2), composing music within specific guidelines (S4), listening to, analyzing, and describing music (S6), understanding music in the context of other arts and disciplines (S8), and understanding music in relation to history and culture (S9). Additionally, it opened opportunities for students to demonstrate non-musical outcomes related to linguistic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, spatial, and bodily-kinesthetic intelligences. The study aimed to describe and tell the story involved in this performance-based assessment.

**Keywords:** integration, performance-based assessment, musical outcomes, non-musical outcomes

## Introduction

A holistic approach to education employs various teaching methodologies to teach students how to think. The concept of an interdisciplinary approach allows learners to connect and understand concepts taught in different disciplines as a unified whole (Chtysostomou, 2004). Erickson (as cited in Sağdıç and Demirkaya, 2014) suggested that interdisciplinary learning involves integrating more than one method or language (Erickson, 1995). This approach enhances higher-order thinking and learning skills, improves content retention, and fosters connections among different contexts (Sağdıç & Demirkaya, 2014). According to Potter et al. (2017), students' higher-order thinking abilities can be assessed through performance-based assessments (Porter et al., 2017). Falk et al. (2007) argued that such assessments enable students to perform well in class, as they evaluate both the information students know and their learning processes (Falk et al., 2007). These ideas support the notion that learning music involves a holistic approach to thinking, understanding, performing, and responding to the language of music (Kedem, 2008). One way to achieve these goals in music education is through interdisciplinary assessments that connect the subject to other disciplines, such as the arts, history, and literature. This concept is further articulated in the Nine Standards of Music Education outlined by the Music Educators National Conference (MENC), which illustrates the close relationship between music, arts, and history. The eighth standard states that students should understand the relationships between music, other arts, and disciplines outside the arts (S8), emphasizing their need to describe how the principles of music and arts are interrelated. The ninth standard specifies that students should understand music in relation to history and culture (S9). By studying past contributions, we can appreciate various forms of art, including music, visual arts, literature, and more (Fowler, Gerber, & Lawrence, 2000; Music Educators National Conference, 1996b; Stearns, 1998). These ideas culminated in the Grade Nine music program at SSC Manila, entitled "*Blast from the Past*," which is an integration with Arts, English literature, Science, and Information and Communication Technology (ICT) subjects.

A good quality music education program must demonstrate how music enhances students' overall well-being (Mark, 2002). Studying music in the classroom fosters growth in musical understanding and skills, leading to a lasting impact on students' lives by enhancing their ability to share the affective power of music (Wolff, 2004). While music class lessons are expected to clearly state their objectives, emphasizing that musical outcomes should be evident by the end of instruction, Wasiak (2017) argued that music programs serve as some of the "best vehicles

for teaching positive life values” to students. These objectives do not always directly reflect the inherent value of music as a subject. For this reason, many music educators advocate for music education to highlight the positive musical and non-musical outcomes that students learn through their music programs as an integral part of the curriculum.

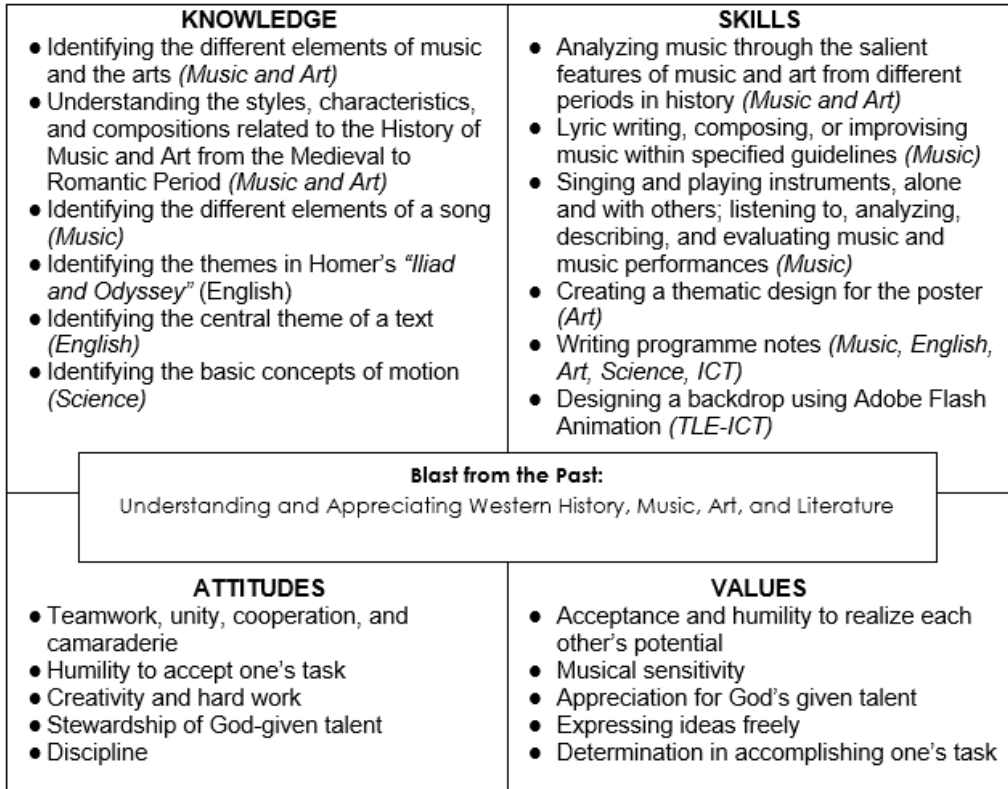
According to Kedem (2008), a school music program must provide opportunities for students to perform music by singing and playing instruments, individually and in groups. Students must develop a thorough understanding of music by studying its historical influences, theoretical foundations, and its relationships with other arts and disciplines. This knowledge and skill set equips learners to understand, interpret, perform, and respond to music (Kedem, 2008). Borrromeo (2015) emphasized that “education in music, or the acquisition of musical knowledge, skills, and values, is shaped by its purpose and context”—the inclusion of music as a subject aims to cultivate basic music literacy (Borrromeo, 2015). The lessons, activities, and assessments designed to promote music literacy are guided by the Nine Standards for Music Education, which provide a vision for what it means to be educated in music and a model for what students “should know and be able to do in the arts” (Kertz-Welzel, 2008). The Nine Standards for Music Education are the following: (S1) singing, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music; (S2) playing on an instrument, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music; (S3) improvising melodies, variations, and accompaniments; (S4) composing and arranging music within specified guidelines; (S5) reading and notating music; (S6) listening to, analyzing, and describing music; (S7) evaluating music and music performances; (S8) understanding relationships between music, the other arts, and disciplines outside the arts; and (S9) understanding music in relation to history and culture (Music Educators National Conference, 1996b). These serve as indicators of what students should be able to accomplish after learning. Therefore, teachers should consider these standards when preparing activities to ensure that students have the opportunity to demonstrate their musical outcomes.

NCME (1991) posited that music is vital in helping students learn an important lesson: not all aspects of life can be quantified. A world without music is hard to imagine, and our engagement with music often begins through various school activities (NCME, 1991). Wolff (2004) noted that rich experiences in music and other art forms engage the mind and emotions (Wolff, 2004). Mark (2002) described these experiences as non-musical outcomes that develop outside the learner’s appreciation for music’s aesthetic qualities. Such outcomes include behavioral conformity, effects on intelligence, skill development, and religiosity. The influence

of music education on individuals has always been expected to support one's values (Mark, 2002). Holding (2010) suggested that when individuals engage with music, they participate in "the creation and recreation of the artistic nature of music, using their intellect, emotions, and physical bodies in coordination" (Holding, 2010). In 2002, Torff argued that "music should be appreciated for its unique contributions to humanity, serving as a source of personal expression and a crucial mode of human intelligence" (Torff, 2002).

The goal of music education is to define what it means to be educated in music and to establish standards for what students should know and be able to do in the arts. This approach aims to help learners "learn to hear, speak, and think in the medium of music" (as cited in the DepEd music curriculum guide, 2016). These goals align with the Nine Standards for Music Education as the study of music must offer students opportunities to engage with music through singing, playing instruments, reinforcing the Elements of Music, and studying musical concepts within historical and cultural contexts (NAfME, 2014). In the Grade Nine music program at SSC Manila, students participated in a culminating activity entitled "*Blast from the Past*," which integrates all these musical processes.

The High School Unit of St. Scholastica's College Manila encourages integration activities, which allow students to connect and apply different concepts and skills they have learned in class. A major integration involves a lesson or assessment that covers five or more subjects, while a minor integration includes two to four subjects. The "*Blast from the Past*" is a major integration activity in Grade Nine. This activity is spearheaded by the music class and is supported by the integration of English, Arts, Science, and ICT. Figure 1 illustrates the integration framework of the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values that students must demonstrate through this performance-based assessment.

**Figure 1** Integration Framework of “Blast from the Past”

This study tells the story of the “*Blast from the Past*” culminating activity in the Grade Nine music program, focusing on its role as an integrated performance-based assessment alongside other subjects. It looks into how this activity can showcase both musical and non-musical outcomes for learners at St. Scholastica’s College Manila. In this context, the study aims to answer the following questions:

1. How is the “*Blast from the Past*” culminating activity conceptualized, planned, and implemented?
2. How are the musical and non-musical outcomes being demonstrated by the students in the “*Blast from the Past*” culminating activity?
3. What are the experiences and concerns of the students in the “*Blast from the Past*” culminating activity?

## Method

### Research Design

The study employed a qualitative research design to collect data on the learners' feedback on the activities, experiences, behaviors, concerns, and insights related to the conceptualization, planning, and implementation of the Grade Nine "*Blast from the Past*" culminating activity. Narratives written by the music teacher were included to provide an in-depth perspective on the program and describe how it could help students demonstrate both musical and non-musical outcomes.

### Participants

The participants of this study were the Grade Nine students of St. Scholastica's College Manila. A total of two hundred fifteen (215) female students, aged 14 to 16, comprised 15.80% of the high school population. The students were divided into five sections: Section A ( $N = 45$ ), Section B ( $N = 43$ ), Section C ( $N = 43$ ), Section D ( $N = 42$ ), and Section E ( $N = 42$ ). They attended music classes for sixteen weeks and took part in the "*Blast from the Past*" culminating activity as part of the performance-based assessment.

### Data Collection

The "*Blast from the Past*" was the culminating activity for Grade Nine music as a major integration activity with Art, English, Science, and ICT classes. In this activity, students interpreted the themes of Homer's "*Iliad and Odyssey*" while adhering to the assigned period in music history. Their interpretations of the literary work were showcased through various forms, including musical adaptations or compositions, singing, instrument playing, acting, painting, lyric writing, and the writing of programme notes.

The planning stage involved the meetings held by the integrating teachers and the crafting of the concept paper. Discussions with students covered the nature of the activity and integration, class planning, practices, and the performance itself, which completed the implementation of the activity. Data collection included evaluation feedback from students and the teacher's narratives reflecting on the experiences and concerns during the activity. This also highlighted how the activity could bring about the demonstration of both musical and non-musical outcomes for the learners.

## Results

The descriptive findings on how the Grade Nine students' experiences in the *"Blast from the Past"* culminating activity provided opportunities that brought out the targeted musical and non-musical outcomes through gathering feedback from the students and writing narratives on their experiences and concerns throughout the activity.

The *"Blast from the Past"* was the culminating activity wherein five subjects in Grade Nine, namely Music, Arts, English, Science, and TLE-ICT, collaborated on a major integration activity. Inspired by the concept of understanding the past in the present context, the culminating activity provided students with an opportunity to present a work that consolidated their journey through the musical styles of the great composers from the past. They traced the development of music and related the different styles and characteristics employed in music through a musical composition or adaptation. Since the overall topic of Grade Nine Music was the History of Western Music, students were given the option to compose or adapt an existing piece, interpreting it in a pop or modern style that incorporated distinct musical characteristics from the assigned historical periods. A key aspect of the performance was the requirement to include a recorder playing in any part of the presentation. The text's focal point was drawn from Homer's *"Iliad"* and *"Odyssey,"* which served as the primary literary reference in the Grade Nine English curriculum on Ancient Greek literature.

The other subjects integrated with music, besides the English literary work, included Arts, Science, and TLE-ICT classes. Each class was tasked with creating a poster that visually summarized their story while adhering to the painting style of their assigned historical period. They had to interpret the characteristics of art from that period. Additionally, the props and sets used for the musical production were also evaluated. In Science class, the integration centered on physics concepts, particularly speed and motion, which needed to be incorporated into their performance. Moreover, a digital backdrop design was created using Adobe Flash Animation to enhance their production, as part of the requirements in TLE-ICT class. Through drawing lots, each class was assigned to a specific period in Western History from the Medieval to the Romantic Period. Aside from the musical composition or song adaptation, each class wrote class programme notes that presented the overall view of their work. The content included an overview of the themes represented in their lyrics, which were inspired by Homer's *"Iliad and Odyssey,"* as well as the salient features of music and art.

The music component in the integration accounted for 25% of the overall score for each class. The students' performance on this integration was graded using a 60-point rubric for music performance. The song produced by each class may be an original composition or an adaptation of existing material. However, if the group would choose the latter, there would be limitations in the choice of the material as they had to improvise or use the "musical idea" as a basis for their work so that it would adhere to the salient features of the music based on the period in history that they represented. The criterion for melody aimed to challenge the students' creativity, as the musical line had to be catchy and easy to remember, whether the work was an original composition or an adaptation while staying faithful to the assigned musical period. Table 1 presents the descriptors of how each class performance was graded based on the given criterion, while the scores per section are reflected in Table 2.

