

Free Higher Education in the Philippines: The Narratives of the Parent

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Abstract:- Human Capital through education is considered a means to a better quality of life. Parents prepare their children from pre-school to higher education. This study investigated the lived experiences of the parents of those students who availed of the Free Higher Education in the Philippines. It utilized Phenomenological Qualitative Research Design grounded on Heideggerian philosophical tradition covering the State Universities and Colleges (SUC) in Region XI (Davao Region, Philippines). A series of focus group discussions were conducted to gather information from 24 parents of students enrolled in State Universities. This was done separately per institution using a semi-structured survey question which was subjected to field testing. The findings revealed the following: (a) parents agreed that education will secure an individual a comfortable life; (b) valued education as a legacy, and pride; (c) the implementation of the program provides ease and peace of mind; (d) all the participants are pleased with the government's willful move of the Free Higher Education Policy which is known as Republic Act 1093.

Keywords:- Free Higher Education, Human Capital, and Parents.

I. INTRODUCTION

Every country desire for economic development. Education is one of the primary factors for economic growth. Good educational systems are very important components in the development of a country in various aspects such as economics, human resources, health, and governance, among others. It is in this premise that human capital investment via education will lead to sustained growth and development. According to Namwandi (2015), no country in the world has ever developed economically without strong human capital. Moreover, the evolution of theories of economic development has shown that education is the mother of all developmental efforts.

The grand program of the Philippine government to provide universal access to quality tertiary education through the implementation of the FREE HIGHER EDUCATION POLICY in State Universities and Colleges (SUC), Local Universities and Colleges, and Technical Vocational Institutions under Republic Act 10931 also known as the "Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education Act" is a response for the improvement of the quality of life of every Filipino.

Today, many views higher education as "vital to maintaining the competitive position in an increasingly knowledge-dependent world economy" (Bowen, 2011). Further, it is hard to find a politician or a government denying the importance of education particularly higher education for the development of the national economy.

II. METHODOLOGY

The central direction of this research investigates what are the Parents' knowledge, realities, and experiences as stakeholders of the Free Higher Education Program.

This study utilizes Phenomenological Qualitative Research Design grounded in Heideggerian philosophical tradition. According to Myers (2013), Qualitative Research Method is designed to understand people, what they say and do as well as the social and cultural context within which they live. Moreover, qualitative research allows the researcher to see and understand the context within which decisions and actions take place and it is often the case that human decisions and actions can only be understood in context. Since the focus of this research is the experience of subjective realities, qualitative design is deemed appropriate to frame constructs and understand the meaning.

This study covers the Four (4) State Universities and Colleges that implemented Free Higher Education in Region XI (Davao Region, Philippines), namely: (1) University of Southeastern Philippines in Davao City with Seven (7) Parent-Participants, (2) Southern Philippines Agri-Business, Marine and Aquatic School of Technology (SPAMAST) in Malita, Davao Occidental with Five (5) Parent-Participants, (3) Davao del Norte State College (DNSC) in Panabo City with Seven (7) Parent-Participants, and (4) Davao Oriental State College of Science and Technology (DOSCAST) in Davao Oriental with Five Parent-Participants. The researcher gathered data from a total of Twenty-Four (24) parents of any random students within State Universities and Colleges in Region XI whose sons or daughters availed of the Free Higher Education.

III. DATA COLLECTION METHODS, ANALYSIS PROCEDURES, AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

This study made use of primary data through Focus Group Discussions (FGD) and literature review through government documents, records, newspapers, and press releases among others. A semi-structured interview guide was prepared to contain pre-determined open-ended inquiries to empower the spontaneous flow of substance.

Further, the interview guide questions were subjected to field testing to ensure clarity with the selected questions and significant changes were done to further enhance the inquiry. This study used the method of Van Manen (2014) selective reading approach where meanings are formulated from the significant statements. This is in accordance to the Heideggerian philosophical traditions.

Van Manen (1990) outlined six methodical procedures as used by Terry (2018) in her study *Clinical Research for the Doctor of Nursing Practice* which was helpful to the conduct of hermeneutic phenomenological research. While these six procedures are neither absolute nor fixed, the researcher found it as a useful guide in dealing with the phenomenon under investigation. These six steps are: (1) Turning to a phenomenon of interest; (2) Investigating experience as we live it; (3) Reflecting on the essential themes which characterize the phenomenon; (4) Describing the phenomena – the art of writing and rewriting; (5) Maintaining a strong and orientated relation to the phenomenon; and (6) Balancing the research context by considering the parts and the whole (Van Manen, 1990, p. 30).

Throughout the conduct of this study, consideration was given to the welfare of the participants. Permission was first sought and written informed consent was given to the participants and explained to them that the interview was purely on a voluntary basis.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

A. Profile of the Participants

There are twenty-four (24) parent-participants. Half of the participants belong to the age bracket ranging from 41 to 50 years old while the majority of them are female, mostly housewives, with two (2) to five (5) kids and a combined monthly income of Php5,000.00- 9,999.00.

