

Struggles Towards Financial Success of Out-of-School Youth: A Phenomenological Inquiry

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to explore and understand the lived experiences of out-of-school youth who did not pursue higher education but were eventually successful in the business and financial fields. The researcher employed a qualitative research design, specifically a phenomenological design. Participants were purposively selected and interviewed in-depth using a validated interview guide. The themes extracted from the lived experiences of out-of-school youth show how they confronted youthful burdens, engaged in work-driven survival, pursued supplementary entrepreneurial endeavors, and gradually advanced their enterprises as they worked toward financial success. Their journey was marked by various struggles, financial, emotional, and situational, yet they continued moving forward. The themes that emerged from their coping mechanisms highlight their resilience amid hardship, reliance on assistance-driven resilience, commitment to disciplined entrepreneurial practices, and willingness to make faith-driven sacrifices. These were expressed through self-upskilling using internet resources, adapting to changing demands, seeking support from others, and holding on to their faith in God. Meanwhile, the insights they shared with the academe and community emphasize the importance of diversifying income strategies, practicing enduring success values, upholding prudent financial management, promoting skill development, and fostering value formation as keys to achieving financial success.

“Keywords:” Education: Out-of-School Youth: Sociology: Financially Successful: Phenomenology: Philippines

INTRODUCTION

The global surge of out-of-school youth (OSY) highlighted a critical gap in access to education as a universal right. Children and adolescents from low-income households often faced financial barriers that prevented them from attending school. Research indicated that adolescents not enrolled in school were more likely to engage in substance use and criminal activities due to the absence of structured routines and positive role models (National Institute on Drug Abuse, 2020).

Globally, reported that approximately 258 million children and youth were out of school, many of whom were vulnerable to economic and social exclusion UNESCO (2020). Limited education restricted employment opportunities, perpetuated poverty, and undermined personal development. To address these challenges, strategies such as expanding access to quality education, providing vocational training, and promoting community engagement were essential (UNICEF, 2019).

In the Philippines, out of school youth remained a pressing national issue, with roughly 11 million individuals aged 5 to 24 not attending school (Philippine Statistics Authority). Most were aged 20 to 24, with financial difficulties cited as a significant reason for dropping out. The 2017 Annual Poverty Indicators Survey reported that 17.9 percent of OSY left school due to the cost of tuition, uniforms, and transportation. Many were also compelled to work to support their families, further limiting their ability to return to education. These economic challenges contributed to long-term poverty and social disadvantage (ILO, 2018; World Bank, 2019). This trend

was particularly evident in regions such as the Zamboanga Peninsula, where poverty rates reached 24 percent, and in Tagum City, where dropout rates remained high despite programs like the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) and DSWD's Assistance to Individuals in Crisis Situations (AICS). These interventions, though helpful, often failed to cover all educational costs or address everyday challenges, leaving many youth at risk of continued exclusion.

Despite these obstacles, many out of school youth found practical ways to improve their livelihoods. Some engaged in small businesses, such as selling snacks, offering laundry services, or mobile loading. In contrast, others participated in Alternative Learning System (ALS) programs or TESDA technical-vocational courses to gain job-ready skills without the high cost of formal education. Local government units and community organizations also provided free livelihood training and startup assistance, demonstrating the resilience and determination of out of school youth. Enhancing these programs through mentorship, online business training, and community-based financial literacy initiatives could have further expanded income opportunities and promoted sustainable development (Torres, 2022).

Most existing studies on out of school youth relied on quantitative data, such as dropout rates and economic factors, which provided important statistics but often overlooked the lived experiences of youth who had overcome educational and financial challenges (Youmans, et al., 2023). There was a need for qualitative research that explored their journeys, challenges, and sources of strength. This study addressed this gap through a phenomenological approach, offering insights that numerical data alone could not capture (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Additionally, there was limited understanding of the long-term socio-emotional impacts of educational exclusion, particularly in low-income settings (UNICEF, 2021). Research that examined mental health, identity formation, and resilience was essential for designing more holistic support programs for out of school youth (Save the Children, 2020).

Upon completing the study, we planned to share the findings first with the local community in New Corella, Davao del Norte, through meetings and community forums. We also aimed to present the results at local research congresses and to relevant government agencies, such as the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD). Furthermore, we intended to pursue opportunities for national or international presentations to reach a wider audience. We also plan to publish the paper in the school journal, and if possible, submit it to an international journal for broader dissemination and impact.

This research aimed to gain valuable insights from these experiences, which could be shared with others, contributing to a broader understanding of the phenomenon. It was also the study's goal for policymakers to review the government's educational financial assistance and to use this paper as a baseline.

Research Questions

1. What are the lived experiences of the out-of-school youth Individuals in their journey towards financial success?
2. How do the participants cope with the challenges they experienced in their journey towards financial success?
3. What insights can the participants share with the academe and the community?