**Table 1** *Indicators in the Rubric for Music Performance in "Blast from the Past"*

Criterion	Descriptor
Relevance to the style or principle of the period (12 points)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Use of style, principle, and salient features of the assigned musical period</li> </ul>
Melody (12 points)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Recall of the melodic line of the musical composition or adaptation</li> </ul>
Lyrics (8 points)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Adherence to the principles, essentials of the period that the class represented, and the connection of the lyrics to the theme</li> </ul>
Harmony (12 points)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Appropriateness of the harmony for the musical period represented, as well as in-tune performance</li> </ul>
Accompaniment (8 points)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Appropriate choice of instruments for the period represented, as well as manifestation of preparedness and practice of the instrumentalists during the performance</li> </ul>
Recorder Music (12 points)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Suitability of the recorder part in the overall feel of the music and its relation to the period represented, as well as manifestation of preparedness and practice of the instrumentalists during the performance</li> </ul>

**Table 2** Summary of scores on music performance for “Blast from the Past”

Criteria for Music Performance	M	Section B “Medieval” (N = 43)	Section C “Renaissance” (N = 43)	Section D “Baroque” (N = 42)	Section E “Classical” (N = 42)	Section A “Romantic” (N = 43)
Relevance to the style or principle of the period (12 points)	7.80	9	6	6	9	9
Melody (12 points)	9.00	12	6	6	12	9
Lyrics (8 points)	5.60	6	4	6	6	6
Harmony (8 points)	9.00	12	6	9	9	9
Accompaniment (8 points)	5.60	8	4	4	6	6
Recorder Music (8 points)	6.00	8	4	4	6	8
Total	43.00	55	30	35	50	47

The categories that were evaluated in the “Blast from the Past” culminating activity included music (25%), lyrics (25%), poster (20%), scenic design (10%) programme notes (10%), and overall performance (10%). Additionally, special awards were presented based on the judges’ assessments, as outlined in Table 3.

**Table 3** Special Awards for “Blast from the Past”

Special Awards	Period in Music History	Section	Title of the Song
Best Musical Composition	Medieval Period	Section B	“Tenebris Ad Bellum”
Best Lyrics	Medieval Period	Section B	“Tenebris Ad Bellum”
Best Recorder Music	Classical Period	Section E	“Oxy Kymata”
Best Performance	Classical Period	Section E	“Oxy Kymata”
Best Programme Notes	Romantic Period	Section A	“The Hourglass of Fate”
Best Representation of a Period	Medieval Period	Section B	“Tenebris Ad Bellum”

**Figure 2** Narrative on the “*Blast from the Past*” Culminating Activity in Grade Nine

Preparations for the “*Blast from the Past*” began as early as the start of the school year, following the recommendations of the Grade Nine teachers to continue this integration. The conceptualization and planning began with a meeting and brainstorming of ideas, followed by the integration of the core subjects—Music, Arts, and English. With the help and approval of the Subject Area Coordinators (SAC) of MAPEH and English, I, the Grade Nine Level Facilitator (GLF), initiated the conceptualization and integrated the plan into the curriculum revisit and review for the included subjects. Unlike in previous school years, most teachers involved in the planning process were mainly new. The two English teachers and the primary Art teacher were newly hired in the High School Unit. The other Art teacher had been in the unit for three years, but it was his first time teaching the subject. Given the challenge of working with a new roster of teachers, I felt the responsibility to guide them and share the details of this project’s background. They reviewed past outputs with the assistance of the Audio-Visual Center, which provided them insights into the project’s nature. This process helped them incorporate the activity into their curriculum programs as they plotted the needed topics and skills. Eventually, the activity was turned into a “major” integration upon the consideration of Science and TLE-ICT to integrate. The concept paper was finalized and approved just in time before the start of the Second Quarter, wherein the integrating teachers must be able to discuss the point of integration.

The assignment on the specific period in Western History that the class represented was done by drawing lots from the student representatives of the Grade Nine sections. These were mainly composed of the class presidents. It happened the week before the First Periodic Exam, so the Music, Arts, and English teachers had enough time to prepare, redesign the instruction, and align the activities per class and historical period for the Second Quarter.

Although I would not consider the new roster of integrating teachers a major concern, I found it necessary to assert myself during the preparation phase to ensure that they understood the nature and goals of the activity. Fortunately, these teachers were experts in their respective fields, which made the process smoother. Together with the MAPEH and English coordinators, my experience as a “seasoned” teacher helped guide the direction of the planned activity. We conducted several meetings, which ranged from preparing and writing the curriculum to drafting the concept paper and ultimately implementing the activity for the students. Most classes’ lack of foresight led them to be affected by the reduced meetings resulting from class suspensions and other activities. Most of the classes crammed their outputs, not only in music but also in other integrating subjects. Lastly, some students also expressed that the other integrating teachers were unable to allocate time for their preparation. This issue occurred despite the reminder set by the GLF on the degree of integration in these subjects.

Overall, the *“Blast from the Past”* culminating activity was considered a success. At the end of the program, the judges commended the students and the teachers for their work on this task. The deliberation was quite intense as they needed to justify their scores based on the class performances. During the grade-level evaluation meeting, the SACs and subject teachers recommended re-implementation of the activity for the next school year.

Figure 3 presents the teacher’s second narrative, documenting the observation of the students’ musical behavior, experiences, concerns, and performance during preparations, practice, and the performance proper for *“Blast from the Past.”*

**Figure 3** Narrative on observation on students’ experiences for *“Blast from the Past”*

The students in Section A were generally proactive in class. They expressed what they thought and felt, ensuring it had an integral part in the learning process. Though students with special music training in clubs took leadership roles during the preparations for the *“Blast from the Past,”* it was notable that they worked best when they felt comfortable with their group mates. Their interpretation of the Romantic Period, as showcased in their song entitled *“The Hourglass of Fate,”* was commendable, as it demonstrated confidence in their singing. The students assigned to play the recorder also prepared well. The writers assigned for the lyrics and programme notes did a great job, which earned them the Best Programme Notes Award. I observed that there were many *“artists”* in class, and their interest in visual arts, such as drawing and painting, became their contribution to the poster and props that were used in the integration of Arts.

Just like Section A, students from Section B showcased impressive musical skills and displayed confidence in singing. Although the class was generally known for being academically strong, I observed that these students were truly exceptional. There were musicians, visual artists, writers, theater actors, and even dancers. There were also many instrumentalists with a formal background, which was an advantage in their preparations for their performance on *“Tenebris Ad Bellum”* representing the Medieval Period. The students knew how to work independently and were committed to their assigned task. Although not all of them were confident in taking leadership roles, some followed the instructions given to them carefully in their assigned committee. Their clear understanding of the salient features of the music in the period still enabled them to create their masterpiece and perform well. Given that Medieval music was primarily vocal, the students were able to focus on their strengths in singing. The recorder parts were placed as *“interludes”* with the main melody being played. The instrumentalists memorized their parts, which gave them the confidence to perform on stage. In return for everyone’s commitment and hard work, the judges acknowledged and awarded them numerous recognitions, including the class that best represented the assigned period.

The students in Section C were somewhat opposite to those in Section B in terms of their confidence in their performance. Although most students were performing well individually, the passive nature of many students became a challenge. Despite the improvements in the overall performance from the First to the Second Quarter, they generally struggled to prepare for "*Blast from the Past*." It was interesting to note that a group of students approached me as early as the start of the quarter to consult on their ideas for the task. However, they were limited in what they could do as they could not elicit responses from their classmates. No one tried to support their leaders and step up. The class represented the Renaissance period through their song "*Navigating an Arduous Love*," which presented a challenge since singing was the primary requirement of this musical era.

One of the challenges I encountered in handling the students in Section D was their behavior. Preparations for the "*Blast from the Past*" were a challenge as they represented the Baroque Period through their work entitled "*Horrendous Triumph*." Though they appreciated the idea of Baroque opera's dark and tragic side in Greek literature, students felt disadvantaged as the musical period glorified the violin family instruments. The students struggled, citing the lack of equipped instrumentalists and students who would take leadership roles in music-making. However, with constant guidance, they learned to embrace the challenge as the recorder players stepped up and worked twice as hard to ensure they could deliver. Due to late preparations, a few individuals took on leadership roles and assumed responsibility for various tasks. The class represented the Baroque Period and was overwhelmed by its disadvantages in musical skills. This hurt their chances of performing well because of their low confidence during the event. However, the judge acknowledged them in lyrics for a commendable work exploring the Baroque writing style in poetry.

Just like Section D, preparations for Section E became short and challenging because the writers struggled during the preparation stage. However, one of the things I liked about this class was the enthusiasm displayed during singing and recorder playing activities. This eventually became their advantage during their practices for the song "*Oxy Kymata*" representing the Classical Period. The concern about their lyrics was resolved through the excellent response from the students who led the music-making. These students had a definite and clear understanding of how to interpret music in the gallant style of the Classical Period. Their music had a happy and light feel. They felt good about their work, and everyone was responsive as they knew the specific tasks assigned to them. This was evident during the event, as the judges recognized their hard work and conferred on them the Best Performance Award.

The activity tested their creativity, leadership, and cooperation skills as they generated many ideas during the activity's preparation. One of the concerns that the students raised was the amount of time given to them due to class suspensions and other school activities. of the highlights of their Grade Nine class activities.

Some classes struggled because the integrating teachers were unable to allocate more time for them to work, which resulted in most of them having to cram. Despite the concerns raised, students were happy with their performance and considered the activity to be one

Statements that support the students' experiences during *the "Blast from the Past"* were gathered from their feedback on the culminating activity. The sample responses related to the demonstration of the targeted musical outcomes through the Nine Standards for Music Education, as shown in Table 4, were categorized into three groups: (1) performing and creating music, (2) responding to music, and (3) connecting music to other disciplines (NAME, 2014).

**Table 4** *Sample statements on the demonstration of the musical outcomes*

Musical Outcomes	Sample Statements from students' feedback on musical outcomes for <i>"Blast from the Past"</i>
Performing and creating music (S1) Singing, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>I enjoyed singing the song that my classmates composed. I felt like I was singing during the Medieval Period. The dark theme and a cappella performance enabled me to understand how the "Medieval" style of music was incorporated.</i></li> </ul>
(S2) Playing, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>I enjoyed playing the recorder. It was like re-learning an old skill because I used to be part of the recorder club back in Grade School.</i></li> </ul>
(S3) Improvising melodies, variations, and accompaniment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Despite having other roles to take on for the "Blast from the Past," I volunteered to play the recorder part, as it added flavor to the music.</i></li> <li><i>In "Blast from the Past," we learned to tweak some parts of the adapted melody to fit the characteristics of music from the period that our class is representing in music history.</i></li> </ul>
(S4) Composing and arranging music within specified guidelines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Our class decided to compose our music for the "Blast from the Past." Making music was easier for us because ideas were already presented to us. We tried to use metaphors to convey the idea of waiting for a positive thing, which Odysseus will return to Penelope.</i></li> </ul>

Musical Outcomes	Sample Statements from students' feedback on musical outcomes for "Blast from the Past"
Responding to music (S5) Reading and notating music	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The notation of the melodic contour in our class composition helped us identify how to sing in a chant-like style for Medieval music.</li> </ul>
(S6) Listening to, analyzing, and describing music	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The assigned pieces that were given to us for each topic and the simple analysis using elements of music in the songs that we performed were used as our reference in our preparations for the "Blast from the Past."</li> </ul>
(S7) Evaluating music and music performances	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Our class deserved to be awarded the "Best Interpretation of the Period." We clearly understood the style of music from the assigned period, and it reflected in our performance.</li> </ul>
Connecting music to other disciplines (S8) Understanding relationships between music, the other arts, and discipline outside the arts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The "Blast from the Past" was an amazing experience, and I learned how integrating music, arts, and English was perfectly woven. Different gifts, like singing, instrument playing, writing, painting, and acting, were unleashed and celebrated.</li> </ul>
(S9) Understanding music in relation to history and culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The "Blast from the Past" allowed us to go back in time. We dressed up as ancient Greek warriors, goddesses, or characters from the Iliad and Odyssey. We performed and interpreted music in accordance with the characteristics of the music that we represented. The poster adhered to the art style of the period.</li> </ul>

Responses that show the students' demonstration of the targeted non-musical outcomes through selected multiple intelligences were also drawn from their feedback on the activity, as presented in Table 5.

**Table 5** Sample statements on the demonstration of the non-musical outcomes

Non-musical Outcomes	Sample Statements from students' feedback on non-musical outcomes for "Blast from the Past"
• linguistic	• <i>I was amazed at how the students could write lyrics, create music, and write their programme notes. These skills showed how the students applied their understanding in the lessons.</i>
• interpersonal	• <i>During our practices for the "Blast from the Past," we taught and guided each other to improve our performance. This helped our class become helpful to each other since everyone was open to criticism and eager to learn from their mistakes. We were patient and supportive with each other.</i>
• intrapersonal	• <i>Never give up. Prepare hard and be brave. You have to face everything, no matter what happens. At the end of the day, whatever the result, you would feel that you learned and would become stronger as a person or as a class.</i>
• spatial	• <i>The integration of art in the "Blast from the Past" through a painting or a poster as an interpretation of our period, props, and costumes helped in our performance. It made us appreciate the task and understand its connection.</i>
• bodily-kinesthetic	• <i>The "Blast from the Past" provided many opportunities for us to perform—singing, recorder playing, acting, and even dancing to some point.</i>

The students also shared their experiences and concerns on the run of the integration activity during the evaluation feedback. Sample responses are presented in Table 6 highlighting the Grade Nine experiences and concerns on the "Blast from the Past."

