



Lived Experiences of Student Leaders

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Abstract— *This study analyzed the lived experiences of the student leaders in Kalinga State University, Dagupan Campus. It made use of qualitative research design, ethnomethodological approach. The study revealed that there are negative and positive lived experiences of the student leaders, five (5) positive and five (5) negative themes respectively. As to the positive impact of student leadership to the studies of the participants, it was revealed that students engaging in leadership positions would tend to become well-rounded persons - developing critical thinking skills, decision-making or problem solving skills, socialization skills, and communication skills. On the other hand, the negative impact of student leadership to the studies of the respondents is that student leaders tend to struggle with time management, especially when there is too much demand of responsibilities.*

Keywords— *lived experiences, student leaders, ethnomethodology*



I. INTRODUCTION

Leadership is one of the most defined words in all sorts of organizations, may it be in business or in the academe; may it be among the professionals or among the students.

In the school, long it has been a culture – making student leadership as part of the curriculum – to develop leaders among students. Thus, it means providing a vehicle for them to perform their tasks through electing their own officers and managing their own clubs and organizations. It is actually considered as the best way to prepare students for their future job [1]. This is also true to [2] that it is important for students to experience leadership opportunities during their schooling to learn the art of building relationships within teams, defining identities and achieving tasks effectively.

Moreover, students perform better academically, socially, and emotionally when they are meaningfully engaged [3]. That is why in the school, establishing student organizations or clubs is highly encouraged.

Further, [4] conferred that “empowering students to have a discernible impact on the school environment is an optimal outcome of student leadership.” In affirmation, the efforts to increase student voice can create meaningful experiences that help meet the developmental needs of youth [5].

The same case with the students in Kalinga State University, they are given voice to perform their tasks and advocacies for the betterment of the whole studentry. The students’ services are the frontlines in the University’s objectives. As the students are given the chance to participate in the decision making process and in the implementation of activities, they are being prepared for the greater responsibilities. Hence, providing such activities to students would mean molding experienced graduates who will become future leaders in the community and in the country. Therefore, knowing the leadership-related factors that may affect the performances of the student leaders is one way to understand them. Such then would provide means to create programs that would even empower them.

It is along the abovementioned insights and discussions that this study was pursued.

II. METHODS

The researchers made use of qualitative research design, employing ethnomethodological approach [6].

Careful selection of participants was undertaken through purposive random sampling. The 35 participants were asked to write their narration regarding their experiences as student leaders. However, only 8 were interviewed which include the presidents of each organization.

Moreover, in gathering first-hand data on the lived experiences of the participants, the researchers made use of open-ended questions for their written narrative essays that were substantiated with interviews. Data analysis procedure was partly adapted from the research procedure of [7] – recorded interviews, transcription, reduction, and regrouping and coding.

III. RESULTS

3.1. Themes on the Lived Experiences of Student Leaders

Apparently, there are ten (10) identified themes categorized as to positive and negative themes; five (5) positive themes and five (5) negative themes, respectively.

As to the positives themes, these include: *Seen Role Model to Fellow Students*; *Seen as Good Communicator*; *Seen as Social Person*; *Seen as Thinker*; and *Seen as Updated to Current Issues on School Matters*.

In terms of the first positive theme: *The Leader, the Model*, it enumerates five (5) common lived experiences of the student leaders. While for the theme: *The Leader, the Communicator*, it enumerates three (3) common lived experiences, and as to the other positive themes: *The Leader, the Social Person*; *The Leader, the Thinker*; and *The Leader, the Updated to Current issues on school matters*, each enumerates two (2) common positive lived experiences.

Seen as Role Model to Fellow Students

Being a leader is being a role model. As to this first positive theme which identified five (5) common lived experiences, it implies that the participants know very well their role as student leaders. That is to be a good model to their fellow students as they lead them with integrity, honesty, and justice.

The following are the positive lived experiences of the participants as to the theme: Modelling Good Leadership.

“Being an officer is a big responsibility to do because I have to be a good model or example to other students.”

“As a student leader, I should be a good model to everybody and I can say that I made my duty as a leader.”

“As a student leader, we should be a model though it is hard to follow the rules and regulations sometimes, because we are not perfect.”

“I should do all what the school policies for the student leaders should also the model for fellow students at KSU, Dagupan Campus.”

“I am trying my best just to be a good leader.”

The above-cited statements are excerpts from the written narrations of the participants as to their leadership

experiences. As highlighted, the words and phrases encompass the theme “Seen as Role Model.” These elaborate that being a model is being a good leader, and being a leader is being a good model. Whichever it may be stated, there is always an association between a model and a leader.