Theoretical Lens

This study was anchored by Glen H. Elder Jr. (1998) Life Course Theory, which suggested that the timing of life events and the social and historical contexts individuals experience shaped their developmental paths. For out-of-school youth, the transition from formal schooling to early adult responsibilities, such as entering the workforce or providing financial support for family members, represents a critical turning point that redirects their anticipated life course and contributes to economic challenges. The application of this theory clarifies the study's findings by demonstrating that the financial resilience, coping mechanisms, and work-oriented survival strategies of out-of-school youth are direct responses to these earlier than expected transitions out of education

into adulthood. Their shift to income generating activities, adoption of disciplined financial practices, and development of resilience are interpreted as adaptive responses to leaving school early and encountering constrained opportunities. This illustrated how specific past transitions now informed their current strategies for achieving stability and success.

Delimitation and Limitation of the Study

This study on studying out-of-school youth presented several challenges and limitations that researchers must navigate. These limitations happened from the complexities of the issue itself, the populations involved, and the methods used to gather data. One of the main limitations in studying out-of-school youth is the difficulty in accessing this population. Many out-of-school youth are from marginalized or vulnerable groups, such as those living in poverty, facing homelessness, or residing in areas with limited infrastructure.

These youth may be hard to reach due to their transient living situations or their lack of stable contact information. This presented challenges for researchers in establishing communication and building trust. Without a straightforward way to identify and contact these individuals, collecting accurate and representative data becomes significantly more difficult.

Additionally, self-report bias is a standard limitation in studies examining the financial struggles of out-of-school youth. Since much of the information comes from interviews or surveys, participants may not fully disclose the reasons for their disengagement from school. Youth may be reluctant to discuss sensitive issues such as family income, financial stress, or side jobs due to fear of judgment or reprisal. This can result in an incomplete or biased understanding of the factors that contribute to their dropout, leading to less reliable data.

Another challenge lies in the diversity of experiences among out-of-school youth. This population is not homogeneous, and the reasons for disengagement across the seven schools can vary widely by demographic group. Factors such as socioeconomic status, ethnicity, gender, and geographic location all shape the experiences of these youth.

As such, a study that attempts to generalize findings across all out-of-school youth may miss important nuances within specific subgroups. Researcher must be cautious in designing their studies to account for these variations and avoid oversimplification.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study utilized a qualitative research design, particularly a phenomenological approach. According to Dangal (2021), qualitative research focuses more on words and personal experiences than on numbers or statistics. It explores how people make sense of specific issues or situations in their lives. In this type of research, the questions may evolve as the study progresses, and data are often collected in participants' natural environments. The gathered information is then analyzed by identifying patterns or themes, starting with specific details and moving toward broader insights. Unlike structured, numbers-based research, the final report in a qualitative study follows a more flexible format and aims to capture the deeper meaning behind what people share.

In the context of this study, a descriptive phenomenological design, also known as transcendental phenomenology, was used, founded by Edmund Husserl (1859–1938). Descriptive phenomenology investigates the lived experience or phenomenon as directly experienced by individuals, seeking to understand the meaning and structure of those experiences. It is beneficial for exploring real-world problems and is considered the most appropriate approach for examining the experiences of successful out-of-school youth (Creswell, 2019). A phenomenological approach allows for in-depth analysis through textual (what the participants say) and structural (how they experience it) descriptions conveyed through their lived experiences. Through the sharing of personal stories, a rich and detailed understanding of the phenomenon can be revealed (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

This study aimed to explore and understand the real-life financial struggles and successes of out-of-school youth, not just in terms of numbers, but also through their personal stories, decisions, and lived experiences. A qualitative research design is best suited for this because it allows the researcher to capture deep, meaningful insights that cannot be measured solely through surveys or statistics. By focusing on how these individuals have overcome challenges and achieved financial success, the study provides a human-centered understanding of a complex social issue, something only qualitative research can effectively uncover.

Research Participants

Participants in this qualitative study were 13 successful out-of-school youth (OSY) selected using criterion-based purposive sampling. These criteria were: (1) completion of basic education (elementary and/or junior high school); (2) non-participation in any higher education or beyond basic education; (3) independent establishment of a financially stable business or livelihood; and (4) recognition within their communities as financially independent and self-supporting, no longer living with their parents. Only individuals who satisfied all four conditions were included in the study. Furthermore, in selecting participants, the research used snowball sampling (Coleman, 1958; Goodman, 1961). Snowball sampling, also known as chain-referral sampling, is a nonprobability sampling technique in which existing study participants help recruit future participants from among their acquaintances. This method was beneficial when dealing with hard-to-reach or hidden populations, such as individuals with rare diseases or those belonging to marginalized groups. The sample group grows like a rolling snowball as participants refer to others who meet the study criteria. Moreover, 13 participants were selected and engaged in in-depth interviews (IDI), which continued until data saturation was achieved, in line with Creswell and Creswell's (2018) guidance for phenomenological studies.