**Table 6** Sample statements on experiences and concerns on "Blast from the Past"

Variable of Interest	Sample Statements on students' experiences and concerns for "Blast from the Past"
• experiences	• <i>The "Blast from the Past" was one of the best highlights during my Grade 9 experience. It was memorable, and we learned many things, especially in music class. Compositions from the old periods were not appreciated much. However, because of this activity, I can say that the composers of the past and their pieces were given more importance and value.</i>
• concerns	• <i>Our communication was problematic because not everyone listened whenever one person had something to say. There were too many conflicting ideas. We also ended up cramming since there were time limitations due to class suspensions, and we did not plan ahead, despite the task being discussed earlier in the quarter.</i>

## Discussion

The Grade Nine culminating activity tests the students' attainment of the musical outcomes through the nine standards for music education (NAfME, 2014). The story of the students' demonstration of these outcomes showed that the work of Sections A, B, and E showed their level of understanding of the salient features of music in the musical period that they represented. The responses in the evaluation feedback indicate that their experiences during preparations, practices, and performance proper enabled them to demonstrate the necessary skills in music classes (Morada et al., 2024). The overall work and performance on the music integration requirements, which included singing (S1), recorder playing (S2), performing and creating music (S3, S4, and S7) and writing of programme notes (S6, S8, and S9), displayed their manifestation of the expected outcomes at the end of the activity. On the other hand, Sections C and D faltered in their performance due to concerns about time and a lack of confidence, particularly in singing and playing instruments. Despite these observations, their work demonstrates an understanding of the musical period they represented.

The class accounts written by the music teacher documented the general observations of each class as they worked on the integration activity. One of the highlights in Section A is their ability to include everyone in all the class activities. The class is generally proactive and easy to work with. Many students possess strong leadership skills that help in the group's chemistry. Notably, during group practices and performances, each member ensures that they contribute and do not just rely on what is instructed by the leaders. In addition, the artistry of the students helped them write their programme notes and produce their class poster. Although students in Section B are mostly known for their academic excellence, they value learning not just through scores, but also by celebrating the diversity of talents and gifts through music, visual arts, theater, and dance. They are good listeners and good speakers. They know when to speak and when to listen. These qualities enable them to prepare well for their representation and interpretation of the Medieval Period. In contrast, the students in Section C are more observant and reserved. Their confidence in singing is generally low, which became challenging for them since vocal music was prominent in Renaissance music. Despite this, they ensure they give their best during group practice. The class is among those who started their preparations early, but they struggled to balance understanding the concepts and interpreting the music through singing and recorder playing. Some students in Section D possess high linguistic skills, particularly in writing lyrics, which are commended in their work. However, they lack the ability to interpret their song

due to limitations in singing and recorder playing. Lastly, Section E has a good mix of academically competent and artistically inclined students. The class is among the last sections to complete their work due to concerns they encountered in completing their lyrics. Despite the difficulty in that aspect, their determination, understanding of each member, and sense of community help them to bounce back. They are among the classes that performed well on stage.

The students' responses demonstrate their insights into the importance of working and sharing music with others, highlighting their interpersonal skills. The *"Blast from the Past"* allows the students to integrate music, art, and literature. It is not only through understanding *"Iliad and Odyssey,"* but also being able to write their lyrics and programme notes. The concept of "word painting" and the poignant use of words in music are also reiterated. The good and bad experiences during their preparations give them valuable insights into the activity. Students pointed out the importance of trusting others and oneself. The "never give up" mantra enables them to prepare hard and be brave. They learn to face everything with courage and accept whatever the decision. Integrating Art lessons in the *"Blast from the Past"* facilitates the learners' connection to the development of music and visual arts in Western History. Lastly, their performance allowed them to incorporate movements and body coordination, as the nature of the integration involved singing, recorder playing, acting, and even dancing to some point.

The respondents share that the *"Blast from the Past"* is among the best highlights of their Grade Nine experience. The integration of the different subjects expands the learners' horizons and pushes their limitations. It also opens doors for them to discover talents and gifts. However, they raise concerns related to the provision of time for practices, guidance from the other integrating teachers, cooperation among all class members, and class suspensions. These concerns and issues lead to most sections cramming on the day of the performance. Despite this, teachers commended the nature of the activity and recommended it for re-implementation for the next school year.

### Conclusion

The "Blast from the Past" activity proved to be an effective culminating assessment for the Grade Nine music program, successfully moving beyond traditional pencil-and-paper exams to prioritize student performance through singing and playing instruments. This project provided a valuable opportunity for students to integrate lessons across music, art, history, and literature, allowing them to con-

nect concepts from different subjects and apply their learning through musical performance (singing, playing, and creation) and other disciplines like writing and public speaking. This form of assessment effectively demonstrates how program outcomes are achieved and directly contributes to the students' holistic formation. Furthermore, documenting the preparation, practice, and performance experiences of both students and the teacher facilitated a crucial process of self-reflection for the music educator, allowing them to explore their practice, define problems, and connect current experiences with prior knowledge, which is often neglected when educators simply move on after assessments and wait for external evaluations.

### Recommendation

Based on the documentation focusing solely on the Grade Nine experience, it is recommended that further studies be conducted on other music-related activities throughout the secondary unit. Specifically, research should focus on activities involving performance, such as singing and playing instruments, across all grade levels. This broader research approach would be highly valuable in assessing the overall quality of the school's music programs and evaluating their effectiveness in meeting the expected standards and competencies established for each respective grade level.

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# **Navigating Religious Schooling and the Emergence of Nonbelief: A Phenomenological Study of Filipino Atheists' Educational Experiences**

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## **Abstract**

This study explores the lived experiences of Filipino atheists and how their educational backgrounds—particularly in religiously-oriented institutions—shaped their paths toward nonbelief. In a predominantly Catholic society like the Philippines, school environments often conflate moral formation with religious conformity. Using Colaizzi's descriptive phenomenological method, this research draws on in-depth interviews with six Filipino atheists aged 22–36 who attended public or sectarian schools during their formative years.

The findings reveal four major themes. (1) Early Dissonance — School Rituals and Unquestioned Belief captures participants' initial exposure to compulsory religious practices, often accepted passively but later questioned. (2) Critical Encounters and Rational Awakening describes how exposure to secular ideas—through philosophy classes, science, and online platforms—sparked critical thought and philosophical clarity. (3) Marginalization and Silence in School Spaces highlights the social and institutional pressures that discouraged open expression of nonbelief, leading to concealment and internal conflict. (4) Reclaiming Identity and Constructing Mo-

rality *Beyond Religion* reflects how participants eventually embraced atheism as a coherent moral and intellectual identity, grounded in humanist and rational principles.

These findings challenge the assumption that atheism is merely a reactive stance. Instead, nonbelief among Filipino atheists emerges through complex interactions with institutional religion, cultural expectations, and personal inquiry. The study calls for educational environments that allow open exploration of belief and nonbelief, fostering intellectual freedom and ethical diversity.

**Keywords:** Filipino atheists, phenomenological research, schooling and identity formation, nonbelief, religious education

## Introduction

In the Philippines, where over 80 percent of the population identifies as Roman Catholic and religiosity is deeply woven into educational, familial, and civic life, atheists occupy an understudied and often stigmatized social position. Despite the constitutional principle of separation of church and state, religious norms continue to influence public and private schools—from curriculum design to daily rituals—making it difficult for non-believers to remain neutral or invisible.

Previous qualitative studies have begun illuminating the lived experiences of Filipino atheists. For instance, Aldama (2025) used Colaizzi's descriptive phenomenological approach to identify themes in atheist identity—such as intellectual freedom, inner conflict, moral autonomy, the burden of silence, and social tension. Smith (2011) explored adult atheists raised in deeply religious households and found themes like rejection of divine infallibility, liberation from cultural chains, and stigma processing. Lee (2015), via a Colaizzi-inspired framework labeled as "Cognitive Metamorphosis," examined the transition from belief to atheism, emphasizing schooling, identity negotiation, family, and digital influences.

These works reveal that atheism in the Philippines is not merely a rejection of belief but a process of identity formation shaped by educational experiences, family expectations, and cultural norms. However, limited empirical attention has been given to how educational institutions themselves shape, challenge, or suppress atheist identities. Schools are key sites for social and value formation, and

understanding how they interact with non-belief is essential for inclusive pedagogy in religiously plural societies. Therefore, this study uses descriptive phenomenology to explore how schooling, teacher expectations, and curriculum influence identity, moral reasoning, and social belonging among Filipino atheists.

This study explores the lived experiences of Filipino atheists in relation to their educational backgrounds, with particular attention to schooling in religious or religion-influenced institutions. The focus on education is significant in a context where religious belief is often normalized through formal and informal school structures, rituals, and discourses. Schools—whether explicitly sectarian or nominally secular—frequently serve as environments where religious conformity is reinforced through prayers, moral instruction, and participation in rites associated with Christianity, particularly Catholicism. For atheist students, these practices can provoke dissonance, foster silence, or induce a need for concealment.

The rationale for this study stems from two key observations. First, while there is a growing body of literature on Filipino atheism (Aldama, 2020), much of it focuses on interpersonal struggles, familial conflict, or broader ideological transitions, often neglecting the institutional sites—such as schools—that shape these experiences. Second, educational institutions are not neutral grounds; they actively socialize individuals into particular belief systems, values, and moral frameworks. In predominantly religious societies like the Philippines, this socialization often privileges belief over skepticism, and conformity over doubt.

As such, atheist students are often caught in a tension between institutional expectations and personal convictions. By investigating how Filipino atheists narrate their schooling experiences—especially within sectarian and religiously influenced settings—this study seeks to uncover how educational structures contribute to identity suppression or transformation. It contributes to the sociology of education and religion by examining the interplay between individual belief and institutional power, and it adds to inclusion discourse by advocating for a more pluralistic understanding of belief diversity within Philippine schools.

Furthermore, this research builds upon the findings of scholars such as Aldama (2020), who identified the emotional burden of remaining silent in religious spaces, and Lee (2015), who described atheism as a “cognitive metamorphosis” influenced by education and exposure to critical ideas. This study, however, goes a step further by focusing not only on how atheists emerge intellectually, but also on how schools themselves act as catalysts or barriers to that emergence. Through

descriptive phenomenology, the research captures the rich, subjective meanings that atheist individuals assign to their school-based experiences—meanings that are often overlooked in quantitative or policy-oriented educational research.

### Context of the Problem

The Philippines is often described as one of the most religious countries in Southeast Asia, with Christianity—particularly Catholicism—deeply embedded in its history, politics, and cultural life. This religiosity extends into the educational system, which was historically shaped by Spanish friar-led instruction and later by American Protestant missionary schools. Even today, many private institutions remain sectarian in character, and public schools regularly incorporate Christian values through formal religious instruction, daily prayers, religious icons in classrooms, and school-wide celebrations of religious holidays.

While the 1987 Philippine Constitution affirms the separation of Church and State and guarantees freedom of religion and belief, in practice, many schools blur the line between religious instruction and public education. As such, students who do not subscribe to the dominant religious narrative—whether they be Muslim, indigenous spiritual practitioners, agnostics, or atheists—often experience the school environment as implicitly exclusionary. This can be particularly acute for atheist students, whose nonbelief may be interpreted as moral deficiency, rebellion, or even psychological deviance within such contexts.

Empirical accounts support this observation. Hammer et al. (2012) document how high school students who identified as atheists reported peer ridicule, subtle ostracism, and being discouraged from expressing their views. Smith (2011) found that students raised in religious households and educated in Catholic schools often endured internal conflict and identity concealment. These accounts are echoed by Aldama (2025), whose study on Filipino atheists highlighted “the burden of silence” and the feeling of being epistemologically alien in spaces that assume religious belief as normative.

This normalization of religiosity in schools not only undermines the principles of inclusion and pluralism but may also inhibit critical thought and personal development. Atheist students often report modifying their behavior, remaining silent during religious activities, or avoiding discussions that might reveal their disbelief. These strategies, while necessary for social survival, contribute to a broader culture of concealment and internalized marginality.

The lack of institutional safeguards or inclusive policies exacerbates this marginalization. Unlike other belief minorities who may have formal recognition or cultural accommodation, atheists remain largely invisible in school policies, classroom discourse, and institutional practices. As a result, their experiences are frequently overlooked in broader conversations about educational equity, diversity, and psychological safety. This study situates itself within this context, aiming to surface the lived experiences of a group often rendered voiceless in educational research and policy.

Descriptive phenomenology, grounded in the philosophical work of Edmund Husserl, serves as the methodological foundation for this study. Husserl's focus on returning "to the things themselves" (Husserl, 1970) emphasizes the need to suspend assumptions in order to access the essence of lived experiences. This study adopts such an approach, following Colaizzi's (1978) method, to faithfully describe the experiences of Filipino atheists without imposing external interpretive frameworks. Unlike interpretive approaches such as IPA, descriptive phenomenology does not rely on hermeneutics or double interpretation but instead seeks to describe universal essences from the participant's own perspective (Giorgi, 2009).

Recent local studies have advanced the sociological and phenomenological understanding of atheism in the Philippines. Aldama (2025), using Colaizzi's descriptive phenomenology, uncovered themes such as the burden of silence and intellectual autonomy among Filipino atheists, illustrating the emotional and epistemic costs of nonbelief in a predominantly religious society. Smith (2011) examined atheists raised in religious households and emphasized both the internal dissonance and social pressures they encounter, advocating for the creation of institutional safe spaces where doubt and questioning are not pathologized.

