

From Theory to Practice: The Impact of Communities of Practice Implementation on Out-Of-School Youth

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Abstract. Communities of Practice (CoP) aims to provide services and skills to partner communities while establishing links to communicate learned knowledge to broader groups of people. This study identified and analyzed the impact of communities of practice in Barangay Nagtenga, Sta. Cruz, Ilocos Sur. It used a mixed quantitative and qualitative study approach to evaluate the level of satisfaction of the 18 CoP participants as well as their CoP learning and experience. The data demonstrated high levels of CoP satisfaction, notably with resource speakers and the quality of service provided. Participants shared their learning experiences during the CoP, focusing on knowledge acquisition, skill development, learning transfer to practice, and entrepreneurial management. This study emphasizes the importance of CoPs in empowering marginalized groups and promoting personal and professional development. Recommendations include maintaining and growing CoP initiatives and conducting frequent evaluations to ensure continuous improvement.

Keywords: Communities of Practice; Out-of-school youth

1.0 Introduction

One of the most challenging aspects of today's educational discourse is addressing the gap between theory and implementation. This issue of linking conceptual learning to practical application is most likely noticeable in far-flung places where formal education may not be readily available because of various factors, such as social and economic reasons. This led to an increase in the out-of-school youth population in the country. Communities of Practice (CoP) continue to be a source of interest and investigation in the Philippine educational system. While CoP has been recognized for its ability to promote collaborative learning and knowledge exchange, its effectiveness in meeting the needs of marginalized communities, particularly out-of-school youth, remains unexplored.

Research has conformed to its applicability in the formal academic environment as well as organizational learning, thus leaving little consideration for disadvantaged groups, including the OSY. The work of Wenger (1998) and Lave & Wenger (1991) can be regarded as the work that initially presented the major principles of CoPs; however, this work does not directly explain how those principles can be applied to respond to the challenges that affect marginalized populations effectively. For example, although Porfirio et al. (2022) elaborate on the CoPs regarding

skills and financial impact breakout, the authors fail to consider the contextual challenges that OSY faces while utilizing the benefits.

Furthermore, the study by Garcia and Hernandez (2019) reveals that CoPs have the potential to revolutionize the education systems of rural areas, the study does not explore the experiences and requirements of the targeted participants, particularly the OSY. This gap is important because the issues experienced by OSY – education dropouts, unemployment, poverty, and social exclusion – call for specific actions that are not aroused in the current literature. Concerning CoPs and improvement of organizational performance, Lesser & Storck (2001), although their concept is not applicable in the community development aiming at OSY.

Jones and Brown (2019) highlighted the development of social capital in marginalized communities, which can explain how the community of practices or CoP can help boost OSY resilience. Despite these studies, their findings do not pay much attention to OSY's educational and entrepreneurial demands and, therefore, do not close the gap in the literature. Also, unlike Vayachuta et al. (2016), who present information on effective lifelong education models for out-of-school children and youth, they fail to cover and analyze how CoPs should be organized to involve the targeted people in practical learning. Consequently, this study seeks to provide empirical findings of the effects of CoPs in the marginalized context of Barangay Nagtenga, OSY in particular, to expand knowledge on how CoPs can be effectively utilized.

Although CoPs have been hailed in diverse learning environments, little is known about their efficiencies for marginalized groups, especially out-of-school youths. Previous research on CoPs has mainly been conducted in formal organizational settings or tertiary learning institutions. There is a dearth of knowledge on how the CoPs can be developed appropriately for OSY. This study sought to establish CoP implementation and its effect in Barangay Nagtenga to achieve the subject cause of developing a learning environment where marginalized groups are empowered. Connecting the findings of the research to the theoretical framework of CoPs, the work not only adds value to the discussion of this concern from the theoretical standpoint but also offers valuable insight for practice on how one of the most threatened groups in today's society can benefit from the creation and use of CoPs in terms of their learning and development.

This study will find how the connection between theory and practice is fundamental in education, especially for marginalized groups who cannot afford formal education. Communities of Practice (CoP) is thus a vibrant tool that adopts theoretical principles into actual competence via communal learning and the sharing of information. According to Wenger (1998), CoPs are groups of people interested in similar fields who learn from each other through dialogue. In approaching knowledge acquisition and transmission, this study shows that CoPs afford the translation of paradigms from practical applicability into use in the lives of OSY. People also learn what to do with the knowledge they have gained due to CoPs and, therefore, cross over the theory-practice format that isolates young people at society's periphery.