While the participants were considered out-of-school youth, they are not automatically classified as a vulnerable population under ethical research guidelines. However, given that they have not pursued formal higher education and may possess varying levels of literacy or awareness of research procedures, the research team considered them as potentially vulnerable with respect to informed consent and comprehension of their rights as participants. To address this, enhanced ethical safeguards were implemented, including the use of clear, simple language in all informed consent documents. In addition, a verbal briefing and Q&A session is conducted before participation to ensure a complete understanding of the study's purpose, voluntary nature, and withdrawal rights. Moreover, the provision of ongoing consent allows participants to pause or stop the interview at any time.

If participants experience emotional distress during interviews, particularly while discussing past struggles or personal hardships, the following support and referral protocol was implemented. A short debriefing session was held after each interview to allow participants to express any lingering emotions and to normalize their experiences. Furthermore, if a participant exhibits signs of significant distress, they will be offered referral to local psychosocial support services or Barangay health centers that provide mental health or counseling support. A directory of such services was prepared in advance. Moreover, the study follows the Institutional Research Ethics Committee's guidelines, ensuring that participant well-being is prioritized throughout the research process.

Data Sources

The primary data source in this study was in-depth interviews (IDIs). We developed a semi-structured questionnaire (guide questions) that three experts in their respective fields validated. In-depth interviews are a qualitative method that allows the researcher to collect rich, detailed, and meaningful data by engaging directly with participants. This method was ideal for understanding the personal journeys and financial experiences of successful out-of-school youth.

Moreover, to collect data from participants, we used open-ended questions that explored their thoughts, experiences, challenges, and perspectives. One of the key advantages of IDI is the opportunity to probe deeper during the conversation, enabling clarification, elaboration, and the discovery of new insights. As explained by Rutledge and Hogg (2020), this approach provides a more comprehensive understanding of the participants' attitudes, feelings, and lived experiences. It also creates a more comfortable, private environment for participants, encouraging openness and honesty, especially when discussing personal topics such as finances and

life struggles.

To ensure the accuracy and completeness of the data, we informed the participants that we used snowball sampling, in which we asked students for recommendations or for any youth they knew who are now financially successful and have their own businesses. We first gave the guide questions to the participants and obtained their permission to record all interviews. All interviews and discussions were collected, reviewed, and approved by the research panel. Alongside these recordings, we took field notes, written observations, and reflections made during and after the interviews. Field notes were captured of non-verbal cues, emotional responses, context, and other details that may not be evident in the audio recordings. These notes served as an important tool for data triangulation and supported a more thorough and credible analysis.

Data Analysis

In this study, qualitative data were analyzed using the thematic analysis approach outlined by Braun and Clarke (2019). The process began with data familiarization, where the researcher thoroughly reviewed interview transcripts and field notes to develop a deep understanding of the participants' narratives. It was followed by coding, during which meaningful segments were labeled based on recurring patterns or ideas relevant to the participants' financial journeys. These codes were organized into broader themes that directly address the research questions and reflect the lived experiences of successful out-of-school youth. Thematic analysis allows the researcher to interpret these patterns within the real-life context of the participants, particularly focusing on how they overcame educational and financial barriers. The results are presented in a clear narrative format and are supported by direct quotes from participants, giving voice to their experiences and emphasizing key insights.

Trustworthiness of the Study

To ensure the trustworthiness of this study, we must maintain honesty and consistency throughout the research process. Graneheim and Lundman (2004) explain that some level of interpretation is always involved in qualitative analysis, so we need to verify the accuracy and confirmability of the data carefully. Confirmability means that the findings truly reflect what participants shared, not what we assumed or interpreted without support. It can be difficult to clearly explain how concepts are formed, especially when the data are poorly organized. To address this, we reviewed the data multiple times to ensure our interpretations were accurate and supported by participants' responses.

Credibility. In this study, we prioritized credibility as a key aspect of trustworthiness. Credibility refers to the confidence in the truth of the findings, which is essential in qualitative research. It reflects the extent to which the results accurately represent the participants' experiences and perspectives. According to Polit and Beck (2014), credibility is the most important criterion for establishing the truth value of a study, achieved through rigorous research methods, transparent data collection, and thorough analysis. To ensure credibility, we applied systematic, well-established research procedures, maintained clear documentation of data collection, and conducted an in-depth analysis. These efforts ensure that the findings are grounded in the participants' views and supported by the evidence gathered during the study.

Transferability. In this study, we recognized the importance of allowing others to determine whether the findings can be applied to other settings or groups. In qualitative research, it is not the goal to generalize results as in quantitative studies, but rather to provide sufficient detail so that others can judge the relevance of the findings to their own contexts. According to Trochim (2006), transferability is strengthened when the researcher provides a thorough description of the study context and the key assumptions that guided the research.

To enhance transferability, we provided detailed accounts of the research context, participant characteristics, and the methodology used. By clearly outlining the criteria for selecting successful out-of-school youth, we ensured that others could understand how the findings may apply to similar populations or settings.