Hammer et al. (2024) focused specifically on high school contexts, documenting experiences of intellectual marginalization, peer exclusion, and subtle forms of discrimination faced by student atheists. These experiences underscore how school institutions can function as mechanisms of social control, policing not only behavior but also belief. Meanwhile, Lee (2015) offered a broader view by analyzing how educational, familial, and global cultural influences converge to shape atheist identities. Lee described this process as a "cognitive metamorphosis," a gradual awakening that often unfolds through critical inquiry, exposure to science, and disillusionment with religious authority figures.

What these studies share is a recognition that education is a double-edged space: it may foster critical thinking and skepticism, yet also reinforce conformity to dominant religious ideologies. However, while existing research has outlined the general experiences of atheists, few studies have focused specifically on the institution of schooling—particularly sectarian education—as a site of both constraint and transformation. This study aims to address this gap by situating atheist identity development within the everyday structures, rituals, and pedagogies of religious schools in the Philippines.

By applying descriptive phenomenology, the study enables a close engagement with the nuanced and often contradictory experiences of Filipino atheists who underwent religious schooling. The goal is not to analyze them through external categories but to understand, from within, the existential tensions and meanings they associate with their educational journey and personal beliefs.

#### Research Question and Sub-Questions

The study's main research question is: *How do Filipino atheists describe their lived experiences in relation to their educational backgrounds and schooling?* To explore this, the following subquestions are posed: (1) What educational encounters triggered critical reflection on religious beliefs? (2) How did religious rituals or expectations shape participants' understanding of self and identity? (3) How did participants experience affirmation or marginalization within their school environments? and (4) In what ways do these educational experiences continue to influence their beliefs and values?

#### Research Sample

The study used purposive sampling to recruit six self-identified Filipino atheists (three men, three women), aged 22–36, residing in Luzon (Metro Manila, Bulacan, Laguna). All participants completed secondary education in religious or semi-religious institutions and were drawn from private Catholic, Protestant, or public schools with strong religious cultures. Recruitment occurred via atheist online communities and snowball referrals. All participants gave informed consent and were assigned pseudonyms to protect anonymity.

## Method

### Research Approach

This study employed descriptive phenomenology, a qualitative research approach rooted in the philosophical tradition of Edmund Husserl, which seeks to

describe phenomena as they are experienced by individuals, free from presuppositions or theoretical impositions (Husserl, 1970; Giorgi, 2009). The goal of descriptive phenomenology is to uncover the essence of a lived experience by accessing the first-person perspective of participants. In this study, the phenomenon in question is the lived experience of Filipino atheists in relation to their formal education, particularly within religious or religiously-influenced school environments.

Descriptive phenomenology was chosen over interpretative approaches to allow the voices of the participants to emerge with minimal interpretation, focusing instead on describing their experiences as faithfully and richly as possible. The approach is especially appropriate when exploring under-researched or marginalized experiences, such as atheism in a predominantly religious society like the Philippines.

The method of analysis followed the systematic steps of Colaizzi's (1978) descriptive phenomenological method, which ensures rigor and transparency in the analysis of qualitative data.

### **Data Collection Techniques**

Data were gathered through in-depth, semi-structured interviews with six self-identified Filipino atheists. The interviews were conducted online via secure video conferencing platforms to ensure accessibility, participant comfort, and ethical compliance during periods of mobility restrictions.

Each interview lasted approximately 60 to 90 minutes. The interview protocol was designed to elicit open, reflective narratives around participants' educational experiences, using broad and exploratory questions such as:

- Can you tell me about your experiences in school, especially regarding religion or religious activities?
- Were there moments in your education that made you question or reflect on religious belief?
- How did your classmates, teachers, or school policies respond to your beliefs or doubts?
- Looking back, how would you describe the role of your schooling in shaping your worldview today?

Follow-up questions were asked depending on the flow of the conversation. All interviews were conducted in English or Filipino, depending on the participant's preference, and were transcribed verbatim. Translations into English were done for data excerpts initially expressed in Filipino. Participants were assigned

pseudonyms, and identifying details were removed from transcripts to ensure confidentiality.

### **Research Participants**

Six participants (three males, three females), aged between 22 and 36, were purposively selected based on the following inclusion criteria:

- Self-identified as atheists or non-believers
- Had completed at least secondary education in the Philippines
- Had schooling experience in either a religious school (e.g., Catholic or Protestant) or a public school with strong religious culture

Participants came from various urban and peri-urban regions in Luzon, including Metro Manila, Bulacan, and Laguna. Recruitment was done through atheist and secular online communities, and snowball sampling was used to reach additional participants.

Prior to the interviews, participants received an informed consent form, explaining the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of their participation, confidentiality measures, and the right to withdraw at any point.

### **Methods of Analysis**

The data analysis followed Colaizzi's (1978) seven-step method, which is widely used in descriptive phenomenology to ensure that participants' voices are preserved and the essence of the phenomenon is faithfully represented. The steps involved:

1. Familiarization – Each transcript was read multiple times to immerse the researcher in the data.
2. Extracting significant statements – Statements that directly pertained to the phenomenon of educational experiences and atheist identity were identified and highlighted.
3. Formulating meanings – Meanings were derived from each significant statement, staying as close to the original phrasing as possible while identifying underlying ideas.
4. Organizing formulated meanings into themes – The formulated meanings were grouped into clusters of themes, revealing patterns and structures common across participants.
5. Developing an exhaustive description – The clustered themes were synthesized into a rich and comprehensive description of the phenomenon.

6. Identifying the fundamental structure – The essence of the phenomenon was articulated, encapsulating the shared meaning of the lived experience.
7. Validation of findings with participants – A summary of the findings was returned to three participants for member checking to verify accuracy and resonance with their experiences.

Throughout the process, bracketing or epoché was practiced to the best extent possible. The researcher made conscious efforts to set aside personal beliefs and biases about atheism, education, and religion, maintaining a phenomenological attitude of openness and receptivity to participants' accounts.

Field notes, analytic memos, and reflexive journaling supported the researcher's awareness of positionality and ensured the rigor of the analysis. Ethical clearance for the study was secured from the author's university research ethics board.

## Results and Discussion

### Theme 1: Early Dissonance — School Rituals and Unquestioned Belief

For most participants, early schooling was marked by routine religious practices—prayers, Mass attendance, catechism, and moral instruction—which were presented as unquestionable truths. These rituals were often performed without conscious reflection but began to feel dissonant as participants grew older.

"Every Monday, we would sing hymns and recite prayers as a class," shared *Isa*, who attended a private Catholic elementary school in Manila. "It was just normal, but I remember asking my teacher once why non-Catholics had to do it, and I was told it was 'just the rule.' I didn't think much of it then, but now I realize how forced it was."

Similarly, *Marco*, who attended a public school in Bulacan, described a daily Angelus over the loudspeaker at noon. "You couldn't opt out. You just had to stand there. At the time, I thought it was strange because not everyone in class believed the same thing."

Participants noted that religious instruction was deeply embedded in the curriculum, even in science subjects. *Clarisse*, who graduated from a Christian school, recounted: "In our science class, the teacher said evolution was just a theory and that God created everything. I remember raising questions and being told to

talk to the pastor if I was confused."

This uncritical reinforcement of belief systems has been observed in prior studies. Hammer et al. (2024) reported similar institutional practices where student atheists were unable to openly question religious claims without social consequences. Lee (2015) also noted that questioning was often redirected as a form of spiritual weakness rather than intellectual inquiry.

The lack of space for doubt or alternative perspectives in the school environment resulted in two early responses among participants: silent compliance or emerging skepticism. *Dani*, who eventually left religion in college, said: "I didn't know the word for it back then, but I felt a kind of resistance. I didn't believe what I was made to recite, but I didn't want to get into trouble. So I memorized the prayers and just did what everyone else did."

This silent compliance aligns with what Silver et al. (2014) call "performative religiosity"—a coping strategy by which non-religious individuals mimic belief behavior in highly religious environments to avoid conflict. While it offers short-term protection, it can also delay identity formation and cause long-term psychological strain.

As these early dissonant experiences accumulated, participants became more attuned to the contradictions between what was taught in school and their emerging rational frameworks. Many pointed to a growing internal discomfort, especially during adolescence, when they began to develop critical thinking skills. This tension between religious orthodoxy and intellectual growth was a recurring theme.

This theme illustrates how school rituals, moral instruction, and teacher authority socialize belief at an early age while suppressing alternative worldviews. Although these practices are normalized under the guise of tradition or discipline, they can unintentionally marginalize students whose beliefs (or non-beliefs) fall outside the dominant religious paradigm. It also raises critical questions for education practitioners: Is moral formation inherently tied to religiosity? And how can moral and civic education be inclusive of diverse worldviews?

## **Theme 2: Critical Encounters and Rational Awakening**

As participants moved into late adolescence and early adulthood, most experienced a shift from passive compliance to active questioning of religious doc-

trines. This shift was often catalyzed by academic exposure to science, philosophy, or logic, as well as access to diverse perspectives via the internet and peer discussions. These critical encounters marked the beginning of what participants described as a process of “waking up,” where previously unquestioned beliefs came under intellectual scrutiny.

*Isa* described her first exposure to rational argumentation during a college philosophy class: “It was the first time I heard about arguments for and against the existence of God that were not sermons. My professor didn’t push a position, but it blew my mind that atheism was a legitimate philosophical view, not just being rebellious.”

This sentiment was echoed by *Marco*, who cited the influence of online videos and science forums: “In high school, I started watching Neil deGrasse Tyson and Richard Dawkins. I didn’t immediately call myself an atheist, but I started realizing that the universe didn’t need a god to function. It was both terrifying and liberating.”

These encounters reflect a turning point, where knowledge from outside religious orthodoxy was validated through critical thinking. As noted by Cotter and Quadrio (2018), access to secular ideas and scientific explanations often empowers non-believers to reframe existential questions outside of faith narratives.

For *Clarisse*, the process was more gradual but equally transformative: “It started with me being uncomfortable with the way religion was used to shame people—especially women. Then I started reading feminist theory, and everything just started clicking. It wasn’t just about belief in God anymore. It was about the whole system of control.”

Her story illustrates how the questioning of religion is often entangled with questioning broader systems of patriarchy, morality, and authority. Similar findings were reported by Smith (2011), where rejection of religious faith coincided with critical reflections on cultural oppression and gender norms.

Interestingly, participants emphasized that their atheism did not emerge from trauma or rebellion, but from a reflective process grounded in inquiry and coherence. *Dani* remarked: “People assume I must have been hurt by religion, but it’s not that. I just couldn’t reconcile what I was being told with what I was learning. It stopped making sense.”

This distinction is important. It counters common narratives that portray atheism as a reaction to personal suffering or moral failure. Instead, participants saw their shift as part of an intellectual maturation process—what Giorgi (2009) calls a "movement toward existential clarity."

However, the awakening to rational thought did not always translate into public declarations of atheism. For many, particularly those still embedded in religious families or workplaces, this awakening remained a private transformation. The risk of social alienation, ridicule, or loss of opportunity discouraged open disclosure, especially within religious institutions.

*Isa* admitted: "I don't talk about it with my family. They still think I'm just 'lost.' I avoid the topic because it's easier. But internally, I've never been clearer about what I believe—or don't believe."

The experiences shared in this theme underline the central role of education, media, and community in facilitating a rational re-evaluation of religious belief. Yet they also point to a gap in Philippine education: while students are taught to think critically, religious belief is rarely subjected to the same scrutiny within school curricula. This selective application of critical thinking allows religious dogma to retain its privileged status in the intellectual development of students.

Hence, this theme invites reflection on the responsibilities of schools to foster epistemic openness—not merely the tolerance of diverse views but the structured space to question all claims, religious or otherwise. As education systems strive to produce critical thinkers, they must be willing to include belief systems in that critique—while safeguarding respect and dignity for all learners, regardless of their faith or non-faith.

### **Theme 3: Marginalization and Silence in School Spaces**

One of the most pervasive experiences among participants was a sense of being marginalized or silenced within educational settings. Even when their non-belief was not explicitly stated, many participants felt that there was no room in the school environment for their views to be expressed safely. This silence—both externally imposed and internally adopted—was shaped by a perceived (and often real) threat of exclusion, ridicule, or disciplinary action.

*Marco* recalled an incident during his junior high school years in a Catholic school: "We had a religion class where everyone had to write about how they felt

God was guiding their life. I wrote something honest—that I wasn't sure if I believed in God. The teacher gave me a lower grade and wrote a note saying I needed spiritual counseling. After that, I just stopped being honest."

This pressure to conform, even in assignments meant to be personal reflections, highlights how institutional expectations can penalize non-conformity. *Isa*, who studied in a public school with strong religious practices, shared a similar story: "I never said I was an atheist, but when I didn't want to join the prayer group, my classmates said I was being disrespectful. Even the teachers looked at me weird. It was easier to just pretend."

Participants used terms like "walking on eggshells," "pretending," and "keeping my head down" to describe their everyday navigation of religious norms in school. These forms of adaptive silence were not only protective strategies but also internalized coping mechanisms, reinforcing the idea that atheism must remain hidden.

Such experiences align with findings from Silver, Coleman, and Hood (2014), who note that young atheists in religious environments often engage in "identity suppression" to avoid social penalties. Smith (2011) similarly describes the *existential isolation* felt by atheists who are unable to disclose their beliefs within family and school circles.

