



# Left Out for I am Slow: A Phenomenological Study on Lived Experiences of College Students

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**Abstract**—Academic performance in the form of grades have been the defining factor for a student to be classified into groups. With the questions on the quality of teaching and learning, it is best to focus on students who felt left out of the academic circle. Thus, Phenomenological Research, with the of a semi-structured interview, identified and explored the college students' life experiences who felt being left out because of their deviation from typical high achievers. The research was based on Sternberg's Theory of Thinking Styles and Perry's Theory of Cognitive Development. From the data analyses with implementation of the Colaizzi Process, three major themes emerged: (1) Admitting Limitation; (2) Understanding Exclusion; and (3) Self-Worth Valuation. The result showed that these students shared an experience of being excluded due to their academic ability. They mostly end up leaving the academic circle as a major resort in escaping the feeling of being left out. Despite such unfortunate predicament, they aspire to do good in areas where they excel and slowly gain the confidence in believing one's self. It is recommended that the schools place equal value and attention to all types of students. Further and in-depth studies is also recommended.

**Keywords**— Slow Learner, Academic Circle, College Life, Turning Point, Out of Place

## I. INTRODUCTION

Over the years, academic performance in the form of grades have been the defining factor for a student to be classified into groups. There have been a growing interest on the topic that most of the researches focused on pitting the subject to the following variables: social media usage<sup>[1][2][3]</sup>, quality of diet<sup>[4]</sup>, in-class multitasking<sup>[5][6]</sup>, sleep loss and learning capacity<sup>[7]</sup>, academic self-efficacy<sup>[8]</sup>, music<sup>[9]</sup>, self-discipline<sup>[10]</sup>, cognitive test anxiety<sup>[11]</sup>, attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder<sup>[12]</sup>, personality<sup>[13]</sup>, teaching methods<sup>[14]</sup>, and psychological correlates<sup>[15]</sup>.

The No Child Left Behind Act was implemented to make sure that students feel included, that they are valued, and they are excelling with their peers<sup>[16][17][18]</sup>. The sense of inclusivity resonates with that of blending in<sup>[19][20][21][22]</sup>, fitting in<sup>[24]</sup>, and learning in unison<sup>[25]</sup>, but certain circumstances are hard to explain in grades and numbers and needs a little digging up in a more personal domain to understand the truth behind every experience<sup>[26]</sup>. The closest study conducted of student personal experience, the feeling of being left focused on the exploration of the negative effects of low belongingness<sup>[27]</sup>.

It can be noted that to truly grapple the essence of academic performance, one must fully immerse on the experience of the students in terms of their sense of relatedness and fitting in, and how they perceive themselves. By establishing the gaps as to the conduct of

the study, there is a strong need to explore the students' life experiences who perceived themselves as slow learners, engage them to in-depth conversation on instances of them feeling left out and how they are coping with such challenges.

## II. OBJECTIVES

With its main objective of exploring the lived experiences, perceptions, and challenges of college students in the context of feeling left out because of their perceived level of intellect, this study would like to answer the following questions;

1. What are experiences of the participants;
2. What is their perception about feeling left out of the academic circle because of their perceived level of intellect; and
3. What are their aspirations.

## III. METHODOLOGY

**Research Design.** This qualitative study, was anchored on Sternberg's Theory of Thinking Styles and Perry's Theory of Cognitive Development, utilized phenomenological approach that aimed to investigate the experience of college students - how it is to be a student and perceiving themselves as slow learners at the same time. 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<sup>[28][29][30]</sup>. A qualitative

research is an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem<sup>[31]</sup>. 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<sup>[32][33][34][35]</sup>. More so, using a qualitative research, the researcher would be able to connect with their participants and to see the world from their viewpoints<sup>[36]</sup>. The researcher found this method most suitable to the inquiry in order to provide a comprehensive analysis on the college students' 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<sup>[37]</sup>. 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<sup>[38]</sup>. Eight (8) individuals took part in the study. Participants met the description of a career changer: 1) a person who considers themselves as slow learners; 2) currently enrolled; 3) a college student; 4) a resident of Calbayog city; and 5) 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<sup>[39][40][41]</sup>. 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<sup>[42]</sup>. (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 a person who knows the struggles of college students 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<sup>[43]</sup>.

**Ethical Consideration.** The study focused on the lived experiences of college students, 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<sup>[44][45][46]</sup>. If literal transcriptions and summary were used in the narratives.

## IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Significant information on the current experience of college students were generated on the premise of feeling left out because of their perceived level of intellect. Current knowledge on higher education scenarios, potential of exploring other means of coping and aspiration for academic path 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) Admitting Limitation; (2) Understanding Exclusion; and (3) Self-Worth Valuation.

### 4.1. Admitting Limitation

Most of the participants had episodes of being unwanted and left-out which further fueled how small they see themselves in terms of their academic achievement and perceived level of intellect. It is illustrated in the following participants' statements:

#### 4.1.1. Outright Exclusion

❖ "I am always picked last when picking members for a debate, been happening since grade school."

- ❖ “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.”
- ❖ “There were only two of us left, leaders are picking members for the quiz bee. One of the members from the other group yelled to the teacher and asked if I can be a group of my own because they see me as a burden more than a contributing member.”