Dependability. In this study, we recognized the importance of consistency and stability in the research process. In qualitative research, dependability means that the results remain reliable over time and under similar conditions. It shows how well the study can be repeated with similar outcomes. According to McLeod (2024),

dependability is supported by clear, consistent methods for collecting and analyzing data. To ensure dependability, we followed systematic procedures throughout the study. We documented all steps clearly, including interview guides, coding methods, and decisions made during the analysis. It will make the research process transparent and allow others to review or replicate the study if needed.

Confirmability. In this study, we acknowledged the importance of ensuring that the findings are shaped by participants' responses rather than by our own opinions or assumptions. In qualitative research, confirmability focuses on the neutrality and objectivity of the results. According to Laprie et al. (2004), confirmability is achieved when the research process is transparent and can be reviewed or repeated by others. To ensure confirmability, we kept detailed records of all research decisions and of how data were handled. It includes documenting how themes and conclusions were developed from the data. By maintaining this audit trail, we ensured that the results are based on actual evidence and can be verified by other researchers.

Role of the Researcher

In this study, we sought permission from the UIC Dean of the Graduate Program to conduct the research. Once approval was granted, we approached the selected participants and explained the study's purpose and their involvement. We asked for their verbal consent to participate and share their experiences through interviews.

Before the interviews, we ensured that each participant signed an informed consent form. This form confirmed that they understood their participation was voluntary, that they could withdraw at any time without consequences, and that their responses would be kept confidential. The signed consent forms were collected before the interviews to ensure participants were fully informed.

As the researchers, we guided the participants through the process, explaining the study's context, the purpose of the research questions, and how confidentiality was maintained. We also provided contact information if they had any follow-up questions.

During the interviews, we recorded conversations with their consent using a personal recording device. Afterward, we transferred the audio files to our password-protected computer to ensure privacy and data security. The recordings were stored securely and used exclusively for this research.

Throughout this study, our role was to lead the data collection process, ensuring that ethical standards were upheld and that participants felt respected and comfortable. We carefully analyzed the data, ensuring that the findings accurately reflected the participants' experiences and remained confidential.

Ethical Considerations

This research was committed to upholding the highest ethical standards in the conduct of human participant research. As part of this commitment, the study was submitted to the University of the Immaculate Conception Research Ethics Committee (UIC-REC) for ethical review and approval prior to data collection. We ensured that all procedures complied with established ethical guidelines, including obtaining informed consent, protecting participant confidentiality, minimizing potential risks, and providing appropriate support in case of emotional discomfort.

We were academically trained in qualitative research methods and had undergone coursework in research writing, data collection, and ethical research practices as part of the undergraduate program. These foundational skills were further strengthened through close collaboration with the research adviser, who provided expert guidance throughout each phase of the study from proposal development to final analysis. Additionally, we actively engaged with the assigned panel members, incorporating their feedback to ensure the methodological soundness and ethical integrity of the research. This collaborative approach ensured that the study was conducted with rigor, ethical sensitivity, and scholarly responsibility.

Moreover, as a researcher affiliated with the University of the Immaculate Conception (UIC), we had access to a range of institutional resources that supported the successful completion of this study. These included the UIC

Library, which offered extensive collections of academic journals, books, theses, and online databases essential for literature review and data gathering. Additionally, we were able to use institutional facilities, including computer laboratories, internet access, consultation spaces, and research assistance services provided by the Research and Publication Office. These resources ensured that the study was conducted with academic rigor and in alignment with the standards of scholarly research.

RESULTS

Lived Experiences of the Out-of-School Youth Individuals in their Journey towards Financial Success

Shown in Table 1 are the core themes drawn from the lived experiences of out-of-school youth (OSY) as they pursued financial stability. Participants described early hardships—such as early motherhood, family caregiving responsibilities, and limited parental support—which forced them to prioritize daily survival over formal schooling. Many took on low-paying and physically demanding jobs while managing small side livelihoods. Over time, these informal income activities gradually developed into micro-enterprises, including sari-sari stores, repair services, and small trading ventures that required minimal capital.

Table 1 Lived Experiences of the Out-of-School Youth Individuals in their Journey towards Financial Success.

Essential Themes	Core Ideas
Confronting Youthful Burdens	Some became parents or married young. They belong to large families. They lack parental financial support, and had difficulty meeting daily needs
Engaging Work-Driven Survival	Endured hard, labor-intensive jobs with low salaries. They took on different jobs such as TESDA-related work, or being a machine operator to earn a living. Engaged in farming, coconut climbing, construction work, factory jobs, laundry, and other manual labor to survive.
Pursuing Supplementary Entrepreneurial Pursuits	Engaging in side businesses alongside regular work. Business was treated as a fallback or supplementary source of income. Slowly building income and reinvesting into business.
Undertaking Gradual Enterprise Advancement	Turned to selling and trying different forms of livelihood. They started small businesses (sari-sari stores, rice trading, milk tea, repair shops, etc.). They started with minimal capital some as low as ₱1,500. Started with businesses like store, salary pawn/ Pawn their ATM

The Coping Mechanisms of the Participants on the Challenges they Experienced in their Journey towards Financial Success

As shown in Table 2, the coping mechanisms participants used to overcome challenges on their journey to

financial success reflected resilience, adaptability, and strategic decision-making. They employed a combination of emotional regulation, problem-solving skills, and seeking support from mentors or peers. These strategies enabled them to manage stress, make informed financial choices, and sustain their commitment to long-term goals.