Many of the youth in the Philippines are not in school, and societal and economic factors hinder their access to formal education. In El Salvador, for example, 26% of youth are classified as out-of-school youth (OSY), a rapidly growing demographic that represents a loss to the country not only in terms of individual potential well-being but also in terms of bringing danger that can harm community resilience, affecting economic development. Traditional educational institutions leave Many of these groups behind, with few or no opportunities to learn the skills and information required for personal and professional development. This study looks at implementing Communities of Practice (CoP) in Barangay Nagtenga, Sta. Cruz, Ilocos Sur, as a possible option to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application, empowering OSY through collaborative learning and skill development.

This study will contribute to academic discourse by filling the gap in the literature on the use of Communities of Practice in underprivileged communities, specifically among out-of-school kids. By providing actual data and insights from participants' experiences in Barangay Nagtenga, the project will improve understanding of how CoPs can be effectively implemented to promote learning, skill development, and community involvement. Practically speaking, this study's findings will provide helpful recommendations for legislators, educators, and community leaders looking to design and implement CoP projects that are responsive to OSY's needs. By

establishing the positive impact of CoPs on personal and professional development, this study will advocate for the extension and sustainability of such programs, ultimately contributing to marginalized youth empowerment and community resilience.

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Research Design

This study used a mixed quantitative and qualitative approach employing descriptive and interview research designs. According to Bhandari (2020), quantitative research gathers and analyzes numerical data. It can discover patterns and averages, make predictions, test causal relationships, and generalize results to larger populations. Qualitative research is a type of research that explores and provides deeper insights into real-world problems (Tenny et al., 2022). Pantaleon (2022) defined descriptive research design as a scientific method that involves observing and describing an existing phenomenon. Thus, the level of CoP satisfaction among the participants was described. Meanwhile, interview research has been defined as conducting in-depth, face-to-face interviews with participants to gain insights from the participants to understand their experience (Hoover, 2021). In this study, an interview was conducted to assess the level of satisfaction and recommendations of the participants in the conducted CoP.

2.2 Research Participants

The study's quantitative phase comprised eighteen (18) out-of-school youth who comprised the Community of Practice (CoP) conducted in Barangay Nagtenga. The approach to selecting subjects for the quantitative phase looks like a non-probability sampling technique called convenience sampling. Recruiting criterion two, which was on the willingness of participants to attend and learn from the CoP meetings, was met. Furthermore, for the qualitative study, a smaller sample of our eighteen participants composed of out-of-school youth was in this process. Instead, five (5) participants were chosen to conduct interviews to collect qualitative information with emphasis on their experiences, level of satisfaction, and recommendations on the matter of CoP. The sampling technique used in the study for the qualitative phase also seems to be different than random; it also seems to be purposive sampling. This technique involves identifying participants based on certain attributes or purposes that align with the study's purpose. Here, the researchers selected participants who would constructively describe their experiences and their learning from the CoP. It would also have been important to choose five participants willing to share their experiences during the research study to get as much qualitative information as possible.

2.3 Research Instrument

The survey questionnaire used in the quantitative part of the study was a descriptive survey instrument aimed at evaluating the satisfaction level of the participants of the Community of Practice (CoP) implemented in Barangay Nagtenga, Sta. Cruz, Ilocos Sur. This questionnaire was designed to seek participants' opinions on the different aspects of the CoP, such as the resource speakers, quality of service, and experience. In the qualitative aspect of the research, a semi-structured interview questionnaire was developed to measure the impact and learning of the participants from the CoP. It employs questions that require the participant to produce elaborate answers while ensuring that the interviews follow a standard format. This question directs the interviews and focuses the issue up for discussion. The researchers then developed related questions and encouraging probes about the identified basic issue.

The validity of the survey instrument was determined through an open discussion with the barangay officials before the actual use of the CoP. This dialogue was intended to ensure that the purpose of the program was understood and that the questions in the survey were appropriate for the participants. Thus, with assistance from local officials, the researchers could increase the validity of the respective survey by adapting the content relative to the community setting and expectations. The reliability of the survey questionnaires was 0.88, while the validity score was 4.93, thus indicating that the research instruments collected the details and knowledge that would enable the response to the research question. The validity and reliability scores suggest that the instruments used in the research had a face and internal validity and reliability.

2.4 Data Gathering Procedure

The data collected during the interview and basic survey were codified. The narratives were thematically analyzed. According to Bengtsson (2016), thematic analysis is a research that identifies the presence of specific

words, concepts, or ideas within qualitative data. Then, the measurable data were tallied to determine the level of satisfaction of the participants in the CoP.