#### 4.1.2. Obvious Insult

- ❖ “My teacher asked me to solve something on the board, while I was doing that, the teacher said that ‘I gave you the easiest one because I know you can’t handle the difficult items’, that was really devastating.”
- ❖ “The group I was with was busy preparing for a presentation, when I was about to approach them, they said that they intentionally not called my attention for the brainstorming, because I only bring in the storm but no brains to the group.”
- ❖ “We were a point away from winning when I messed up big time, they yelled and yanked me going out of the room and call me stupid in front of many people.”

#### 4.1.3. Overt Inadequacy

- ❖ “I admit that I am weak as a student and there is no need to measure my IQ since the people around me makes me feel that way.”
- ❖ “Ever since my mother and elementary teacher told me that I equate to nothing, I carried that ever since and believe that I am really no good.”
- ❖ “I am considered as the weakest student in my class, even I agree so myself, so I don’t bother trying anything to improve my grades, I am dumb so why bother?”

#### 4.2. Understanding Exclusion

Most of the participants admitted that despite excluded by their peers and acknowledging their own shortcomings, they still understand the reason behind such actions. They feel the full blow of their insults choose to respond positively to the situation. It is illustrated in the following participants’ statements:

##### 4.2.1. Deeper Consideration

- ❖ “I understand where are they coming from, they have expectations of me that I cannot deliver and I can’t change anything about it.”
- ❖ “Although it hurts, I cannot do anything to make light of the situation, I just psyche myself to understand their reasons and hope that it will change in the future.”
- ❖ “I just cry myself out everynight, my parents always tell me to be strong no matter what, not everything in life is determined by your academic performance, always be the better person.”

##### 4.2.2. Belief Tolerance

- ❖ “I just let them be, eventually I would get used to it for it will reach its prime.”

- ❖ “That is what they want to label me as someone who is dumb, and I just tolerate that because I am in mood to entertain their teasing, I am already bombarded with problems.”
- ❖ “Though they make me feel as a nobody, I am just taking it all in like a sponge, I don’t want any more drama plus they will just stop at some point and disregard my existence as always.”

#### 4.3. Self-Worth Valuation

Most of the participants self-confessed that there is a silver lining to their negative experience, that being left out in the academic setting is not all that bad that it makes someone realize their true worth as a person, encouraged them to love their self more, and made opportunities for self improvement. It is illustrated in the following participants’ statements:

- ❖ “I am over with the crying and hurting and see these negative experience as an opportunity to improve myself and prove them wrong.”
- ❖ “Most people would see as slow learner, which I take advantage of because they do not expect anything good from me.”
- ❖ “I know myself more than what they say of me, and I can’t wait to rub it on their faces what I can actually do.”
- ❖ “I am unique and I know that my time will come for me to prove something worthwhile.”
- ❖ “This experience of mine makes me want to hard more and spend my time to improve myself.”
- ❖ “I will make everything in my power to succeed in life, prayers and hardwork is all I need.”
- ❖ “I know I can do more to if I put my heart and soul into it, life is what we make it.”

Instances of being unwanted and left-out in the class is quite common in any academic setting. Reasons could range from various sources, experiences and circumstances. The situations which rooted from home and school often exacerbate the problem, with students having lesser confidence and seeing themselves as slow learners. With such term being used loosely, the students tend to conform to an identity they believe to possess or to the label they are given. By presenting them with limitations they tend to convince themselves that they are really what other people perceived them to be. Self-limiting behaviors are often devastating not only to the disposition of the student but to their overall goals and aspiration in the future. By limiting their options, they feel that they are only until that level and dare not explore further on what they could be in the future.

Most of the participants admitted that despite excluded by their peers and acknowledging their own shortcomings, they still understand the reason behind such actions. They feel the full blow of their insults choose to respond positively to the situation. Often, when bombarded with such negativity, a person tends to see it as a situation requiring utmost understanding. They understand the

situation very well that disrupting the order as it was presented can often change the course of a routine or an established environment. The need to maintain the such ideal environment comes at an expense of sacrificing one's happiness and trading it with the constant mockery. They also understand since they believe that a very good reason could explain such misfortune happening to them.

As a culmination, not every bad experience equates to a bad outcome. Sometimes, a person sees it as an opportunity. Opportunity to improve what they do, enhance what they know, and upgrade what they are. Such process takes time, realization and effort, but when one's back is pressed against the wall, the claws come out and the inner beast comes shining through. Seeing oneself as person who needs improvement is the first step in truly changing for the better. It is a play on which side of the road one follows, is it the one that others designed for you or a path you are willing to make risks and sacrifices. Silver lining in every situation, treating scenarios as opportunities and not roadblock to what a person can become in the future.

## V. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE SCOPE

The result showed that these students shared an experienced of being excluded due to their academic ability. They mostly end up leaving the academic circle as a major resort in escaping the feeling of being left out. Despite such unfortunate predicament, they aspire to do good in areas where they excel and slowly gain the confidence in believing one's self. It is recommended that the schools place equal value and attention to all types of students. Further and in-depth studies is also recommended.

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