This marginalization was not limited to peer interactions. Participants also recounted subtle or overt disapproval from authority figures. *Dani* shared: "I asked a teacher why religion was required if we were a secular country. She laughed and said, 'Because this is the Philippines. You'll understand when you're older.' It was dismissive. There was no space to even ask the question."

Beyond individual responses, participants identified systemic aspects of marginalization. Religion classes were described as indoctrinatory rather than exploratory, and alternative worldviews were rarely mentioned. Atheism, if addressed at all, was framed negatively—associated with immorality, arrogance, or spiritual emptiness.

*Clarisse* recalled: "In one class, the teacher used atheism as an example of people who are 'lost' or 'confused by Western ideas.' I remember looking around, wondering if anyone else felt like me—but no one said anything. That silence was loud."

The theme of silence recurred in nearly all interviews—not just as a social condition but as a psychological burden. Participants described the strain of pretending, especially during moments of forced prayer, religious holidays, or spiritual retreats.

Yet for some, silence became a motivator for eventual self-affirmation. *Isa* reflected: "Being silenced made me want to speak more. But I had to wait until I was in a space where I wouldn't be punished for it."

This tension between internal belief and external conformity is a central struggle in contexts where religion and education are deeply intertwined. Schools, which should ideally be spaces for open inquiry and personal growth, can instead become sites of moral gatekeeping, where deviation from religious norms is interpreted as rebellion or deficiency.

For education policymakers and practitioners, this theme underscores the need to examine how curricula, classroom culture, and institutional traditions might unintentionally alienate students who do not adhere to dominant religious identities. Inclusion is not only about representing various beliefs in lessons, but also about fostering an environment where silence is not the only safe option for those who believe differently.

#### **Theme 4: Reclaiming Identity and Constructing Morality Beyond Religion**

Despite the inward struggles, social fears, and marginalization experienced by participants, a significant theme that emerged was the process of reclaiming identity and constructing morality outside religious frameworks. This shift did not occur suddenly but was part of a longer journey of reflection, education, and existential questioning. Participants spoke of arriving at a place where atheism was not just the absence of belief, but a self-affirmed identity grounded in reason, personal ethics, and critical inquiry.

*Rico*, now in his late twenties, explained: "It took years, but I realized I didn't need religion to be a good person. I could care for others, make ethical choices, and build meaningful relationships—without a god watching over me. That was liberating."

This theme was often accompanied by participants' efforts to construct a coherent moral framework. Far from being amoral or nihilistic—as sometimes portrayed in dominant religious discourse—participants emphasized empathy, ac-

countability, and human solidarity as the foundations of their ethical life. *Ana* said: "My values come from understanding what causes harm and what creates well-being. I don't need commandments. I need compassion and critical thinking."

This resonates with the work of Zuckerman (2015), who found that secular individuals often ground their morality in humanist principles rather than divine mandates. Filipino atheists in this study described similar tendencies: favoring reasoned ethics over religious doctrine, and consequentialist reasoning over absolute moral commands.

Participants also described a shift from defensiveness to assertiveness in claiming their atheist identity. *Nico*, who once kept his views hidden from family and friends, eventually reached a turning point: "I got tired of hiding. When I finally told my mom, she cried. But I explained my reasons calmly, and I didn't back down. Over time, we learned to live with our differences."

This sense of empowerment was often facilitated by access to secular communities online, exposure to philosophical and scientific literature, and conversations with other non-believers. *Dani* shared: "Joining atheist forums helped a lot. I realized I wasn't alone, and that there were others who thought like me—even if I never met them in person."

Such experiences demonstrate the importance of networks of recognition for identity development. In a society where institutional recognition of non-belief is limited, digital communities often provide the first space where atheists feel seen, validated, and safe. This is echoed in Cimino and Smith (2007), who emphasize the role of online platforms in sustaining secular worldviews among young people.

For some, reclaiming identity involved deconstructing internalized religious guilt. Participants spoke of how, early in their journey, they feared divine punishment, eternal damnation, or moral degeneration. Over time, these fears were replaced by a more integrated self-understanding. *Isa* recounted: "I used to panic at the thought that I was going to hell. But after reading more, I realized those fears were implanted. I now see them as part of my conditioning, not reality."

This cognitive liberation reflects what Berger and Luckmann (1966) describe as the deconstruction of a previously taken-for-granted reality. Participants were not simply rejecting religion—they were reconstructing the symbolic universe in which they understood their place in the world.

Interestingly, this theme also revealed participants' nuanced views about religion. Many were critical of organized religion, especially for its perceived hypocrisy, but remained respectful toward spirituality or personal belief systems. *Clarisse* noted: "I don't believe in gods, but I understand why people turn to religion. It gives comfort. My issue is with religious institutions imposing their beliefs on others."

This differentiation points to a critical yet empathetic stance, which resists the caricature of atheists as combative or dismissive. It also illustrates the complexity of Filipino atheism: it is not merely oppositional, but constructive, seeking to build ethical and meaningful lives outside dominant religious paradigms. The final dimension of this theme involved a desire to contribute positively to society. Participants viewed their atheism not as a withdrawal from moral responsibility, but as a call to engage ethically, rationally, and compassionately in a pluralistic world. *Marco* said: "Just because I don't believe in a god doesn't mean I'm indifferent. In fact, I think it means I have to try even harder—because I believe this life is all we have."

This view embodies a form of existential responsibility, where the absence of divine oversight is not paralyzing but motivating. It reflects the core insight that Filipino atheists, far from being moral outsiders, are actively engaged in constructing meaning, forming ethical commitments, and contributing to human flourishing—on their own terms.

## Conclusion

This phenomenological study examined the lived experiences of Filipino atheists, particularly in relation to their educational backgrounds and formative encounters within religious or religiously influenced school settings. The findings reveal a nuanced and layered trajectory from passive conformity to critical self-authorship, shaped by internal questioning, external constraints, and the eventual reclamation of identity outside religious frameworks.

The first theme, Early Dissonance — School Rituals and Unquestioned Belief, highlights how participants initially encountered religion as an unquestioned norm embedded in school rituals and moral discourse. These practices, while seemingly routine, planted seeds of discomfort and intellectual dissonance as students silently grappled with the incongruence between inherited belief systems and their emerging doubts. Religious expressions in school—such as prayers, catechism, and

masses—often felt compulsory rather than meaningful, setting the stage for later questioning.

The second theme, *Critical Encounters and Rational Awakening*, underscores the transformative power of secular knowledge and reflective inquiry. Philosophy classes, science education, online discourse, and exposure to global perspectives provided participants with the language and conceptual tools to challenge religious dogma. These encounters marked a turning point—from silent unease to conscious critique—and offered intellectual clarity that emboldened participants to explore atheism as a legitimate worldview.

The third theme, *Marginalization and Silence in School Spaces*, reveals the social and institutional consequences of deviating from religious norms in a dominantly theistic environment. Participants described being silenced, ridiculed, or rendered invisible when they attempted to express non-belief. This culture of conformity discouraged critical engagement with religion and deepened the sense of isolation and alienation among atheist students. Even in educational institutions meant to foster free thought, the price of unbelief was often social rejection or moral suspicion.

The fourth theme, *Reclaiming Identity and Constructing Morality Beyond Religion*, disrupts prevailing stereotypes of atheists as morally deficient or directionless. Participants narrated how, after a period of struggle and silence, they began to embrace atheism as a coherent, ethically grounded identity. Their moral compass was reoriented around humanist, rational, and empathic principles—proving that morality need not be anchored in religious belief. This stage reflects not only individual affirmation but also a broader ethical stance rooted in pluralism and intellectual integrity.

Taken together, these themes show that atheism in the Philippines is neither a reactionary position nor a mere absence of belief, but a reflective, ethically conscious, and socially negotiated identity. It emerges through personal encounters with doubt, sustained by reason and moral deliberation, and shaped by social environments that alternately suppress and provoke the search for coherence.

This study contributes to a deeper sociological understanding of unbelief in a highly religious society. It challenges binary views of belief versus non-belief by foregrounding the fluid, developmental, and context-dependent nature of atheist identity. It affirms that Filipino atheists are not outside the moral community but

are active agents in constructing meaning, purpose, and ethical frameworks beyond theistic traditions.

Finally, the findings call for a more inclusive educational and civic discourse—one that honors the diversity of belief and non-belief alike. Respecting the moral and intellectual agency of atheists is not just a matter of tolerance; it is a democratic imperative grounded in the right to freedom of thought and conscience. In the next section, specific recommendations will be provided for how educators, institutions, and policymakers might respond constructively to the presence and voices of atheists in Philippine society.

### **Recommendations**

This study's findings underscore the need for more inclusive and pluralistic approaches to worldview diversity in Philippine society. Based on the lived experiences of Filipino atheists, the following recommendations are proposed:

#### **1. Integrate Philosophical Diversity in Education**

Educational institutions should include atheism, agnosticism, and other secular worldviews in civic and moral education curricula. This encourages critical thinking and fosters respect for diverse beliefs. Learning materials must avoid portraying religion as the sole source of morality or identity, and instead present a balanced view of belief and non-belief.

#### **2. Train Educators for Inclusive Teaching**

Teachers and school staff should be trained to handle religious and philosophical diversity sensitively. Professional development programs can include modules on secularism, freedom of belief, and respectful classroom dialogue to ensure non-believers are not marginalized in classroom discussions or school activities.

#### **3. Ensure Institutional Secularity in Public Schools**

Public schools must uphold constitutional principles by making religious activities optional and ensuring no student is compelled or pressured to participate. Mechanisms should be put in place to protect students who choose not to take part in such activities, including clear policies and grievance procedures.

#### **4. Support Student Inclusion and Mental Health**

Guidance services should recognize the presence of non-religious students and offer inclusive psychosocial support. Non-religious students should be encour-

aged to form peer support groups or participate in student organizations that affirm pluralism and freedom of thought.

### 5. Encourage Further Research on Atheism

There is a significant gap in literature on atheism and secularism in the Philippines. Future research should explore atheism in relation to gender, sexuality, social class, and regional differences. Comparative research with other Southeast Asian countries can also provide valuable regional insights.

### 6. Foster Dialogue Between Believers and Non-Believers

Government agencies, educational institutions, and civil society organizations should promote respectful dialogue between the religious and non-religious. Interbelief forums and inclusive community programs can help reduce prejudice, promote mutual understanding, and uphold shared civic values.

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# **Bridging the Gap to Work Readiness: An Analysis of Innovations in the Implementation of the Work Immersion Program in Public and Private Senior High Schools**

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## **Abstract**

The introduction of the Senior High School (SHS) program in the Philippines aims to produce a holistically developed, 21st-century-equipped workforce prepared for employment, entrepreneurship, or higher education. A central component of this goal is the Work Immersion Program (WIP), a mandatory practical experience governed by DO 30, s. 2017, designed to enrich students' competencies for their chosen career paths. While effective WIPs rely heavily on robust school-industry collaboration and have proven beneficial in supporting students' self-concept and career focus, their implementation faces recurrent challenges, including securing funding for student expenses, availability of partner institutions, student attendance issues, and the disparity between school and industry equipment. This

study recognized that, particularly in response to operational hurdles and the pandemic, many schools have developed innovative implementation strategies to ensure the program's success. This research addresses the gap in current literature by exploring the different practical, adaptable, and replicable innovations introduced in the WIP across both public and private schools in the Philippines. The objective was to specifically answer: What innovations were introduced in the implementation of the Work Immersion Program, that are geared towards skills development and future readiness of learners? The findings provide models that can augment areas of difficulty for other schools and serve as aspirational goals for program enhancement.

**Keywords:** work immersion program, senior high school program evaluation, work readiness

## Introduction

The responsibility of producing a qualified workforce suited for the demands of the 4<sup>th</sup> Industrial Revolution in the Philippines has become a shared responsibility between basic and higher education with the introduction of the Senior High School (SHS) program. The SHS curriculum aims to produce students that are holistically developed, equipped with 21st century skills and prepared for the future, regardless if the student decides towards the direction of higher education, attainment of middle-level skills, employment or entrepreneurship. The two year program is highlighted by a work immersion program (WIP), the goal of which is to expose students to an actual and practical learning experience while enriching their competencies for the career path they are most likely to pursue after SHS or college (Brilliantes et.al, 2019). To ensure the adherence to the objectives, the Department of Education has issued a DO 30, s. 2017 as a Guideline for the implementation of the WIP.

The success of WIP lies heavily on the ability of schools and their partner institutions to collaborate closely and recognize the mutually beneficial outcome of their partnership (Belonio and Monato, 2020). Well executed WIP have been shown to support students' growth in sense of self, career direction, and dedication to chosen disciplines (Casas and Dela Cruz, 2019) while in turn allowing indus-

tries the opportunity to have a good source of low-cost labor (Galloway and Chillas, 2014) as well as, have resources during busy periods, reduce recruitment and training costs, and this reduce adjustment period for potential hires (Zenobia, 2018). The implementation of WIP on the other hand, does come without its own set of challenges. Some highlighted problems encountered in the implementation of WIP for SHS in the Philippines are (1) funding of students' expenses (i.e. transportation, food, etc), (2) availability of partner institutions, (3) attendance of students (Figueras and Mendoza, 2020) and (4) school materials and equipment which are not comparable to those used in industries (Mapalo et.al, 2022). Interestingly, borne out of recognizing many challenges in operations and the timing of the pandemic, schools have also created innovations in its implementation to ensure not only survival but success.

