



Crossroad of Preparedness and Opportunity: A Phenomenological Study on the Work Readiness of Grade 12 Students

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Abstract—This study used phenomenological approach in exploring the life and lived experiences of Grade 12 students in Catbalogan, Samar. Since the implementation of the K-12 curriculum, the researchers were looking into the totality of the experience and the development of readiness under the premise of the following theories: Engerstrom's Cultural Historical Activity Theory; Keogh, Maguire and O'Donoghue's Subject-Centric Activity Systems Theory; and Badura's Social Cognitive Career Theory. Fifteen (15) Grade 12 ABM students took part in the study. With the aid of a semi-structured interview and utilizing the Colaizzi process, three themes emerged: (1) Work Readiness Inadequacy; (2) Continuing Education; and (3) Cons and Pro of Internship. From the analysis and interpretation of data, it shows that students shared experiences of being not prepared and feeling inadequate for work with a hint of optimism and resiliency. As a recommendation, the schools must be extensive with the programs and work together with other stakeholders in guiding students for employment. Likewise, further studies and a more in-depth investigation of the Grade 12 students' life experiences is also recommended.

Keywords— Senior high School Student, Work Readiness, Preparation, Immersion, Experience

I. INTRODUCTION

There has been an increase interest on work readiness over the years. Researches had focused on the following concepts: scale development on work readiness ^[1]; impact of work engagement ^[2]; subject well-being and post traumatic ^[3]; implementation of preceptorship ^[4]; individual readiness to change ^[5]; technological readiness ^[6]; development of transferable knowledge ^[7]; and employability prospect ^[8]. All of the studies cited utilized number and statistical explanation to understand the work readiness of students and pair with a variety of variables. The new Kinder to Grade 12 Curriculum is an education system that covers 13 years of primary and secondary education from kindergarten to 12th grade. The K to 12 Curriculum has offered different strands for the students STEM, TVET, HUMMS, ABM and others. The Curriculum will provide a student TESDA's Competency Certificate and National Certificates (NCs) after graduating SHS for them providing early access to work and other job opportunities ^[9].

Since it is quite a new curriculum and considered as radical for some, most of the researches is on the quantitative side of the spectrum. While it provides insight on the basis of the background of the data, it still lacks researches that focused on the students' life experiences who are about to finish the new curriculum. Thus, the conduct of the study with the aim of exploring and finding out more information of the work readiness of the senior high students through

their experiences and perspectives surrounding the phenomenon of early exposure to perspective nature and place of work.

II. OBJECTIVES

With its main objective of exploring the lived experiences, perceptions, and challenges of senior high school students under the premise of work readiness, this study would like to answer the following questions;

1. What are experiences of the participants;
2. What is their perception about work readiness; and
3. What are their aspirations.

III. METHODOLOGY

Research Design. This qualitative study, was anchored on Engerstrom's Cultural Historical Activity Theory; Keogh, Maguire and O'Donoghue's Subject-Centric Activity Systems Theory; and Badura's Social Cognitive Career Theory, utilized phenomenological approach that aimed to investigate the experience of high schoolers - how their professional time as well as personal engagements intertwine and coexist with each other. A qualitative research study aimed to examine a phenomenon that impact on the lived reality of individuals or groups in a particular cultural or social context ^{[10][11][12]}. A qualitative research is an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem ^[13]. The researcher builds a

complicated and holistic picture, analyse words, report comprehensive takes of participants, and does it in situ. Phenomenology aimed to accurately describe the phenomenon without a pre-existing knowledge to a framework, but remaining truth to the facts ^{[14][15][16][17]}. More so, using a qualitative research, the researcher would be able to connect with their participants and to see the world from their viewpoints ^[18]. The researcher found this method most suitable to the inquiry in order to provide a comprehensive analysis on the high schoolers' life experiences.

Participants and Sampling. Purposive sampling was used to identify the study's participants. Purposive sampling allows the researcher to select people who are appropriate for the study ^[19]. Simply put, the researcher decides what needs to be known and sets out to find people who can and are willing to provide the information by virtue of knowledge or experience ^[20]. Eight (8) individuals took part in the study. Participants met the description of a career changer: 1) a Grade 12 student; 2) currently enrolled; 3) a resident of Calbayog city; and 4) willing to participate in the study.

Data Collection. In gathering the appropriate data for the study, semi structured interview was used. Semi-structured interview is a type of interview that has become the most familiar strategy in collecting qualitative data ^{[21][22][23]}. A semi-structured interview is a qualitative research approach that combines a prepared set of open questions with the opportunity for researchers to dig deeper into specific responses; it's used to figure out how interventions work and how they might be improved. It also enables for clarification by asking follow-up questions. Two experts in the field of psychology validated the content of the interview guide. The researcher also offered an agreement that covered gaining informed consent, maintaining confidentiality, making time and location commitments, granting authorization to record, and outlining research ethical principles. The researcher employed note taking and dialogic form as data storage strategies. To each deeper response of the respondents.

Data Analysis. The Colaizzi process for phenomenological data analysis is illustrated in the following steps ^[24]. (1) Each transcript should be read and reread several times to get a general idea of the material. (2) Significant statements on the topic under investigation should be taken from each transcript. These assertions must be written down on a separate sheet with page and line numbers. (3) From these crucial statements, meaning should be derived. (4) Sort the formulated meanings into categories, clusters of themes, and subthemes. (5) The study's findings should be incorporated into a comprehensive description of the phenomenon under investigation. (6) The phenomenon's essential structure should be described. (7) Finally, study participants should be asked to validate the findings by comparing the researcher's descriptive results to their own experiences.