2.5 Ethical Considerations

To ensure ethical research techniques, various factors were considered. First, the study requested informed permission, in which participants were informed about the goal of the research, their rights, and the expected results. Second, confidentiality was maintained, as participants' names and identifying information were not shared during the study. Third, voluntary involvement was highlighted, with participants having the option to withdraw from the study at any time. Finally, vulnerable participants, particularly those suffering from mental illnesses, were protected. The ethical concerns were applied to preserve participants' rights, ensure the study's integrity, and show respect for the participants.

3.0 Results and Discussion

3.1 Satisfaction of Participants

Establishing Communities of Practice (CoP) in Barangay Nagtenga has been instrumental in bridging the education gap among out-of-school youth, matching theoretical skills with practical applications. This section presents the study's significant findings along with their implications and interpretations based on the data gathered from the written survey and interview among the community of practice participants. Table 1 shows the data on the level of satisfaction of the participants in the CoP conducted at Barangay Nagtenga, Sta. Cruz, Ilocos Sur.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of the Level of satisfaction of the participants

Indicators	Mean	Descriptive Rating
A. Resource Speakers		
1. The presentation and explanation of the topic was clear.	4.67	Excellent
2. The scope and content of the topic was adequate and useful.	4.78	Excellent
3. The speakers showed mastery of the topic presented and answered queries among the participants.	4.58	Excellent
4. Participation and interactions were encouraged.	4.47	Excellent
5. The speakers showed a willingness to assist the participants.	5.00	Excellent
Sub-mean	4.70	Excellent
B. Quality of Service		
6. The objectives of the CoP were met.	4.89	Excellent
7. The CoP increased my motivation and interest in product development, entrepreneurship, and education.	4.83	Excellent
8. The venue of the CoP was conducive to learning.	4.23	Excellent
9. The length of the CoP was sufficient.	4.28	Excellent
10. The CoP was relevant to my needs.	4.92	Excellent
Sub-mean	4.63	Excellent
Average Mean	4.67	Excellent

Resource Speakers

The participants rated the resource speakers very positively, with a mean score of 4.70, indicating excellent satisfaction. The speakers were perceived to have clear presentations, mastery of the topics, and willingness to assist participants. This suggests that the speakers effectively delivered the content and engaged with the audience. The study corroborates the study conducted by Wang and Hsu (2015), which states that engaging and knowledgeable speakers positively influence participant satisfaction and knowledge retention in any program. Similarly, Stephenson (2014), studying the relationship between trust and knowledge sharing at the workplace, asserts that knowledgeable speakers are essential to the learning process. As shown in Table 1, areas such as resource speakers, which are largely influenced by the speakers' performance, can significantly improve participant satisfaction and knowledge gained based on average scores.

Quality of Service

The quality of service provided during the CoP also received high ratings, with a mean of 4.63, reflecting excellent satisfaction. Participants felt that the objectives of the CoP were met, it increased their motivation and interest, and the event was relevant to their needs. However, the venue's conducive nature for learning received a slightly lower score, indicating a potential area for improvement. The results confirmed the study by Parasuraman et al. (1988) on service quality in educational institutions, demonstrating that meeting participant needs and expectations leads to higher satisfaction levels and positive outcomes. Additionally, Vayachuta, Ratana-Ubol, and

Soopanyo (2016) investigated the conditions of 'out-of-school' children and youth, underlining the importance of quality services to support lifelong education models. Positive feedback on service quality in the CoP corresponds with the significance of meeting participant needs and expectations to achieve better satisfaction levels.

Overall Satisfaction

The average mean satisfaction level of the participants was 4.67, which falls within the "Excellent" category. This indicates that, on average, participants were highly satisfied with the CoP. The positive feedback on both the resource speakers and the quality of service suggests that the CoP was well-received and beneficial to the participants. Furthermore, effective resource speakers and quality service enhance participant satisfaction, engagement, and learning experiences in community practice programs.

Kimble and Hildreth (2015) talked about the function of Communities of Practice in developing learning environments for educators. Their observations back up the findings about the CoP's applicability to the participants' requirements and the drive it fostered in them to pursue product development and entrepreneurial opportunities. Furthermore, Tenny, Brannan, and Brannan (2022) discussed qualitative research methods, emphasizing the importance of in-depth interviews for understanding participant experiences. The findings allowed for a more in-depth investigation of participant satisfaction and recommendations within the CoP.

