



Research Paper

## Graduates From An Alternative Schools Assessments On Postsecondary Educational Opportunities

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### ABSTRACT

Alternative educational environments are intended to fulfill the needs of children who are at danger of dropping out, have already dropped out, or are exhibiting behavior severe enough to justify removal from the mainstream setting. Alternative programs are classified into two types: programs that focus disciplinary action or remediation, often known as Disciplinary Alternative Education Programs, and programs with an academic emphasis, which are aimed to address students' academic requirements and weaknesses. This study focused on alternative education initiatives that aimed to improve at-risk pupils' academic performance. This study sought to understand the benefits and drawbacks of attending an alternative school in terms of students' immediate post-graduation plans by examining their perceptions of their readiness to face the challenges of postsecondary education after graduating from the alternative school. This study investigated the perspectives of entering college for at-risk adolescents who were anticipated to graduate from an alternative school. The data highlighted three significant themes regarding students' perceptions of postsecondary possibilities and goals. These three categories comprised causes that led to postsecondary plans, progress toward postsecondary goals, and views of readiness for postsecondary plans.

**Keywords:** Assessments, alternate education, at-risk student, graduations, college state, student give up

### I. Introduction

State governments and local districts have broadened the scope of education by implementing alternate educational environments. Alternative educational environments are intended to satisfy the needs of students who are at danger of dropping out or have already dropped out (Carver, Lewis, and Tice, 2010). These initiatives were put in place to address rising dropout rates and the need for education to be more competitive on a global scale. Alternative education programs, according to Foley (2009), are "individualized opportunities designed to meet the educational needs of youth identified as at risk for school failure". According to Foley (2009), alternative programs are classified into two types: those that emphasize disciplinary action and remediation, also known as Disciplinary Alternative Education Programs (DAEP), and those that emphasize academics and are intended to address students' academic needs and deficiencies. Programs in both categories aim to achieve one of two goals: a successful return to regular schooling or fulfillment of high school graduation requirements (Carver et al., 2010; Foley, 2009; Lehr et al., 2003). This study focused on alternative education programs that prioritized student academic success.

Alternative education programs that prioritize student academic achievement can take place in a range of educational contexts, both inside and outside of the public school system, and can employ a variety of instructional delivery techniques. These programs may also differ substantially from one another, both in terms of state and district. Academic alternative education programs are not disciplinary programs nor are they punitive in character; rather, they are centered exclusively on students' academic requirements (Carver et al., 2010; Lehr et al., 2003). Additionally, alternative education programs can be given in a variety of methods. For example, some programs are totally computer-based, others are entirely classroom-based, while yet others include a combination of online and classroom instruction. Furthermore, some programs focus solely on students' academic life, while others take a more comprehensive approach, incorporating social assistance and community-based learning (Lehr et al., 2003). Successful alternative programs should lead to lower dropout rates and higher graduation rates (Carver et al., 2010; Tyler & Lofstrom, 2009). However, when attempting to estimate graduation rates, various variables disagree, most notably the definition of high school graduates. Many reporting agencies consider a high school diploma plus a general equivalency diploma (GED) to be acceptable, whereas others merely require a high school diploma (Tyler & Lofstrom, 2009). For the intent of this study, only students who have acquired their high school diplomas were considered graduates. This study looked at at-risk

adolescents at an alternative school to see how they perceived postsecondary options and what variables affected their selections.

## **II. Statement of the Problem**

High school graduation rates are a growing problem in the public education system, and many at-risk children do not graduate. In terms of generating solutions to the dropout epidemic, three common themes have emerged: changing the student, changing the program, and changing the system (Lehr et al., 2003; Raywid, 1998). Ideally, modifying the curriculum would change the student intrinsically, have long-term consequences, and impact their lives. Alternative schools were established to adjust curriculum and provide students who were at danger of dropping out or had previously dropped out of high school with the option to graduate with their high school diplomas in an alternative school setting. Historically, the success or failure of these programs was determined primarily by the graduation percentages of at-risk kids engaged in alternative education. However, this study intended to expand on previous research by measuring the performance of alternative schools based on students' assessments of their postsecondary educational possibilities. Alternative schools of choice have grown in popularity over the last decade, particularly when a student is about to drop out of high school or has already done so. The goal of the American public education system is to develop lifelong learners who will be useful members of society. However, disagreement continues about whether the existing educational system is adequate in achieving this goal for all elements of society. There are several research on the effects of alternative education programs in terms of characteristics associated with program performance and high school graduation rates. However, little study has been conducted on the postsecondary education goals of the population served by alternative schools, particularly those who are categorized as at-risk. Thus, the purpose of this study was to fill a vacuum in the literature by investigating whether alternative educational programs are as effective in preparing this growing number of students for higher educational possibilities as traditional high schools.