Research Reflexivity. In the study, the researcher's approach is different in terms of other researchers' perspectives. As persons who know the life of a high schooler and their aspiration, the researcher understands his stand that might lead to a different development and an equally valid understanding of the particular situation under study. The study has a preconception with a tone of positivity of eventually creating meaning during the entire process. The position and the background of the researcher will affect the choices made in the investigation, from an angle, with the methods that best judged the sole purpose of the study, framing, coming up with themes and the overall conclusion of it. With the intent of sharing the results to the participants of the study. Furthermore, preconception is not equated in any form of bias unless the researcher fails to mention them ^[26].

Ethical Consideration. The study focused on high schoolers' life experiences, their self-regard and aspirations. Therefore, the ethical considerations centered around the situations depicted solely from participants' experiences, interactions and actions observed. The issues of theoretical, theological, situational, critical and covenantal situational approach to research ethics were irrelevant to the overall study ^{[26][27][28]}. If literal transcriptions and summary were used in the narratives.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Significant information on the current experience of high schoolers were generated on the premise of work readiness. Current knowledge on senior high school education scenarios, potential of exploring other means of coping and aspiration for work readiness were noted. The generated information can help in establishing not only springboard for subsequent research but also a platform for the college students feeling left out to be heard and show the cacophony of their experiences.

From the data analyses with implementation of the Colaizzi Process, three major themes emerged: (1) Work Readiness Inadequacy; (2) Continuing Education; and (3) Cons and Pros of Internship.

The three themes that emerged suggested that Grade 12 ABM students see themselves as not yet ready to tackle on the challenge of being ready to work, landing a job and sustaining it though they still have positive self-regard or personal outlook as evident in the second and third theme. While they hold an unquenchable hope for growth and professional advancement. This study showed that these students experienced a difficult yet an honest and fulfilling form of preparation that can inspire and boost the aspiration of students.

Episodes of feeling inadequate haunts the almost graduate senior high school students. Though, others may associate, right away, that experiences surrounding work preparedness are negative, the result of the study revealed otherwise. The first theme focused on the feeling of work readiness inadequacy.

4.1. Work Readiness Inadequacy

From the analysis, it can be understood that being a graduating senior high school student is not an easy task. They are experiencing difficulty in terms of the type of work environment they are expecting, the skills they need to learn prior to working and second thoughts in working right after graduation. Likewise, despite the cruel reality, they are still viewed as a valuable member of the society for they will determine the future of the country. These feelings of uncertainty and lack of confidence is depicted in the following participants' statements:

- ❖ "Here I thought I was picked first because they believe in my capability, but the group leader pulled me to the corner and told me that I was picked out of pity and only followed the instruction of our teacher not because they think I am capable."
- ❖ "In my case today, I am not even ready to go to college, much more finding a job. No!"
- ❖ "No, my skills are not yet enough."
- ❖ "It may seem enough but in case of landing a job, it is still a long way to go. It is still considered as basic, just like a starting requirement for college but not for work."

4.2. Continuing Education

From the analysis, it can be understood that aside from landing a good paying job, most of the students find it necessary to continue their education or pursuing a college degree. They are engrossed in the idea that students are thinking of completing their education, despite the additional years, in obtaining a degree to increase further their chance to secure a decent paying job. These feelings of aspiration and academic pursue is showcased in the following participants' statements:

- ❖ "I am still undecided. I am planning to go to college first."
- ❖ "Not yet (when asked if they are planning to work right away), I am going to focus on my studies first."
- ❖ "Maybe, I will just get a scholarship from DOLE."
- ❖ "I'll pursue my college."
- ❖ "Hey, sometimes, it makes me consider to be a working student after if I am lucky to get a job and the income from it would help me during college. Though there are chances for the income not sufficient enough to sustain studying but come to think of it, if choosing between work or continuing education, I would choose to go to college. The more knowledge, the more opportunity that will come in my way."
- ❖ "We must pursue continuing education for the economy. Haha."

4.3. Cons and Pros of Internship

From the analysis, it can be understood that aside from landing a well-paying job and earning a college degree, most of the students find the benefits and disadvantages of engaging in internships. They feel that such stage is a preparatory phase in getting work or pursuing higher

education. These conflicting feelings towards internship is shown in the following participants' statements:

- ❖ "Yes the internship experience is help, giving us a chance to develop our skills through immersing us to actual work conditions since for them if we are to pursue a working life, it would be the same path we would take."
 - ❖ "This internship is useful but it is hard because I don't like this course, when I graduate, I would still pursue my college degree and take on other strands."
 - ❖ "Yes, internship is helpful."
- "Internship has no use for me if I would be taking a different work in the future. To be honest, yes. It has no use."

V. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE SCOPE

Students shared experiences of being unprepared and feeling inadequate for work with a hint of optimism and resiliency. As a recommendation, the schools must be extensive with the programs and work together with other stakeholders in guiding students for employment. Likewise, further studies and a more in-depth investigation of the Grade 12 students' life experiences is also recommended.

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