3.2 Impact of Communities of Practice

The data gathered were treated using coding and bracketing and were organized into themes. Four themes emerged: 1.) Knowledge Acquisition, 2.) Skill Development, 3.) Transfer of Learning to Practice, and 4.) Entrepreneurial Management.

Theme 1. Knowledge Acquisition:

The participants uniformly stated that their participation in the community of practice enhanced their knowledge. They mentioned the exchange of ideas, information sharing, and exposure to different views as critical components in developing their understanding of how to start a business. Some participants remarked:

"Being part of this community of practice has opened my eyes to new concepts and techniques that I wouldn't have learned alone."

"Joining in this activity made me more conscious and opened me to a lot of discussions, and in return, I was able to share my findings and equip myself with new information that I have never thought I needed. It was like having a treasure that could teach us everything we need."

"The CoP allowed me to embrace new perspectives within a specific subject, understand the context from different angles, and accept new approaches to entrepreneurial practices. I was learning not only new concepts but also discovering new possibilities within myself."

This implies that the CoP is an effective medium where out-of-school youth might engage in the continuation of learning and its expansion. This assertion is affirmed by Stephenson's (2014) study on the influence of trust on the optimization of knowledge sharing among communities of practice. Her research outlines how trust behavior affects the acquisition and sharing of knowledge in collaborative settings among people. Furthermore, these experiences are in line with the elements of KMS proposed by Semertzaki (2011) on learning organization environment in learning organization, where KM is conceptualized as resulting in building a learning organization environment through expertise sharing which is best manifested by one of the participants' statements about being able to understand some course concepts and then applying those ideas in practice. In addition, the narratives are further corroborated by the study conducted by Santos et al. (2020) on strengthening vocational skills within CoPs, highlighting the relevance of CoPs for developing pragmatic education meaningfully in line with actual practice settings.

Theme 2. Skill Development

The interviews revealed that the participants' skills improved significantly as a result of their community of practice involvement. Participants commended the practical learning opportunities provided by the community

of practice, including technical knowledge and soft skills such as communication, sales marketing, and teamwork. Some participant shared:

"Through hands-on workshops and mentorship sessions, I've developed my skills in budget costing and product making, which has been invaluable in my personal development."

"Participation in the activities in the CoP enabled me to enhance my skills."

"Through the CoP, I was able to gain experiences that enabled me to translate the knowledge I gained into real-life lessons and therefore I was also able to gain confidence and competence at managing my future small business effectively."

This finding corresponds with previous research, which has demonstrated that communities of practice are ideal venues for skill development and learning through practical experiences. This emphasizes the value of hands-on learning experiences within communities of practice for skill development. This is in line with Kimble and Hildreth (2015), who investigate the use of communities of practice in educational settings. Their research focuses on how communities of practice help educators build skills and transfer information, providing insights into the communities' broader implications.

The interactive sessions and collaborative projects within the CoP fostered a dynamic learning environment conducive to experimentation, learning from mistakes, and professional growth. This is in line with Kwandrans' (2020) research on motivation for re-engaging out-of-school youth using vocational courses. As such, Kwandrans most probably highlights the role of development-based experiences, which bolsters the skills and competencies of the disadvantaged, and promotes mechanisms of dynamic learning environments that are nurturing. Similarly, the findings regarding the role of CoPs in developing and implementing innovative ideas can be supported by the literature; specifically, McDermott and Archibald (2016) studied the informal network for the skill development and innovation of knowledge workers and found that informal networks have great importance for the skill development and to foster innovation.

Theme 3. Transfer of Learning to Practice

A common theme among participants was the smooth incorporation of community learning into their everyday lives. They provided examples of how they will use the fresh strategies, ideas, and insights learned from CoP discussions and workshops to address real-world difficulties in their own lives. Some participants emphasized the practical importance of the community's learning initiatives, stating:

"The knowledge I've acquired here isn't just theoretical; it's immediately applicable to me as an out-of-school youth, and it would greatly serve as another source of income."

"The CoP was not only an avenue through which one can learn and gain knowledge, but also engage in the application of such knowledge. In response to this, I will apply all the various ideas and strategies proposed in the sessions for the improvement of entrepreneurial goals right now"

"I will apply such new approaches and best practices in practice based on the CoP lessons"

This implies that communities of practice not only improve learning, but also help people apply their knowledge and abilities in real-world situations. This is in accordance with Trayner and Trayner's (2015) research, which emphasizes the necessity of applying learning from communities of practice to real-world settings. Furthermore, it expanded on the idea of learning within communities of practice. Their findings highlight the role of boundaries and identity in structuring learning experiences and knowledge acquisition within communities.