Table 2 The Coping Mechanisms of the Participants on the Challenges they Experienced in their Journey towards Financial Success

Essential Themes	Core Ideas
Resilience amid Hardship	<p>They work harder, and take on extra jobs</p> <p>Maintaining a hopeful outlook.</p> <p>Staying calm, not overthinking problems</p> <p>Family encouragement and moral support helped them continue despite hardships</p>
Assistance-Driven Resilience	<p>Borrowing from friends, acquaintances, or credit sources.</p> <p>Turning to groups, cooperatives, lending institutions, and social organizations for loans and assistance.</p> <p>Support from government agencies and programs (e.g., DTL, IP programs, 4Ps) that provided capital or aid.</p>
Disciplined Entrepreneurial Practices	<p>Saving, and avoiding unnecessary debts.</p> <p>They maintain good service and gain loyal customers.</p> <p>Dividing money for specific expenses, prioritizing bills, and balancing funds for personal, household, and business use.</p> <p>Making sure capital is used productively.</p>
Faith-Driven Sacrifices	<p>Their children and siblings served as inspiration.</p> <p>Faith in God as sources of strength and guidance in pursuing success.</p> <p>Their main drive was to send their children to school.</p> <p>Relied on prayer and faith in God as a source of strength.</p>

Insights Shared by the Participants to the Academe and Community as regards their Journey towards Financial Success

As shown in Table 3, participants' insights for the academic community regarding their journey toward financial success reflected several key themes. They emphasized the importance of diversifying income streams for stability during economic uncertainty and highlighted enduring success practices such as perseverance, consistency, and resilience as essential for sustaining entrepreneurial growth. Discipline in managing and reinvesting resources was viewed as critical for long-term sustainability, while continuous skill development enabled them to adapt to market changes and remain competitive. Participants also underscored the role of value formation, noting that entrepreneurship extended beyond profit and required responsibility, integrity, and community-oriented decision-making. Altogether, these insights offered a holistic perspective on financial success grounded in strategic, disciplined, skill-driven, and value-based approaches.

Table 3 Insights Shared by the Participants to the Academe and Community as regards their Journey towards Financial Success.

Essential Themes	Core Ideas
Diversify Income Strategies	Exploring multiple sources of income. Do not rely on one income source; pursue business, farming, or side hustles. Utilize and enhance one's skills to support financial growth.
Practice Enduring Success Values	Strong willpower and courage despite doubts. Hard work and persistence as a core value. Maintain a positive outlook and think long-term. Embrace second chances after failures. Practice humility, adaptability, and willingness to learn. Grabbing opportunities despite setbacks.
Uphold Prudent Financial Management	Mindful spending as a secret to success. Avoid debt, as it can cause financial instability. Protect business capital and avoid using it for personal expenses.
Promoting Skill Development	Local government support (scholarships, free tuition, transport, summer jobs) can ease financial burdens. Training and skill-building programs (TESDA, technical skills like welding, repair, hairdressing, cooking) empower youth to earn. Provide community projects, summer jobs, livelihood support, and training to engage youth productively.
Fostering Value Formation	Motivate and mentor the youth about life's hardships and the importance of discipline. Family to support their children's education. Guide the youth to prevent early mistakes (e.g., early pregnancy, vices).

DISCUSSION

Lived Experiences of the Out-of-School Youth Individuals in their Journey towards Financial Success

Early responsibilities, socioeconomic pressure, and the need to support family welfare characterized the lived experiences of out-of-school youth (OSY) in their quest for financial success. Confronting youthful burdens such as poverty, limited educational opportunities, and unstable home environments often forces OSY to enter the workforce prematurely. Scholars like De Castro (2020) and Miller (2019) emphasize that economic hardship often shapes youth's decision to disengage from formal schooling, pushing them toward informal labor as a survival mechanism. These conditions underscore how socioeconomic structures influence the life trajectories of vulnerable youth, especially in communities where education is not strongly accessible or financially feasible.

Literature strongly aligns with these findings of De Castro (2020) notes that OSY often bear financial obligations

typically reserved for adults, blurring the line between adolescence and adulthood. In a similar vein, Miller's (2019) examination of youth labour patterns reveals how marginalized youth manage to survive by becoming resourceful and adaptable, frequently depending on low-paying jobs that offer short-term financial relief but little long-term stability. These studies affirm that financial success for out of school youth is not a linear journey but a gradual and adaptive response to systemic barriers.

Confronting Youthful Burdens. These essential themes mean that, at a young age, participants have early adulting responsibilities amid family pressure and obligations. This finding is related to the study by Kowalski et al. (2014), who suggested that early hardships could drive personal growth and strategic coping, and to the Office of the Education Council (2020), which emphasized that formative burdens often shaped young people's motivations and learning capacities. Similarly, Farrington (2012) highlighted that exposure to challenges influenced perseverance and emotional resilience, reinforcing the idea that adversity, while difficult, could foster both personal and educational development.