According to [8] on their page *Leadership Thoughts*, “a good leadership role model sets high standards of accountability for themselves and their behaviors.” They introduced the five (5) leadership roles. One of which is “*Is ready to lead*,” which they further defined as leaders are those who lead by example. “They are honest, sincere, and practice what they preach.”

[9] introduced the five leadership practices which include “*Model the Way*.” They further described it as recognizing that leaders model the behavior they expect and that the behavior is based upon personally held values and beliefs. Hence, this elaborates that student leaders hold their own values and beliefs, that are reflected on their manner of leading their fellow students. The student leaders also are social beings, having their own unique representations of their beliefs and practices, that eventually what they tend to model to their fellow students.

Seen as Good Communicator

Based on the findings, the student leaders experienced leadership as stage for communication. This is for the fact that from the very start, when they were still campaigning for their positions, they were communicating themselves already. They would have never become officers if they do not know how to speak out their ideas. Hence, being a leader is also being a communicator.

There is this maxim that “speech is the best show man puts on.” We can tell that in man’s speech or the way he communicates, tends to reflect his thoughts, aspirations, and his personalities. There, the type of leadership a leader has reflects through his way of communicating. In fact, [10] identified good communication skills as one of the essential qualities that define great leadership.

The following are excerpts from the lived experiences of the participants as written on their narrative essays:

“When I am leader I am enhancing my skills how to communicate with others.”

“...learning to listen to someone though I know that I am the leader...”

“A leader do not just talk, but also listens.”

As highlighted on the excerpts above, it is understood that the student leaders know it for themselves how important it is to communicate well. Student leaders learn to communicate better through exercising leadership because as they try to talk to their fellow students, they are already practicing communication. They will learn to listen better

as they try to hear other's opinions, as what is emphasized on the excerpts "...learning to listen to someone though I know that I am the leader..." and "A leader do not just talk, but also listens." Here, through leadership, students learn the art of listening. As the adage goes "a leader is a good follower." So, it is to listen to follow.

Seen as Social Person

There is such term as "social leader," as offered by [11]. He expounded that being a social leader is acknowledging that there is a team of people responsible for the creation and implementation of all decisions and ideas.

Indeed, no man is island. People will always need other people in order to survive to this vast world. The same is true with the experiences of the student leaders as apparently emphasized by the following excerpts:

"I get to know new faces and friends..."

"As an officer, I am friendly and approachable so that they can talk to me."

The first excerpt implies a positive view of a student leader of what he gains with power or position, while the second excerpt implies a negative view of a student leader of what he must do to perform in his power or position. The latter emphasized by the phrase "so that they can talk to me"--tends to imply what others will do when the leader becomes friendly and approachable. On the other hand, student leaders must be friendly so that others will approach them. If not, their fellow students would see them as obdurate who do not need others' opinions. However, engaging with other people could be one of the most crucial roles of being a leader because it is not that easy to convince people [12].

As defined by [2], leadership is about the art of motivating, influencing, and directing people so that they work together to achieve the goals of a team or a broader organization. Indeed, it is about a team -- a group.

Politically, every position is power. May it be a student position in the school, still power exists -- power to influence fellows in order to achieve common goal. With that, the need to rule over others with any given position also demands leaders to become social persons. They will always be needing others people in order to lead.

Seen as Thinker

It is with deep sense that every leader is a thinker or must be a thinker. This is for the fact that in order to solve problems and arrive to sensible decisions, leaders must do use their minds. It is also for a fact that some organizations fail because of the incapacity of leaders to decide sensibly.

According to [13], "thinkers or logical thinkers observe and analyze phenomena, reactions, and feedback and then draw conclusions based on that input. They can justify their strategies, actions, and decisions based on the facts they

gathered." Hence, that elaborates further the need for student leaders to become a thinker.

The same is true with the experiences of the student leaders as could be observed in the following excerpts from their narrative essays:

"You may boost your capacity to think for the betterment of your fellow students and for the betterment of the school as well."

"As the president, I think very well of the activities that would improve the club and my fellow student."

Both above-cited excerpts would emphasize that the student leaders know it for themselves the need to think very well when in a position. As they made mention, there is a need for thinking in order to put across their ideas and be able to develop plans and programs that would improve their organizations, their fellow students, and the institution as a whole.

Seen as Updated to Current Issues on School Matters

Static leadership does not welcome change. As posted by [14], "Leadership is not a static endeavor;" and that "successful managers does not only acknowledge development, but also willing to navigate their team through change."

Henceforth, such organization stays as is without development. Through embracing new updates to the current issues, especially on school matters, leaders are also opening doors for the organization to improve.

As being experienced by student leaders, they also consider the need to get updated with what is happening around them. As follows are their lived experiences taken from their narrative essays:

"I have learned to be well-oriented and updated on what is going on around me."