Several studies in the past investigated the lived experiences of Grade 12 learners and the outcomes of work immersion programs in the Philippines. However, few studies explored the possible intervention plans that can be implemented to prepare the students' future work readiness.

This research paper uncovered different innovations introduced in the implementation of the WIP in both public and private schools in the Philippines. It focused on practical, adaptable, and replicable programs that can augment areas of difficulties in implementation for some schools or serve as aspirational goals, which the school as a community can strive to achieve. Specifically, the objective of this research work is to answer the question: What innovations were introduced in the implementation of the Work Immersion Program, that are geared towards skills development and future readiness of learners?

Catelo (2020) cited the creation of "On-the-Job training Manual" in a state university. The manual reiterated the duties and responsibilities of the immersion students' personnel to help administer, interpret, and regulate procedures related to internship training and placement. Pre deployment modules focused on the development of soft skills are rare if none in local literature. It is the purpose of this study to contribute to the dire literature on such an important topic. A crucial component of any work immersion model is the alignment between the strand of the students and the work immersion experience (Cruz & Permejo, 2020; Bustamante, 2019; Santos, 2019). Identifying the career choice of students before deploying them is essential. Building partnerships with different offices or agencies to serve as partners in implementing the work immersion program is also necessary (Santos, 2019). For Work Immersion to be successfully implemented, the

staff at the school and the Partner Institutions must collaborate closely, have their support, and be totally dedicated. These staff are required to constantly exercise reasonable care and effort when performing their jobs. In actuality, the staff members must follow and implement the requirements of the DepEd Order.

Favila et al. (2019) developed The Ugnayan model, a knowledge-sharing model for senior high school work immersion programs. Ugnayan is a Filipino word which means “connection” or “interaction.” The proposed model is composed of four circles that overlap each other, two of which are solid lines while the other two are broken lines. The solid line circle P1 and the solid line circle P2 merge, creating a closed area. This same area is shared with the broken line circle P3 and the broken line circle P4. The enclosed area at the center contains the core elements: (1) Standard—the knowledge of what is official, accepted, and regulated; (2) Readiness—the knowledge pertaining to preparedness, capacity, and enthusiasm; (3) Commitment—integrity and the knowledge of the level of endurance to pursue and accommodate responsibilities and endeavors; (4) Discernment—the understanding of the consequences of an action or proposition; and, (5) Fulfillment—the knowledge of the value of accomplishments that could come in the form of awards and/or contentment. The proposed model posits that the core elements are the basis for establishing sound and productive knowledge sharing that could be used at the micro/personal level, meso/institutional level, and macro/societal level of interactions. On the micro/personal level, knowledge sharing is between a mentor from an industry and a trainee, an SHS student. Knowledge sharing of the core elements of the proposed program could lead to a more viable working relationship between participants.

Figure 1.

*The Ugnayan Model*



Learners exposed to job assignments relating to their strand perform and exhibit efficiency in completing the tasks and present lessons that will last a lifetime and virtues that can be used for a better life. One of SHS immersion's main advantages is its potential to close the knowledge gap between the classroom and practical application. Students can gain a deeper knowledge of their education and how it relates to their future jobs by getting hands-on experience in their chosen fields. The effect of the Senior High School Work Immersion Program on students' work-related competencies was investigated by Casas and Dela Cruz (2019) in a study where 100 senior high school students took part in the program. According to the data, the program significantly affects students' work related competencies. Additionally, they claimed that immersion programs have been shown to support students' growth in sense of self, career direction, and dedication to chosen disciplines.

The work immersion program aids senior high school students in the Philippines in developing skills and competences that are pertinent to their future occupations, according to a study by Adornado, Gabion, and Igot (2020). The initiative should be expanded to include additional students and industries, according to the authors.

Roa and Limbo (2019), found that the work immersion program provides students with valuable experiences that help them understand the world of work and make informed career decisions. The authors recommend that schools continue to implement the program and provide more support for students during the immersion period.

Some studies also conducted innovations to help address some issues on immersion. Paitan (2017) investigated the innovation titled "Dynamic Career Advocacy Program" in a public school in Zamboanga Sibugay. He explained that innovation strengthened the access to information and provided guidance about career and education. It also expanded the promotion of benefits of the proper guidance of the students in line with the Career Guidance Advocacy Plan 2017-2022. In 2019, Uy & Martinez argued that "ambitions of the labor market" should be articulated in the immersion programs in the public schools. Within the SHS system, the department will need to confront the issues of when to terminate failing or sub-standard programs and when to open new and necessary offerings, taking into account the preferences and aspirations of its students, the needs and ambitions of the labor market, and the broader interests of the diverse Philippine general public.

Catelo (2020) cited the creation of “On-the-Job training Manual” in a state university. The manual reiterated the duties and responsibilities of the immersion students’ personnel to help administer, interpret, and regulate procedures related to internship training and placement. Gamboa, Danganan, et al. (2020) said the head in charge of immersion has a big role to solve the immersion issues. They described and evaluated 16 public senior high schools in Cluster IV of the Division of Pampanga and shared that most schools gave premium on the physical facilities, deliberate selection of teachers, curriculum alignment, and strong partnerships and linkages through a focal head in-charge of immersion.

Guiamalon & Hariray (2021) shared that a public school in Cotabato City observes strictly a well-defined system of policies, rules, and regulations on faculty attendance in their respective classes; faculty performance evaluation; faculty instruction evaluation, and awards/incentives for services and excellence in preparation for the immersion programs.

The successful implementation of Work Immersion depends mainly on the strong collaboration, support, and commitment of the school personnel, students, and partner Institutions. These personnel shall always exercise due care and diligence in performing their duties (Section 7, DepEd Order no. 30 s. 2017).

Faculty involvement is crucial to the successful implementation of the WIP. Faculty serves to (1) prepare students to the work immersion program by teaching them the necessary knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes; (2) ensure that students are placed in appropriate work settings; (3) supervise their work immersion experience by doing follow up and visitations to work site; and (4) provide useful feedback on their work immersion using data from the industry partners and students’ evaluation of their experience.

The work immersion program is to be done systematically with a rigorous monitoring procedure as stipulated in DepEd Order 039, s., 2018, mandating compliance with the following criteria during the work immersion; curriculum implementation and compliance, work Immersion delivery process, assessment of student’s progress, supervision of work immersion implementation, and administrative concerns. Moreover, the training of students should be closely monitored by adults from the industry (Industry/Work Supervisor) and teachers (Work Immersion Teacher / SHS Focal Person). Hence, a grading system is required at the end of the Work Immersion Program.

## **Method**

This study implemented a descriptive research design using a multiple case study approach. To ensure fair representation of respondent schools, the researchers targeted to study two (2) private schools – educational institutions ran and supervised by foundations, organizations, and/or corporations registered under the Securities Exchange Commission and are recognized by the Department of Education and two (2) public schools - educational institution ran and supervised by the Philippine government under the Department of Education, located within Metro Manila.

The selected schools for the case study had varying Grade 11 and Grade 12 student size demographics ranging from 200 – 730 and collectively offered all possible offerings in SHS: Academics (STEM, ABM, GAS, and HUMSS) to Technology and Vocational (ICT, Bread and Pastry, Cookery, Home Economics, and ICT), Sports, and Arts and Design. Information was gathered through interviews of either Director, Principal, or SHS Coordinator of the school using a structured set of guided interview questions (Appendix B). Each interview session was recorded and transcribed.

To better understand the impact of a work immersion innovative intervention plan, a pre-deployment soft skills module was developed by this study. Thirty four (34) senior high school students were divided into groups to participate in an activity entitled, “Unity in Command and Direction.” A processing evaluation was facilitated after the activity through a Google form assessment questionnaire. Students were then asked for their honest assessment by stating the key insights they have learned, and the application of these insights to their personal and academic life. The result of this study validated the proposed intervention module of the work immersion program for senior high school learners of Metro Manila.

## **Results and Discussion**

Based on the findings, the researchers identified five key areas as emerging themes during the study. These themes were divided into the following categories: Best Practices or Innovations, Building Strong Partnerships, Knowledge Sharing Model Interaction, WIP Work-related Competencies, and Faculty Evaluation/Involvement.

## A. Best Practices or Innovations

All four schools interviewed shared their best practices in the Work Immersion Program.

School A, a Christian school, implemented a comprehensive WIP consisting of Pre-Work Immersion, While-Work Immersion, and Post-Work Immersion stages. Through open-forum activities, grade 10 and 11 students learned from grade 12 students about their work experiences. Students evaluated their immersion experience through personal work immersion portfolios, fostering individual reflection. Additionally, the school organized a work immersion fair where company representatives and guests were invited, aligning with the school's mission to inspire students through alumni professionals who used their expertise as a ministry for the Lord.

School B, a private school, excelled in innovation within their WIP. They focused on selecting reputable industry partners, leveraging the school president's experience in the banking industry. The school developed comprehensive guidelines with input from partners in diverse fields, ensuring students gained skills aligned with emerging trends. Proximity and practicality were key considerations, with the school choosing immersion partners within Quezon City to facilitate monitoring and accessibility, allowing students to focus on their work and learning.

The WIP of School C, a public school, demonstrated several unique features. The school formulated an assessment tool to evaluate the program's effectiveness and provided insurance coverage for students through the Red Cross. Each track had an adviser, and the overall program was overseen by a focal person and guidance advocate. Despite the challenges posed by the pandemic, the school continued the WIP, offering online clerical training, ensuring comprehensive documentation, and establishing consistent partnerships with industry institutions.

School D achieved success in executing the WIP, by focusing on quality and student-centered experiences. They deployed students to industry partners that provided relevant learning experiences based on their chosen strand. The school prioritized a high volume of partnerships and emphasized the development of soft skills, recognizing their significance in the workplace. Their flexibility in working with partners who had unconventional reporting hours expanded the pool of options for students, albeit placing additional demands on immersion supervisors. By sharing school resources and incorporating programs like Work Ready Now (WRN), School D ensured students were equipped with necessary resources and devel-

oped the right attitudes for the workplace. Impressively, 50% to 70% of deployed students ended up working for their industry partners, with some securing part-time work or receiving job offers upon graduation.

The findings from the four schools' WIPs highlighted various best practices, including comprehensive program structures, effective industry partnerships, proximity considerations, teacher follow-up, assessment tools, insurance coverage, and soft skills development. These practices contributed to the enhancement of students' learning experiences, preparing them for future employment, and established strong connections between educational institutions and industry partners.

### **B. Building of Strong Partnerships**

The researchers also identified how the four schools had built strong partnerships that contributed to the success of the Work Immersion Program.

During the pre-work immersion program at School A, students were given the opportunity to choose the company or institution they wished to work with. The school had a strong network of connections with industries and company establishments, many of which were parents or alumni, who had facilitated partnerships with various institutions. A company enlistment form was sent along with the invitation letter to engage the companies. School coordinators and leaders engaged in discussions with the companies to determine the requirements and accommodations needed for the WIP. The companies themselves identified the number of students they could accommodate, considering the high-risk nature of the pandemic. For instance, partner hospitals could only host a maximum of ten students, with five students assigned for a week and another set of five students in the following week. Similar arrangements were made with other companies. In addition to company enlistment, School A also allowed self-located immersion, provided certain rules and qualifications were met. Self-located companies could not be immediate family businesses and had to meet the school's standards for work immersion partners. Parents were required to sign a waiver, taking responsibility for logistics and arrangements. The acceptance letter for self-located students outlined these arrangements, giving students the choice between school-assigned companies and self-located work immersion. The duration of the work immersion program varied, with some companies agreeing to a two-week program while others opted for a one-week program, depending on their capacity and personnel constraints.

School B's effective engagement and collaboration with stakeholders and

parents were crucial for the success of the Work Immersion Program. Recognizing the importance of close cooperation, the school proactively reached out to government agencies such as the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) and the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (PAG-ASA). These partnerships provided students with invaluable opportunities to experience real-world scenarios and learn from experts in various fields. The school president, having an extensive network of contacts in the banking industry, played a vital role in establishing partnerships with various companies. Grade 12 students were able to secure work experience among top companies courtesy of the industry connections. The school also partnered with local businesses and industry experts to provide mentors, who guided and supported students throughout the program. Creating a database of potential employers and job opportunities allowed students to expand their professional network. Integrating the work immersion program with the academic curriculum helped students apply their practical experiences to classroom learning.

The school head's background in journalism and campus advising enabled School C to improve its communication systems and formulate comprehensive guidelines for the work immersion program. The school also focused on proper documentation. School C established consistent partnerships with partner institutions, and it was a notable feature that some students were already employed in these institutions, considering their work experience as part of their work immersion.

School D's access to the Work Ready Now (WRN) program offered by JP Morgan Chase & Co., through the non-profit organization Educational Development Center (EDC), proved to be a valuable asset. The WRN program provided modular skills training in communication, teamwork, and other relevant aspects, preparing students in tech-voc for practical application in the workplace. School D attributed the inclusion of the WRN program to increased satisfaction among industry partners regarding the quality of work and attitude of their students. The compromises made by School D in accommodating industry partners led to strengthened relationships and expanded opportunities for students. By allowing and training students to engage in real work, School D built strong, long-term relationships with industry partners, ensuring continuous opportunities for their students.

The findings highlight the importance of building strong partnerships in the success of the Work Immersion Programs across the four schools. School A lever-

aged its network of connections with industries and company establishments, allowing students to choose their preferred work immersion company or pursue self-located immersion. School B emphasized effective engagement with stakeholders and leveraged the school president's industry connections to secure valuable work experiences for Grade 12 students. School C improved its communication systems, established consistent partnerships, and recognized the value of students' existing work experience. Lastly, School D's access to the WRN program provided students with modular skills training and fostered strong relationships with industry partners. These findings underscore the significance of collaborative efforts and innovative approaches in enhancing work immersion programs and preparing students for future careers.