## **III. Purpose of the Study**

The study aims to address a significant gap in the existing literature regarding the effectiveness of alternative educational programs in preparing at-risk students for postsecondary education opportunities. While numerous studies have explored the performance and graduation rates of alternative education programs, relatively little attention has been given to their effectiveness in supporting students' postsecondary education objectives. By focusing on this understudied aspect, the research seeks to provide valuable insights into the role of alternative schools in facilitating the transition to higher education for at-risk students. Specifically, the study aims to compare the effectiveness of alternative educational programs with traditional high schools in preparing students for further education opportunities beyond high school.

Key components of the study may include:

**Identification of At-Risk Population:** Clearly defining and identifying the at-risk population served by alternative schools, which may include students facing various challenges such as academic underachievement, behavioral issues, socio-economic disadvantages, or other risk factors that impact their educational attainment.

**Assessment Criteria:** Establishing criteria for evaluating the effectiveness of alternative educational programs in preparing students for postsecondary education. This could include indicators such as college enrollment rates, persistence in postsecondary education, completion of degree or certificate programs, and overall academic achievement in higher education.

**Comparative Analysis:** Conducting a comparative analysis between students attending alternative schools and those in traditional high schools to determine differences in their postsecondary education outcomes. This analysis may involve statistical methods to control for relevant variables and ensure the validity of comparisons.

**Qualitative Insights:** Supplementing quantitative data with qualitative insights through interviews, surveys, or focus groups with students, educators, and other stakeholders. This qualitative component can provide a deeper understanding of the factors influencing postsecondary education readiness and success among at-risk students in both alternative and traditional educational settings.

**Policy Implications:** Drawing implications for educational policy and practice based on the findings of the study. This may involve recommendations for enhancing the effectiveness of alternative education programs in supporting postsecondary education goals, as well as identifying areas for further research and improvement in addressing the needs of at-risk students.

Overall, the study aims to contribute valuable knowledge to the field of education by shedding light on the role of alternative schools in promoting postsecondary education access and success for at-risk students, thereby informing efforts to improve educational outcomes and opportunities for this vulnerable population.

#### IV. Research Questions

The research questions that led this study were as follows:

1. What plans do students who graduate from a different school have right after graduation?
2. What variables impact students graduating from an alternative school's decisions to attend college or find work soon after graduation?

#### V. Significance of the Study

This study makes a significant contribution to the field of education by addressing a critical gap in research and focusing on the postsecondary education attendance plans of at-risk students who completed high school in alternative educational environments. Here are some reasons why this study is noteworthy:

**Narrow Scope and Scarcity of Research:** The study's focus on postsecondary education attendance plans of at-risk students who graduated from alternative schools fills a gap in the existing literature. While previous research has largely concentrated on the effects of alternative schools on high school completion rates, this study extends the investigation to explore what happens beyond high school for these students.

**Alignment with Educational Objectives:** By examining whether alternative schools contribute to the development of lifelong learners who are prepared to become productive members of society, the study directly addresses the fundamental purpose of education. It seeks to understand whether alternative education programs effectively support students in achieving their postsecondary education goals, thereby advancing broader educational objectives.

**Unique Perspective:** The study provides a unique and comprehensive perspective on the factors influencing alternative school graduates' decisions regarding postsecondary prospects. By directly engaging with graduating students through face-to-face interviews, the research offers insights into their attitudes, experiences, and aspirations regarding higher education.

**Implications for Practice:** The findings of this study have practical implications for students, parents, instructors, and administrators involved in alternative education programs. They offer valuable insights into the effectiveness of existing programs in preparing students for college admission and highlight areas for improvement or revision to better support students' postsecondary education goals.

**Potential for Program Enhancement:** The study's findings may inspire fresh ideas for enhancing alternative education programs to better meet the needs of at-risk students. By identifying the characteristics and experiences that influence students' decisions about pursuing higher education, the research can inform the development of targeted interventions and support services within alternative schools.

**Contribution to Understanding:** Overall, the findings contribute to a deeper understanding of the efficiency of alternative education programs in preparing students for college admission. They shed light on the factors that motivate alternative school graduates to pursue higher education, offering valuable insights for educators, policymakers, and researchers seeking to promote educational equity and opportunity for all students.