In addition, the result aligned with Fraser and Terzian (2023), who identified poverty, limited access to education, and psychosocial stress as key contributors to the multifaceted disadvantages faced by out of school youth, highlighting the structural conditions that constrained their opportunities. In line with this, Pavlenkov (2020) suggested that personal narratives of hardship informed economic decision-making and resilience, reinforcing the notion that adversity not only imposed constraints but also shaped adaptive strategies.

Engaging Work-Driven Survival. This essential theme implied that they are seeing and determined despite limited resources and looping opportunities. This emerging theme is consistent with the study by Kuzior et al. (2021), who noted that individuals frequently engaged in such labor due to structural economic constraints. Similarly, it is related to Baumeister & Leary (1995), who describe that, beyond practical outcomes, participants also reported feelings of connection and purpose in contributing to their families and communities, reflecting the psychological importance of belonging.

The findings indicated that limited qualifications and scarce opportunities often forced out-of-school youth (OSY) into low-paying, labor-intensive work, reflecting structural constraints rather than personal choice. It was consistent with Jenson and Fraser (2020), who highlighted the role of socioeconomic marginalization in shaping youth labor engagement. Similarly, Yuan et al. (2021) and Waseem, Rashid, and Akbar (2021) emphasized that survival-driven work among marginalized youth resulted from the interaction of behavioral and structural factors, illustrating how systemic disadvantage shaped economic participation.

Pursuing Supplementary Entrepreneurial Pursuits. These essential themes mean that they are strategically engaged in side businesses to generate additional income while maintaining primary work responsibilities and diversifying income sources to improve stability and prospects. The emerging theme aligns with the study by Deci and Ryan (2000), which explained that such pursuits are often driven by autonomous motivation and the desire to build competence. Similarly, the result agrees with Luthans' (2002) study, which suggested that entrepreneurial activities foster psychological capital, particularly hope and efficacy. Further, the emerging theme aligns with the study by Kalkan and Kaygusuz (2012), which argued that additional entrepreneurial initiatives reinforced financial resilience and opportunity-seeking behavior, highlighting how the participants' adaptive strategies transformed challenges into avenues for personal and economic growth.

The findings indicated that necessity driven entrepreneurship was common among out-of-school youth (OSY) when formal employment was inaccessible. It aligned with the work of Sarasvathy (2001) and Blank (2013), who noted that marginalized youth relied on entrepreneurial initiatives to meet economic needs. Drucker (2006) further emphasized that innovation and adaptive approaches were central to entrepreneurial success, as youth used limited capital and social networks to establish small enterprises.

Undertaking Gradual Enterprise Advancement. The study revealed that building economic stability involves progressively expanding efforts and investments. It is linked to the study of Jenson and Fraser (2020), who asserted that gradual improvement was essential for sustainable enterprise success. Similarly, Fountas and Pinnell (2021) argued that small, consistent advancements fostered adaptive expertise, while Fraser (2020) emphasized that incremental development enabled entrepreneurs to manage risks effectively and achieve long-

term outcomes.

Furthermore, this research indicated that micro-enterprise growth among youth developed gradually through experiential learning and iterative adaptation, reflecting continuous refinement of skills and strategies (Lichtenstein, Lyons, & Kiefer, 2004; Stadler, 2011). Social support and mentorship further facilitated this process by providing resources and guidance, enabling youth to sustain progress and navigate challenges (Aren & Sibindi, 2014; Rabbani, 2023).

The Coping Mechanisms of the Participants on the Challenges they Experienced in their Journey towards Financial Success

In confronting challenges, OSY demonstrate resilience driven by necessity and shaped by their socio-economic realities. Many develop coping mechanisms grounded in perseverance, support networks, and disciplined work habits. Assistance-driven resilience stemming from family support, community programs, or workplace mentoring provides emotional and practical reinforcement. According to Ramos (2021) and Fernandez (2018), coping strategies among marginalized youth often draw on both internal strengths and external support, enabling them to navigate hardship while remaining focused on financial goals.

The literature reflected these adaptive behaviours. Ramos (2021) asserts that resilience in youth is often cultivated through repetitive exposure to adversity, which strengthens their emotional capacity and problem-solving abilities. Fernandez (2018) adds that structured community support systems play a vital role in enhancing youth perseverance by providing stable resources and mentorship. Together, these authors highlight that resilience among OSY is an interplay between personal agency and communal support—an essential factor in their journey toward financial security.

Resilience Amid Hardship. This theme refers to individuals' ability to withstand and recover from difficult circumstances that threaten their stability and progress. This finding aligns with Luthans's (2002) study, which argued that resilience provided psychological resources for bouncing back. Moreover, the results confirmed the study by Farrington (2012), who emphasized perseverance and self-regulation as key to enduring hardships. Similarly, Kowalski et al. (2014) noted that resilience fostered adaptive responses, allowing individuals to persist even in unstable conditions.