### **C. Increased Work-Related Competencies**

The Work Immersion Program was a valuable opportunity for senior high school students in acquiring competencies that prepared them for the workplace. This study aimed to explore the specific competencies developed by students during the program, including technical knowledge, soft skills, and adaptability. By examining the approaches taken by different schools, this research provided insights on the strategies employed that enhanced students' competencies and facilitated a smooth transition to the professional realm.

In School A, the students demonstrated discipline and excellence. However, they lacked the necessary set of skills, when they entered the immersion. As a result, supervisors assigned them minimal tasks and provided basic orientations. To address this limitation, the school focused on contextualizing students' learning within their prior knowledge. Collaborations with companies were sought to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application. These partnerships allowed students to engage in real-world experiences, applying their learning to actual tasks. Although their skills remained at the beginning level, this collaboration facilitated a more holistic understanding of their specialization.

Effective communication skills, including non-verbal communication, emerged as a highly valued competency in School B. Industries emphasized the significance of soft skills and taught students the importance of being punctual, greeting others, and maintaining a positive attitude through smiling. The incorporation of non-verbal communication skills, such as maintaining eye contact and using appropriate body language, were recognized as essentials for successful business interactions. By nurturing these skills, the school aimed to equip students with the interpersonal abilities necessary for professional environments.

School C maximized the opportunities provided by online and hybrid setups, which became the trend during the pandemic. The school actively sought industries and institutions offering hybrid and online work immersion programs. This approach aimed to expose students to the importance of flexibility, time-management, and soft skills in a rapidly evolving work landscape. By engaging in online work environments, students learned to adapt to different setups and developed the skills necessary to navigate remote collaboration, communication, and project management. This opportunity prepared them for future workplaces that may rely heavily on digital platforms.

In School D, the focus shifted towards developing students' soft skills before deployment. The school recognized that attitude and dedication towards work were crucial differentiators among candidates. With the influence of Industrial Revolution 4.0 in the workplace, School D emphasized the students' ability to handle work situations with grace and confidence. They believed that these qualities were more valuable than technical skills alone. By prioritizing the development of soft skills, such as effective communication, problem-solving, and teamwork, School D aimed to equip students with the mindset and attributes necessary for success in a rapidly changing job market.

The findings of this study highlight the concerted efforts made by the four schools to enhance the competencies of senior high school students during the Work Immersion Program. By addressing the limitations in students' initial skill sets, the schools effectively collaborated with industry partners to provide practical experiences that contextualized theoretical knowledge. The emphasis on soft skills, including effective communication, punctuality, and positive attitudes, demonstrated the schools' recognition of its significance in the workplace. Moreover, by incorporating online and hybrid setups and focusing on adaptability and flexibility, the schools prepared students for the evolving work landscape. The development of both technical and soft skills embedded in the Work Immersion Program, played a crucial role in equipping students with the necessary competencies to succeed in their future careers.

#### **D. Interaction (Ugnayan Model)**

School A's work immersion closely resembled the Ugnayan model of Favila et al. (2019) on the meso/institutional level. At the end of the WIP, the students organized a work immersion fair alongside grade 9 to 11 students. Company representatives and guests were invited to attend as participants. Being a Christian school, one of the great commission parts of the work immersion program was to

use this activity as an opportunity to inspire students. Alumni students who have been successful in their own field, shared how they used their field as a ministry for the Lord. This helped students gain inspiration from alumni professionals who have been experts in the field and who have used their expertise to serve the Lord.

The school found ways on how to give back to the partner companies, by giving opportunities of engagement during school activities. For example, company partners were invited to be one of the exhibitors during parents' conferences and schoolwide projects. The participants acted as exhibitors or sellers to promote their services and products. This gesture solidified the school and company partnerships. Another form of evaluation was the sharing of students' experiences after the post-immersion stage. Students shared the lessons learned in the work immersion site, their stories and participation with their batchmates. This was a very effective way in gauging the objectives fulfilled for the work immersion.

#### **E. Faculty Involvement and Evaluation**

There was no contention to the fact that teachers from both private and public schools were all invested in helping their students take full advantage of the benefits of the work immersion program. The extra effort exerted by public school teachers, who dealt beyond students' immersion concerns, was palpable and unquestionably contributed to the success of the students. To establish collaboration among teachers and staff in the immersion program, a work immersion program coordinator was assigned to each company. His/her responsibility was to coordinate with the company during the while-immersion stage of the program. The coordinators accompanied the students on the first day and the last day during the company's thanksgiving program. The school administrator assigned to work on the Memorandum of Agreement (MOA), Waiver Disagreement and Waiver for students, had to work alongside with the legal department of the school, to help solidify and notarize all the documents needed. The documents were checked yearly, to see if the paperwork still fits the requirements of engagement. Finally, the school director was the one who approves all the documents and processes involved in the engagement and partnership with companies.

In School C, each track had an adviser, and the overall WIP was overseen by a focal person and guidance advocate. In School D, only those with specialization in SHS, were given Immersion Supervision assignments. The teacher follow-up was considered a best feature in School B. Its teachers did a follow-up on the status of the work immersion students through the Work Immersion Program coordinator. This ensured that the students were properly guided and supported during

their immersion. The follow-up also allowed the teachers to monitor the progress of their students, and ensured that students achieved the objectives of the program. Teachers provided advice and guidance to students when needed. They also assessed the effectiveness of the program and made necessary adjustments to improve it.

### **Conclusion**

The findings of this study suggest that innovative practices established strong connections between educational institutions and industry partners. It also enhanced students' learning experiences and readiness for future employment. The implementation of WIP provided practical experiences that addressed the limitation of the students' skill set. Although experiences varied in both private and public schools in terms of work immersion, the overall outcome of the WIP contributed to the success of the students in the long run.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the need to improve Senior High School (SHS) learners' skills and ensure their future readiness, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Develop a comprehensive program structure by creating a well-planned WIP that integrates ongoing teacher support and training and includes effective assessment tools that accurately measure practical skill acquisition. It should also incorporate pre-deployment soft skills modules to prepare students for the workplace environment.
2. Strengthen industry partnerships and policies by establishing policies that actively foster strong partnerships between schools and industry partners and implementing knowledge-sharing initiatives where industry experts can regularly interact with students and teachers.
3. Modernize skills and practice by integrating technological advancements into the work experience to expose students to modern tools and processes and focusing on building student skills that are directly aligned with current industry needs and the demands of the 4th Industrial Revolution.
4. Conduct further investigation into the readiness of SHS teachers and facilitators regarding their planning and pedagogical approach in implementing skill development programs with specific, measurable goals and outcomes.

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# Night Secondary School Forward: An Enhanced Night School Program

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## **Abstract**

At the beginning of the 20th century, the Missionary Benedictine Sisters came to the Philippines with a clear mission: to provide Catholic education, especially to those who had little access to it. They founded St. Scholastica's College Manila in 1906 and later expanded to establish schools in underserved communities across Luzon and the Visayas. Their work went beyond classroom teaching to include catechesis, health outreach, and community service in barrios, prisons, and welfare homes. Rooted in the Benedictine spirit of *Ora et Labora*—prayer and work—their educational apostolate combined faith formation with social responsibility.

This same spirit led to the establishment of the Night Secondary School (NSS) of St. Scholastica's College Manila in 1970. Created to serve working students and young women from disadvantaged backgrounds, the NSS provided free secondary education to learners who could not attend regular day classes. For decades, it has offered a second chance at education grounded in compassion, discipline, and service.

Today, however, the program faces structural and operational challenges. The existing five-year Junior High School cycle, the absence of a Senior High School offering, scheduling conflicts for

working students, reliance on volunteer faculty, and the lack of PEAC certification limit the program's reach and sustainability. In response, this proposal outlines a renewed framework aligned with current Department of Education policies, including the transition to a four-year Junior High School program, the introduction of Senior High School tracks under the Academic and Technical-Vocational-Livelihood strands, and the integration of blended learning strategies. The proposal also includes steps toward certification, strengthened administrative support, and sustainable partnerships.

Updating the Night Secondary School is both a practical and mission-driven response to present realities. By aligning with national standards while remaining faithful to its Benedictine roots, the NSS can continue to serve working learners and underserved communities, ensuring that education remains a pathway to dignity, opportunity, and holistic formation.

**Keywords:** Benedictine Education, Night Secondary School, educational reform, educational innovation

## Introduction

At the turn of the 20th century, the Missionary Benedictine Sisters responded to an urgent appeal to provide Catholic education in the Philippines. Led by Mother Ferdinanda Hoelzer, OSB, the Sisters opened St. Scholastica's College in 1906 and soon expanded to free schools and parish schools across Luzon, Cebu, Leyte, and Mindanao, often in poor or underserved areas. Under Mother Clodesindis Lueken, OSB, their mission extended beyond classrooms to barrios, prisons, and welfare homes, where they combined catechesis with health care and community service, while also training students to teach religion in public schools. By the 1920s to 1940s, the Sisters had established numerous academies including St. Agnes' Academy, Holy Family Academy, and St. Peter's College, broadening their apostolate from schools to remote communities and embodying their mission to bring education, faith, and service to those most in need. The Benedictine congregation's advocacy on education was never confined to academic instruction; it was a mission-driven effort to

integrate faith, service, and social upliftment. Benedictine schools became vehicles for evangelization, community development, and empowerment, especially for the poor and marginalized, reflecting a vision of education as both a spiritual and social responsibility, deeply aligned with the Benedictine ideals of *Ora et Labora* or prayer and work.

Building on this legacy, the broader Philippine education system has also been shaped by its colonial past and the reforms introduced after independence. Yet despite these reforms, many Filipinos continue to struggle with access to quality education. Poverty, armed conflict, limited school resources and facilities, and the digital divide remain major challenges.

It is within this context that the Night Secondary School (NSS) of St. Scholastica's College Manila was established in 1970, continuing the Benedictine tradition of service by providing free secondary education to young women and adult learners from underserved communities. As a ministry program, the NSS has offered opportunities for those who could not pursue regular day schooling due to financial or personal circumstances. Its mission reflects the congregation's commitment to inclusive education and social upliftment, ensuring that learners from disadvantaged backgrounds can access quality instruction in a supportive environment.

However, despite its long-standing contribution, the current NSS program faces several challenges. The school still operates under a five-year Junior High School curriculum, which requires students to spend an extra year before moving on to Senior High School. Moreover, the absence of a Senior High School track forces learners to transfer elsewhere to complete their education, disrupting continuity. The shift to early afternoon classes has also made attendance difficult for working students, particularly household helpers and employed adults who were the program's original focus. In addition, the reliance on volunteer teachers without full-time administrative staff raises concerns. Finally, the lack of certification from PEAC limits access to external support. Together, these gaps highlight the urgent need to update and strengthen the NSS program to remain responsive to the evolving needs of learners.

To address existing gaps, this proposal outlines an updated framework for the Night Secondary School (NSS) program, aligned with DepEd Order No. 012, s. 2024 and patterned after Calbayog City Division Memorandum No. 234, s. 2026. The Junior High School cycle will be streamlined from five to four years, with

evening classes scheduled from 4:30 PM to 9:30 PM, Monday to Friday. The weekly program designates core subjects, English, Mathematics, and Science five times per week; major subjects, Filipino, Araling Panlipunan, MAPEH, and TLE, four times per week; Christian Living Education three times per week; and Homeroom/Club once weekly. The program remains accessible to both public and private school students and fully complies with national curriculum standards. Furthermore, it establishes the foundation for Senior High School expansion, offering the Academic Strand and Technical-Vocational-Livelihood (TVL) track. To maximize instructional time and flexibility, a blended learning approach may be integrated, combining face-to-face sessions with modular or online components.

Updating the Night Secondary School is not just timely, it is essential. To stay true to its Benedictine roots while remaining responsive to the evolving needs of today's learners, the program align with National Standards by transitioning to a four-year Junior High School structure and introducing Senior High School tracks will bring NSS in line with national standards and expand student opportunities. In addition, formal certification, structural updates, and alumnae engagement will help secure the program's future and position it as a model for other Benedictine communities.

The Night Secondary School of St. Scholastica's College Manila embodies the Benedictine tradition of inclusive education and service, but its current structure requires renewal to meet the evolving needs of learners today. By aligning with national standards, introducing Senior High School tracks, securing certification, and strengthening sustainability, the program can continue to provide meaningful opportunities for working students and out-of-school youth. Institutionalizing these updates ensures that the NSS remains a vital pathway for educational equity, community upliftment, and lifelong learning, faithful to the Benedictine mission of *Ora et Labora*, prayer and work.

### **Review of Related Literature**

The Philippine Alternative Learning System (ALS) Act, or Republic Act 11510, institutionalizes a comprehensive non-formal education framework that expands access to basic education for out-of-school children, youth, and adults, particularly those from marginalized and underserved communities. The law strengthens ALS implementation by improving teacher preparation, enhancing learning resources and community learning centers, and establishing the Bureau of Alternative Education to ensure quality and relevance nationwide. Through these reforms, ALS provides flexible learning pathways that allow learners to complete

basic education, pursue further studies, and improve their socioeconomic opportunities.