In summary, this study offers valuable insights into the postsecondary education trajectories of at-risk students who graduate from alternative schools, advancing our understanding of the role of alternative education in fostering college readiness and lifelong learning.

#### VI. Method of Procedure

The researcher employed a qualitative descriptive research approach, specifically adopting a phenomenological perspective, to explore graduating students' perceptions regarding how the policies, programs, and activities of alternative schools prepared them for college opportunities. Here's a breakdown of the key elements of this approach:

**Qualitative Descriptive Research:** This approach aims to provide a detailed, straightforward description of phenomena, focusing on capturing participants' experiences and perspectives in their own words. It is particularly useful for exploring complex, real-world phenomena such as students' perceptions of educational experiences.

**Phenomenological Perspective:** Phenomenology seeks to understand and describe individuals' lived experiences and the meaning they attach to those experiences. In this context, the researcher focused on understanding the subjective experiences of graduating students from alternative schools regarding their preparation for college opportunities.

**Data Collection Method:** The researcher conducted face-to-face semi-structured interviews with graduating students from alternative schools. Semi-structured interviews allow for flexibility while ensuring that key topics are covered. This approach encourages participants to provide detailed responses and enables the researcher to probe further into specific areas of interest.

**Interview Design:** The interview protocol was designed specifically for this study, with open-ended questions aimed at eliciting participants' attitudes and perceptions about higher education. Questions likely explored

various aspects of the alternative school experience, such as curriculum, support services, extracurricular activities, and interactions with teachers and peers.

**Data Analysis:** The researcher utilized content analysis to analyze the interview data. Content analysis involves systematically categorizing and interpreting textual data to identify common themes, patterns, and meanings. In this study, the focus was on identifying recurring themes related to how alternative school policies, programs, and activities contributed to students' preparedness for college opportunities.

By employing a qualitative descriptive approach within a phenomenological framework, the researcher aimed to gain a deeper understanding of how alternative schools shape students' perceptions of college readiness. This approach allowed for rich, nuanced insights into the experiences of graduating students and the factors that influence their transition to higher education.

## **VII. Research Question Findings**

The researcher used the identified themes and subthemes to answer each research question.

### **7.1 Research Question 1**

Research Question 1 was, "What plans do students who graduate from a different school have right after graduation?" Twelve individuals expressed a willingness to pursue some type of higher education after graduation. These programs included industry certification programs at the local college, general study at the college, and admission to four-year colleges.

### **7.2 Research Question 2**

Research Question 2 was, "What variables impact students graduating from an alternative school's decisions to attend college or find work soon after graduation?" When the topic relating to this research question was examined, three sub-themes emerged: (a) personal duties, (b) impact of family and friends, and (c) the existence of local industry in the community. Participants cited wanting to offer a better life for their children and assist their immediate relatives as the key motivator in their decision-making process. The researcher discovered that both life experiences and support from family and friends had a significant impact on participants' decisions on postsecondary prospects. Several participants recounted the pathways of friends and family members whom they wished to emulate because of their perceived triumphs and the support they had gotten from these people. Furthermore, numerous individuals cited the existence of multiple major petrochemical manufacturing plants, as well as their integration with communities and educational institutions, as factors. Several participants planned to get the qualifications required for work at one of the nearby factories, and one was already enrolled in an industry-sponsored certification program.

## **VIII. Conclusions**

The goal of this qualitative descriptive study was to learn about the attitudes of students graduating from an alternative school toward college options. During the course of this qualitative study, themes arose that reflected the sample population's perspectives about postsecondary prospects and goals. Three primary themes were identified, two of which featured sub-themes that gave further information about respondents' perspectives. The topics were as follows: (a) reasons leading to postsecondary goals, (b) progress toward postsecondary plans, and (c) perceptions of the alternative program's college preparedness. In addition to these themes, participants shared direct input on how their own experiences influenced their perspectives and decisions about life after graduation. The national education system's principal purpose is to develop lifelong learners who will be productive members of society. This aim applies to all students, and regardless of the type of learning environment, they should be exposed to the same material and given the same opportunity to improve themselves. To reach this purpose, all academic settings must have a program design that includes organized information and support for students on the college selection, application, admittance, and financial possibilities. This design must take into account the student population's specific burdens and hurdles, such as retention history, family structure, financial constraints, and any other circumstances that put a student at risk. Until this happens, educators will ignore a rising population that will struggle to compete in an increasingly sophisticated and linked world.

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