The majority of combined family income is very far from the estimated average annual Filipino family income of Php267,000.00 based on the survey conducted by the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA, 2016) while having an average annual family expenditure of Php215,000.00. Hence, there has to be a savings of Php52,000.00 on average in a year. In this case, the parent's combined monthly income is far less, thus, most of them belong to the low-income class.

B. Experiences and Understanding of Parents towards Free Higher Education Program

(1) “**Education is human capital for a secured life**” is how the parents describe that earning an education is equivalent to one's capacity to provide for the basic needs such as food, clothing, shelter, education, and health among others. It is clear that with this capacity, life's burden would be lightened. Filipinos feel secure if they could live long, enjoy a comfortable life upon retirement, and avail resources to cover unexpected expenses, which may result in savings. Skills development and capacity building through training and education are the most important investment in human capital. Moreover, the study result converges with Todaro and Smith (2011) who define human capital as productive investment embodied in the human person, including skills, abilities, ideals, health, and locations, often resulting from expenditures on education, on-the-job training programs, and medical care. One of the responsibilities of parents is to provide a good education to their children. Nelson Mandela (not dated) said education is “the most powerful weapon you can use to change the world” while Malcolm X called it “our passport to the future for tomorrow belongs to the people who prepare for it today.”

(2) “**Education is a Family Legacy and a Family Pride**” is how Filipinos deeply regard education, the majority view education as a way for economic upliftment. As described by Bondoc (2017) most Filipino parents always put in the minds of their children that they need to study hard and do their best in their studies so they would land a good job. To graduate from college is the ultimate desire of Filipino parents for their children. When Filipino parents witness their children march and eventually earned a degree or passed a licensure examination, they tend to believe that they are done with their responsibility to their children. As for the children, earning a degree means finding a good job and nurturing a promising career. This is how Filipinos perceive the value of education and its involvement in daily lives. Economic return is mainly the major driving force for individuals to invest in their human capital, yet, non-monetary returns or benefits also play a significant role in the investment in human capital. Non-monetary returns might be an improvement in well-being at work as a result of additional schooling and training and take the form of higher status, with more flexibility or interesting assignments or self-fulfillment, or job satisfaction (Seong-O Bae, 2014). According to Lazar (1998) as cited by Seong-O Bae (2014) the value of returns means improved working conditions rather than improved salary. Workers with more education or training, tend to be less often unemployed than those without it (Becker, 2009). And through free higher education, parents become confident that their children are now equipped to face the challenges of getting a degree, and that education would do something good to the lives of their children. This is where legacy comes in. Besides, having children earn a degree gives honor to the parents and pride to the family.

Life would be tough and aimless without education. Education helps people wrestle with life's challenging realities; it gives people the ability to do things in various ways and improve individuals' quality of life. The parent-participants regarded.

(3)“Education is a Capacity Development for Filipino Youth” when they were asked what the government tries to accomplish. Education is aimed at supplying the economy with human capital that could convert efficiently other resources into the output of high value for the quality of life.

According to the Philippines Statistics Authority (PSA), the education dimension had the largest share or contribution to the overall deprivation of the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) at 36.5 percent and 36.9 percent in 2016 and 2017, respectively. This then according to Bernales (2018) of the PSA that Filipino families are most deprived of education. Today, education has become an essential element in a life-long process, which contributes greatly to schooling, human and economic development, and productivity. Consequently, during the past 50 years, the expansion of education has led to a fundamental transformation of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development countries (OECD, 2011).

Ease of financial difficulties and having a condition of a healthy mind are the primary responses of the parent-participants when asked about the effect of the free higher education on their daily lives which led to the theme**(4) “Provision of Sanity.”** Participants joyously expressed that they are saved from the embarrassment of periodic school promissory due to no available funds during examination date and are freed from loan sharks as an immediate solution for school payment. This results in an increase in their household disposable income. The Commission on Higher Education (CHED) fully supports the “Tax Reform for Acceleration and Inclusion (TRAIN)” law because it not only increases the take-home pay of salaried Filipinos by reducing income tax rates and rationalizing tax rates on other goods and services, but it also funds the Free Higher Education law that puts money in the pockets of students and their families (De Vera III, 2018).

Therefore, Filipino families whose children are benefiting from free higher education can now spend their money on other household needs. The narratives show that the parents experienced the peace of mind and are hopeful that their children would eventually graduate due to the money transfer of the government through the Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education Act. This then results in better communication in the family thereby helping develop a good relationship among the family members since household financial burdens as one of the stressors have been addressed by the program.

V. CONCLUSION

The free higher education policy in the Philippines is a proactive policy for education, a grand program, and a radical move of the government that was greatly appreciated by the parents. The Republic Act 10931 marks the massification of Philippine higher education that led to an increase in student enrollment. Moreover, it gave also students more opportunities for higher education, comfort, and assurance from their parents as well.

With the continuous drive and belief that the Republic Act 10931 could be a means to a changed life, especially for the poor and for nation-building, there is a continuing need for the proper setting of objectives, priorities, targets, and plans in pursuit of its goal.

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