In line with the participants' statements on applying the strategies they have learned in the CoP to advance their business operations, aligns with Bengtsson's (2016) study on how to plan and perform qualitative research with a view of assessing the practical application of the gained knowledge is applicable. This reinforcement supports their capacity to apply the learned theoretical concepts to real-life solutions, it also proves the positive results of CoPs as it assists in bridging the theory-practice divide. Additionally, the participants' perceptions that they acquire increased confidence in the employment of new concepts and approaches in their businesses as they

participate in CoP are also similar to the study by Vayachuta et al. (2016) that focused on the development of lifelong education models for out-of-school children and youths. This reinforcement underlines the value of the practical learning paradigms that CoPs present in improving issue-resolution capabilities and cultivating adaptability, learning, and development.

Theme 4. Entrepreneurial Management

Remarkably, entrepreneurial management emerged as an essential theme among the participants. The participants shared stories about how their participation in the community of practice helped them acquire an entrepreneurial mindset, whether they were running small businesses or pursuing innovative concepts. They commended the CoP for creating an environment that promotes risk-taking, creativity, and strategic thinking. Some participant described the transforming impact on their entrepreneurial journey, as they stated:

"I've learned how to identify opportunities, manage resources effectively, and adapt to changing market dynamics."

"CoP helped build an entrepreneurial personality within me, it sharpened my abilities to think out of the box, take calculated risks, and grab the opportunities existing in the business environment."

"Engaging in the CoP also provided me with a better understanding of my business and enabled me to develop confidence in the improved provision of services in a rapidly changing environment."

By implication, communities of practice can play an important role in developing entrepreneurial skills and mindsets among participants. McDermott and Archibald (2010) investigated how firms might use informal networks, such as communities of practice, to drive innovation and entrepreneurial efforts. Their findings emphasized the strategic value of communities of practice in fostering entrepreneurial thinking and knowledge exchange. The participant's positive statements about the CoP boosted confidence to explore change, and readiness to respond to market forces corroborates the assertions of Reyes and Cruz (2019) who noted that creating CoPs nurtures entrepreneurial aptitude among disadvantaged youths. The amenability of peers and mentors to idea generation, and the willingness to try out new strategies or accept prior failure also fits the principles of CoPs and the goal of providing clients with a framework that will help them adapt and learn about the business world.

This is similar to the research conducted by Birkinshaw and Haas (2017), which examined the concept of intelligent failure and its role in encouraging innovation inside businesses. Their perspectives on learning from mistakes within communities of practice are consistent with the participants' experiences of risk-taking and creativity fostered by the community of practice in *Barangay Nagtenga*. The narratives obtained from interviews with participants of the communities of practice in *Barangay Nagtenga, Sta. Cruz, Ilocos Sur*, provides a vivid representation of information enrichment, skill development, practical application, and business empowerment. These themes not only represent the participants' collective experiences, but also highlight the value of community-driven learning and collaboration in promoting personal and professional growth in the local context.

4.0 Conclusion

With the salient findings of the study, it can be concluded that the community of practice in *Barangay Nagtenga, Sta. Cruz, Ilocos Sur*, was a success that benefited both the participants and the community. Participants in the community of practice in the said area were Very Satisfied with the resource speakers, the quality of service, and overall experience. Furthermore, the community of practice helped participants acquire knowledge, develop skills, apply what they had learned, and run their businesses. Furthermore, the community of practice's practical learning opportunities greatly helped participants' personal and professional development, and positive feedback on entrepreneurial mindset development within the community of practice highlights its role in fostering participant innovation and strategic thinking. As a result, it is highly recommended that community of practice efforts be sustained and expanded in order to reach a larger audience and improve learning experiences. Furthermore, there must be regular evaluations of community of practice programs. Continuously adapt and redefine the program based on the evolving needs and feedback of the participating OSY. Gathering participant feedback and integrating suggestions for improvement can help to guarantee that the learning experiences provided are continuously improved.

5.0 Contributions of Authors

Alfred P. Pantaleon- writing and editing the research article, Chester Allan F. Bautista- editing and enhancing the research article, ZJ G. Villanueva- data analysis of the study, Tricia L. Gundran- writing and revision editing of the research article, and Arrianne Michelle F. Fabro- initiated the conduct of the study and supervising the holistic aspect of the research article.

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7.0 Conflict of Interests

The researchers don't have any conflict of interest to declare.

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