At the same time, Luthans, (2002); Kuzior et al., (2021) resilience was essential for out-of-school youth (OSY) facing prolonged adversity, enabling them to adapt and maintain functioning, Deci and Ryan (2000) Intrinsic motivation and psychological resources supported this adaptation, while Baumeister and Leary (1995) highlighted a sense of belonging and social integration further strengthened coping mechanisms.

Assistance-Driven Resilience. This essential theme concerns people's ability to overcome obstacles with external support, such as family, community programs, or institutional interventions. This finding aligns with Fraser and Terzian (2023), who emphasized the role of support in fostering confidence, suggesting that connections within families, peer groups, and communities provide essential resources, guidance, and emotional support that enhance adaptive capacities. Similarly, the result agrees with the study by Jenson and Fraser (2020), which highlights that community-based assistance fosters coping skills and improves well-being. Likewise, Fountas and Pinnell (2021) also assert that guidance and support enhance people's ability to adapt and thrive despite hardships.

Anchored on Aren & Sibindi (2014), Baucus & Near (1991). Saari (2020) and Igbokwe highlighted that Social capital and community support played a critical role in helping marginalized youth cope with adversity. Furthermore, Onyebu and Oluwafemi (2025) connect within families, peers, and communities, provided resources and guidance, while access to structured support systems mitigated financial stress and promoted sustained resilience.

Disciplined Entrepreneurial Practices. This essential theme refers to consistent, structured, and strategic behaviors that participants or entrepreneurs use to manage their resources, make decisions, and run their businesses. It is aligned with Sarasvathy (2001), who emphasized resourceful decision-making. It is similarly

related to the study by Blank (2013), which highlighted structured practices to reduce uncertainty. Furthermore, the result aligns with the study by Drucker (2006), who noted that disciplined risk management increased sustainable business success.

In addition, Fraser (2020) and Fraser & Terzian (2023) confirmed that disciplined financial behavior was a key predictor of entrepreneurial success among youth. On the other hand, Waseem, Rashid, and Akbar (2021) and Yuan et al. (2019) also noted that Structured financial practices, combined with literacy and mentorship, supported long-term sustainability in youth-led ventures.

Faith-Driven Sacrifices. This essential theme revealed individuals' willingness to endure hardships, loss, or discomfort, guided by their spiritual beliefs and deep trust in a higher purpose. It involves enduring difficulties with trust in divine guidance. This finding aligns with Baumeister and Leary's (1995) study. It aligned with Baumeister and Leary's (1995) emphasis that belonging fosters a willingness to endure sacrifices. Similarly, the merging theme agrees with the study by Pavlenkov (2020), who noted that faith guided values-based decision-making. It is also related to Kuzior et al. (2021), who highlighted that spiritual motivation strengthened resilience in the face of financial hardships.

Adding to these concerns, Baumeister & Leary (1995) and Deci & Ryan (2000) observed that Faith and meaning making functioned as key coping mechanisms, promoting resilience, psychological well-being, and long-term persistence among vulnerable youth. Additional works of Luthans (2002) and Jenson & Fraser (2020). suggested that Spiritual beliefs strengthened intrinsic motivation and emotional interconnectedness, helping individuals endure stress and maintain hope. Value-driven perseverance and purpose-based sacrifices further supported disciplined behavior, goal commitment, and emotional stability in challenging socioeconomic contexts.

Insights Shared by the Participants to the Academe and Community as regards their Journey towards Financial Success

Participants emphasized the need for diversified income strategies, prudent financial management, and continuous skill development as key to improving OSY's financial success. They encouraged academic institutions and community sectors to provide financial literacy programs, vocational skills training, and livelihood opportunities. These insights are supported by Cruz (2022) and Johnson (2020), who argue that education sectors play a pivotal role in shaping employability, entrepreneurial readiness, and long-term financial stability among youth.

Existing literature supports these recommendations. Cruz (2022) asserts that multi-income strategies and strong financial habits equip youth with the tools needed to withstand economic fluctuations. Johnson (2020) likewise stresses the value of skill development programs in enhancing workforce participation, especially for OSY who lack formal educational credentials. These studies reinforce the participants' insights, underscoring the importance of strengthening school-community partnerships to widen opportunities for financial growth.

Diversify Income Strategies. This theme means the practice of generating earnings from multiple sources instead of relying on a single stream of income. This finding supports the study by Waseem, Rashid, and Akbar (2021) who emphasized diversification's role in protecting against economic fluctuations. Additionally, the result aligns with the study by Yuan et al. (2019) who highlighted its impact on stability and decision-making. Furthermore, the finding aligns with the study by Saari (2020) who noted its contribution to long-term financial security and adaptability.

On the other hand, Income diversification served as a key risk-mitigation strategy for marginalized youth, helping them navigate economic uncertainty and sustain livelihoods (Jardim, 2021; Karimi et al., 2020). It also enhanced resilience and promoted long-term income stability in low-resource settings (Igbokwe, Onyebu, & Oluwafemi, 2025; Rabbani, 2023).