Alongside ALS, the Department of Education introduced the Alternative Delivery Mode (ADM) to provide flexible, non-traditional approaches to teaching and learning for students who cannot be served effectively by the regular school system. Institutionalized through DepEd Order No. 54, s. 2012, ADM complements formal schooling by offering pathways for learners at risk of dropping out, those in geographically isolated areas, and those whose circumstances prevent regular attendance. Its features include flexible schedules, varied modalities such as self-paced modules and online learning, workplace-based completion of competencies, and participation in both curricular and co-curricular activities, all aligned with the MATATAG/Enhanced K–10 curricula. Examples of ADM programs include the Drop-out Reduction Program (DORP), Modified In-School and Off-School Approach (MISOSA), Instructional Management by Parents, Community, and Teachers (IMPACT), and Night High School programs for working learners.

The Night High School (NHS) program further complements ALS and ADM by providing working learners of legal age with the opportunity to complete basic education through evening classes. Junior High is completed in four to five years, while Senior High takes about two years. Classes typically run from 4:30 p.m. to 9:30 p.m., with possible Saturday sessions. The program also allows learners to fulfill Technology and Livelihood Education (TLE) competencies in their workplace under proper supervision, with additional arrangements requiring approval from the Schools Division Office. Recent policy developments, such as Calbayog City Division Memorandum No. 234, s. 2025, announced the implementation of a four-year NHS curriculum beginning SY 2025–2026, shifting from the previous five-year model to streamline instruction and better serve working and non-traditional learners. The program covers Grades 7–10, follows the MATATAG/Enhanced K–10 Curriculum, and maintains the same enrollment requirements as regular day school programs. Classes run Monday to Friday, 4:30 p.m. to 9:30 p.m., with a minimum of four instructional hours per day, and subject allocations follow DepEd Order No. 012, s. 2024. The program also incorporates blended learning modalities, allowing modular or online components for learners with work-related conflicts, while requiring participation in curricular and co-curricular activities.

In relation to blended learning, Dr. Margaret Driscoll (2002) identifies different ways to define the concept. One perspective emphasizes the integration of web-based technologies such as virtual classrooms, self-paced modules, collabo-

rative tools, and multimedia resources to achieve specific educational goals. This view is echoed by Singh (2003), who notes that blended learning combines multiple delivery modes, offering learners more choices and often greater effectiveness. Another definition frames blended learning as the mix of instructional technology with traditional face-to-face teaching, not as a replacement but as an enhancement that extends learning opportunities. Finally, Driscoll highlights the practical dimension of blended learning, describing it as the combination of instructional technology with actual job tasks, allowing learners to apply knowledge directly in workplace settings.

The Philippine initiatives of ALS, ADM, and NHS highlight the Department of Education's commitment to inclusive and flexible learning pathways, ensuring that education remains accessible to marginalized and non-traditional learners. When viewed alongside Driscoll's definitions of blended learning, these programs demonstrate how technology, pedagogy, and workplace integration can be combined to strengthen educational outcomes. ALS provides modular and community-based learning, ADM introduces structured alternatives within formal schools, and NHS offers evening schedules for working learners, all of which align with blended learning's emphasis on mixing delivery modes, integrating varied teaching approaches, and connecting instruction to real-life application. Together, these frameworks illustrate a comprehensive strategy where blended learning principles are embedded into national education policies, enabling learners to pursue basic education, improve employability, and actively participate in community and national development.

### **Program Objectives**

The Night Secondary Enhanced Program initiative aims to modernize and expand its educational impact by streamlining the Junior High School curriculum into a four-year program aligned with the national K–12 framework. Within the next three years, the program will establish a Senior High School department offering both Academic and Technical-Vocational-Livelihood (TVL) strands to broaden student career pathways. To accommodate the unique needs of working and adult learners, the school will implement a structured blended learning schedule during late-afternoon and evening hours (4:30 PM – 9:30 PM), featuring core subjects like English, Math, and Science five times weekly, alongside specialized and elective courses.

Institutional growth will be anchored by achieving PEAC certification within five years, ensuring quality assurance and external credibility. This will be supported by a strengthened administrative foundation, including a dedicated full-time administrator and an expanded pool of volunteer teachers trained in adaptive education. Finally, the program seeks to ensure long-term viability by mobilizing a robust network of alumnae, donors, and partners to fund scholarships and facility enhancements.

### Sample Blended Class Program

The Night Secondary program utilizes a strategic blended learning model designed to maximize instructional efficiency for working and adult learners within a condensed evening timeframe. Core academic subjects—English, Mathematics, and Science—are prioritized with four weekly face-to-face sessions and one modular session, while specialized subjects like TLE, MAPEH, and Araling Panlipunan follow a three-day in-person rotation supplemented by independent learning. By concentrating intensive subject blocks, such as the triple-period Filipino and CLE sessions on Thursdays and Fridays, the schedule reduces daily cognitive transitions and allows for deeper engagement. This structured approach ensures that despite the limited 4:30 PM to 9:30 PM window, students receive comprehensive curriculum coverage that meets national standards while maintaining the flexibility of a blended modality.

Day	4:30 - 5:15 pm	5:15 - 6:00 pm	6:00 - 6:45 pm	6:45 – 7:05 pm	7:05 - 7:50 pm	7:50 - 8:35 pm	8:35 - 9:20 pm	9:20 - 9:30 pm
Monday	English	Math	Science	Break	TLE	MAPEH	AP	Cleaning
Tuesday	English	Math	Science		TLE	MAPEH	AP	Cleaning
Wednesday	English	Math	Science		TLE	MAPEH	AP	Cleaning
Thursday	English	Math	Science		CLE	CLE	CLE	Cleaning
Friday	Filipino	Filipino	Filipino		Home-room	Club	English/ Math/ Science	Cleaning

### Senior High School Program Objectives

The Senior High School program is designed to provide comprehensive academic and technical pathways by offering both the Academic Strand and the Technical-Vocational-Livelihood (TVL) track, with specialized concentrations in Home Economics, ICT, and Bookkeeping. Guided by an inclusive admission policy, the program welcomes all learners regardless of their previous school background

or voucher status, ensuring equitable access to quality education. The curriculum is meticulously structured to build technical proficiency and workplace readiness, equipping students with the practical competencies necessary for success in higher education, immediate employment, or entrepreneurship. Furthermore, the initiative maintains strict alignment with Department of Education (DepEd) policies, ensuring that evening class implementations and specialized subject deliveries meet all national standards for institutional excellence.

### Technical-Vocational-Livelihood (TVL) Program Description

The Technical-Vocational-Livelihood (TVL) track offers comprehensive training across three primary strands: **Home Economics**, **Information and Communication Technology (ICT)**, and **Bookkeeping**. Within the Home Economics strand, students can gain industry-standard expertise in culinary arts and hospitality through courses such as Bread and Pastry Production, Commercial Cooking, Cookery, and Food and Beverage Services, complemented by foundational service skills in Housekeeping, Travel Services, and Tourism Promotion. For those pursuing digital and technical careers, the ICT strand provides creative and specialized pathways in Animation, Illustration, Medical Transcription, and Technical Drafting. Finally, the Bookkeeping program rounds out the curriculum by equipping learners with essential core competencies in financial documentation and modern accounting practices, ensuring they are well-prepared for immediate workplace integration or entrepreneurial ventures.

### Implementation Plan

The implementation of the updated Night Secondary School program follows a phased, seven-year roadmap designed to ensure academic transition, institutional recognition, and long-term sustainability. The initial years focus on structural realignment, moving to a streamlined four-year Junior High School (JHS) model while securing necessary government approvals from the Department of Education. As the program matures, the middle phases prioritize the expansion into Senior High School (SHS) through strategic partnerships with TESDA and the modernization of technical facilities. The final stages are dedicated to rigorous quality assurance via PEAC certification and the establishment of a Sustainability Committee, which will manage industry partnerships and alumnae engagement. This comprehensive approach ensures that the program does not merely launch but evolves into a mission-aligned, quality-certified institution capable of supporting lifelong learning for its students.

Phase / Time-line	Major Activities	Responsible Units / Persons	Expected Outputs / Milestones
Phase 1: Program Realignment and Government Recognition (Year 1)	<p>Secure approval from the Benedictine Sisters of the Manila Community</p> <p>Apply for DepEd recognition of the 4-year JHS curriculum</p> <p>Align curriculum with K–12 standards</p> <p>Update instructional materials and grading system</p> <p>Conduct orientation for faculty and staff</p> <p>Begin documentation for future PEAC certification</p>	Benedictine Sisters of the Manila Community VPAA NSS Principal Faculty and Staff DepEd	<p>Approved 4-year JHS program</p> <p>Updated curriculum and instructional guides</p> <p>Faculty orientation on new curriculum standards</p>
Phase 2: Implementation of 4-Year Junior High School (Year 2)	<p>Implement the revised 4-year Junior High School curriculum.</p> <p>Design and prepare for Senior High School curriculum offerings.</p>	Benedictine Sisters of the Manila Community VPAA NSS Principal Faculty and Staff DepEd	Prepared Senior High School curriculum offerings.
Phase 3: Senior High School Program Application (Year 3)	<p>Apply for SHS recognition</p> <p>Partner with TESDA for TVL certification</p> <p>Prepare facilities and laboratories</p>	VPAA NSS Principal TESDA Faculty and Volunteer Teachers Alumnae Associations	<p>Government-approved SHS programs</p> <p>Equipped learning facilities</p>
Phase 4: Senior High School Program Launch (Year 4)	<p>Recruit SHS teachers</p> <p>Launch first batch of SHS students</p>	NSS Principal Faculty and Volunteer Teachers	<p>Qualified SHS teachers hired</p> <p>First SHS batch enrolled</p>

Phase / Time-line	Major Activities	Responsible Units / Persons	Expected Outputs / Milestones
Phase 5: PEAC Certification and Quality Assurance of Junior High School (Years 5 –6)	<p>Prepare and submit PEAC certification requirements</p> <p>Conduct internal audit and mock certification</p> <p>Implement quality assurance system</p> <p>Strengthen learner support services (guidance, career, digital literacy)</p> <p>Develop continuous faculty development programs</p>	Benedictine Sisters VPAA NSS Principal Faculty and Staff Alumnae Associations	PEAC-certified JHS
Phase 6: Program Evaluation and Sustainability (Year 7 and Beyond)	<p>Conduct evaluation and tracer studies</p> <p>Periodically review and update the curriculum</p> <p>Form a Sustainability Committee</p> <p>Establish partnerships with industries, TESDA, and LGUs</p> <p>Strengthen alumni engagement for funding and mentorship</p>	Benedictine Sisters VPAA NSS Principal Faculty and Staff Alumnae Associations Industry Partners	<p>Sustainable and mission-aligned NSS operations</p> <p>Regular curriculum review and updates</p> <p>Strong partnerships for employment and lifelong learning</p> <p>Continued alumni and community support</p>

### Resource Requirements

The implementation of the Night Secondary program is built upon a model of resource efficiency and institutional synergy. Rather than requiring entirely new infrastructure, the program leverages the existing facilities and laboratories of the Day High School and College units, significantly reducing the need for capital expenditure. Strategic investment is instead directed toward human capital, specifically the appointment of a dedicated administrator and the continuous training of volunteer faculty, and the administrative requirements for government and PEAC

accreditation. By utilizing shared services for guidance and counseling, the program maximizes its operational budget to prioritize student-centered support, such as learning materials and subsidies, ensuring that the initiative remains both high-quality and financially sustainable.

**Table 3**

*Strategic Resource and Operational Requirements for the Night Secondary Forward Program*

<b>Component</b>	<b>Assumptions / Basis</b>	<b>Remarks</b>
<b>Salaries / Personnel</b>	Includes a full-time administrator, administrative staff, and a pool of qualified volunteer teachers.	Focuses on maintaining a lean but professional leadership structure.
<b>Curriculum &amp; Accreditation</b>	Covers application fees, documentation, external consultants, and preparation workshops for PEAC and DepEd.	Essential for institutional credibility and quality assurance.
<b>Facility / Infrastructure</b>	Focuses on internet connectivity upgrades, classroom maintenance, and equipment for the TVL track.	Efficiency is maximized by sharing existing classrooms and labs with the Day High School and College units.
<b>Faculty Development</b>	Ongoing orientation, K–12 alignment workshops, and specialized certification training.	Ensures staff are equipped for the unique needs of adult and evening learners.
<b>Student Support Services</b>	Career guidance, counseling, instructional materials, and subsidies for working learners.	Guidance services are shared with other units; focus is on enhancing inclusivity and retention.

### **Monitoring and Evaluation**

The program's efficacy is tracked through tri-term progress reports that provide data-driven insights into both student performance and faculty attendance. To complement these quantitative metrics, the school actively solicits qualitative feedback through regular student surveys and focus groups, ensuring that the learner's voice shapes the educational experience. These efforts culminate in an exhaustive annual program evaluation structured around Key Result Areas (KRAs), allowing leadership to measure institutional impact and refine academic strategies.

## Sustainability Plan

Long-term viability is anchored in a multi-faceted sustainability strategy that leverages community and industry partnerships. The program actively engages its alumnae network to secure consistent fundraising and scholarship support, while simultaneously building alliances with local businesses to provide resources and real-world opportunities for the TVL track. Operationally, the school invests in the continuous professional development of existing staff to manage and maintain digital platforms effectively. Finally, these initiatives are not treated as standalone projects but are fully integrated into the school's long-term strategic plan to ensure the program remains a permanent pillar of the institution.

## Conclusion

This proposal presents a transformative opportunity to revitalize the Night Secondary School program. By embracing flexibility, technology, and student-centered support, we can empower learners to succeed academically and professionally.

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