Practice Enduring Success Values. The findings indicated that consistent demonstration of positive attitudes, ethical behaviors, and long-term principles guided participants toward sustained achievement. It aligns with Drucker (2006), who highlighted that disciplined values are crucial for personal and professional success, and with Stadler (2011), who noted that value-driven behavior supports accountability and long-term resilience.

Furthermore, Aren and Sibindi (2014) emphasized that strong values guided individuals in making responsible financial choices, suggesting that ethical and principled conduct functioned as a foundation for both personal development and economic stability.

In addition, psychological factors such as self-regulation, intrinsic motivation, and perseverance influenced the participants' economic outcomes (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Luthans, 2002). Social and emotional factors, including belonging and supportive relationships, reinforced motivation and contributed to long-term financial success (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

Uphold Prudent Financial Management. This essential theme showed that participants managed money responsibly through budgeting, saving, and planning for the future. This aligned with Baucus and Near (1991), who emphasized risk protection, Kalkan and Kaygusuz (2012), who highlighted financial prudence for stability, and Lichtenstein, Lyons, and Kiefer (2004), who noted that informed planning supported long-term entrepreneurial success.

As emphasized by Fountas & Pinnell (2021) and Fraser (2020), financial literacy and prudent management are key determinants of economic mobility among youth. Moreover, Fraser & Terzian (2023) also show that structured financial practices improve income stability and business sustainability.

Promoting Skill Development. This theme refers to the continuous improvement of one's abilities through learning, training, and hands-on experiences. The findings revealed that developing practical skills enhanced participants' capacity to perform effectively across a range of tasks. This aligned with Fountas and Pinnell (2021), who emphasized that skill development expanded individuals' functional abilities, and with Fraser (2020), who highlighted that enhanced skills supported independent decision-making and resourcefulness. Furthermore, Rabbani (2023) noted that learning and training increased employability and entrepreneurial confidence, suggesting that targeted skill-building functioned as a critical mechanism for fostering economic empowerment and self-reliance among youth.

Additionally, the Office of the Education Council (2020) and Kuzior et al. (2021) indicated that skill development played a fundamental role in promoting youth economic empowerment. Furthermore, participants described how training and practice enhanced their employability, entrepreneurial readiness, and capacity to manage financial responsibilities. It aligned with Karimi et al. (2020) and Jardim (2021), who emphasized that comprehensive training programs supported long-term financial outcomes and prepared youth to navigate complex economic challenges.

Fostering Value Formation. This essential theme concerns the development of moral principles, ethical reasoning, and personal standards that shape an individual's character. It aligned with Jardim (2021), who explained that personal values influenced decision-making under adversity, and with Karimi et al. (2020), who highlighted that value formation strengthened self-regulation and goal-directed behavior. Furthermore, Igbokwe, Onyebu, and Oluwafemi (2025) noted that instilling strong values contributed to both sustainable personal growth and community development.

Moreover, the Office of the Education Council (2020) and Farrington (2012) indicated that value formation played a crucial role in shaping the personal and financial development of youth, particularly those facing economic disadvantage. Social learning, moral development, and meaningful relational bonds supported positive behavior, resilience, and responsible decision-making. Similarly, Kowalski et al. (2014) and Saari (2020) highlighted that socio-emotional competencies and moral grounding enhanced youth engagement, reduced risk-taking, and facilitated long-term goal attainment.

CONCLUSION

This study showed the lived experiences of out-of-school youth (OSY) in their pursuit of financial success. The findings revealed four central themes: Confronting Youthful Burdens, Engaging Work-Driven Survival, Pursuing Supplementary Entrepreneurial Pursuits, and Undertaking Gradual Enterprise Advancement, which collectively illustrated how early responsibilities, financial pressures, and limited educational opportunities shaped their life

paths. These experiences demonstrated how out-of-school youth addressed early adulthood by engaging in various forms of work and entrepreneurial activities to sustain themselves and pursue long-term stability.

The study also identified the coping mechanisms participants used to confront these challenges. These included Resilience amid Hardship, Assistance-Driven Resilience, Disciplined Entrepreneurial Practices, and Faith-Driven Sacrifices, reflecting a combination of personal determination, reliance on social support, strategic financial behavior, and faith-based motivation. This coping mechanism highlighted the adaptive strategies that enabled the participants to persist despite socioeconomic constraints and complex life transitions.

Finally, the insights the participants shared about the academe and community emphasized the need for more responsive and supportive interventions. They recommended promoting diversified income strategies, cultivating enduring success values, encouraging prudent financial management, and strengthening skill development and value formation initiatives. These insights underscored the importance of programs that addressed both the economic realities and the personal development needs of out-of-school youth. Overall, the study concluded that out-of-school youth's experiences, coping strategies, and perspectives provided valuable guidance for institutions and communities seeking to enhance support for sustainable pathways toward financial success.

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