"There are lots of things that I don't know yet, but because of the organization, I learn a lot of things."

It is emphasized above that the student leaders know the importance of getting updated to issues around them and that they know it for themselves that they would learn things they have not known before. That is through bearing positions and experiencing how to lead their fellow students.

It collaborates with the study of [4] that empowering students to have a discernible impact on their school environment is an optimal outcome of student leadership.

Therefore, student organizations provide platform for students to get updated not only of issues on school matters, but also all around them and their future endeavors after graduating from studies.

Further, this part exposit on the negative themes include found in this study. These include *Disobedience by fellow students*, *Missed classes due to mandatory meetings*, *Criticisms from fellow students*, *Time constraint*, and *Unsatisfaction with the position*.

In terms of the negative lived experiences of the student leaders, the first and second negative themes: *Disobedience by fellow students* and *Negligence of classes due to mandatory meetings*; both enumerate three (3) common lived experiences. As to the other negative themes: *Criticisms from fellow students*, *Time constraint*, and *Unsatisfaction with the position*; all enumerate two (2) negative common lived experiences.

Disobedience by Fellow Students

It is always true that in every team, there will always be the members who are supportive and obedient and the otherwise or the disobedient. On the part of the student leaders, that is the challenge for them.

According to one of the student leaders, it was really hard to lead people sometimes because they do not want to follow. That was emphasized on the following excerpts from their narrative essays:

“Some students disobey us.”

“I lose confidence when I know other students do not obey what I say... nakakawalang gana lang... (discouraging/disappointing).”

The above-cited lived experiences of the student leaders tell how they truly feel when others get to disobey them. The phrase “nakakawalang gana (discouraging/disappointing),” would imply a negative effect of disobedience from the subordinates of student leaders. Hence, resulting to disappointments by the student leaders that would eventually lead to ineffective leadership and unrealized goals of the whole team or organization.

Moreover, disobedience by their fellow students through not cooperating in the activities of the organization also sounds disappointing on the part of the student leaders. That was made clear in the excerpt below from a student leader:

“Many students are not cooperating in activities.”

With that, it may affect their leadership performances. However, this may become a means for the student leaders to reflect or introspect if their leadership style is effective or the other way around.

Hence, it might be high time for the student leaders to look into their leadership styles. May it be coach leadership style, visionary, servant, autocratic, Laissez-faire, democratic, Pacesetter, or transformational, there is indeed a need for every leader to know it so that they would come to know which might be effective for the type of group they have [15].

Missed Classes due to Mandatory Meetings

Of all the possible negative effects of entering to student organizations, especially for leaders is when they miss their classes.

The following are excerpts from the lived experiences of the participants as written on their narrative essays:

“..when I must attend the meeting no matter what happens even if I have a class.”

“Sometimes, it is complicated for me to attend during the activities of officers because I was forced to attend the said activity instead of entering my class.”

“Attendance is a must(meeting) because if I will not attend, I will have a penalty.”

Negligence of classes, sometimes, is set forth already by the capacity of the student leaders to manage their studies and at the same time their positions in any organization.

As a student, it is indeed hard to study. There is no easy course, including factors such as family matters, personal matters, financial matters, and the like. So, how much more to student leaders? Hence, they need to double their effort, especially that they are seen as role models by their fellow students.

When interviewed, mostly the reason why student leaders tend to neglect their classes over the set meeting of the organization is the fine imposed when an officer missed to attend. Though there would be considerations on their part to take special quiz, they made elaborations that it is still a different story to be listening to the actual explanations of the instructor and to participate in the class activities.

Criticisms from fellow students

According to [16] post on *How to Handle Negative Feedback as a Leader*, “leaders are not immune to feeling challenged when they are on the receiving end of negative feedback.”

Indeed, leaders are also human beings with emotions. They also needed to be heard, especially when sometimes misinterpreted of their words and actions.

The following are excerpts from the lived experiences of the participants as written on their narrative essays:

“Sometimes we hear bad words and bad things.”

“Sometimes, when sharing your opinion, they won't consider because you're just a new officer. They just talk and talk behind you.”

The excerpts above would imply the burden of student leaders to be hearing negative feedbacks from their fellow students. To other officers, they say that their noviceness in the position or just because they are new, others do not tend to respect them and even speak of criticisms at their back.

Everybody is entitled of his/her own opinion. Indeed, that is a fact. However, weighing words before uttering them is still the best strategy for a wise person. That is something a leader must possess -- the ability to make sensible decisions. In that case, students would tend to gain their respects and that even if they are new officers, they still deserve to be heard and they deserve their positions.

Time constraint

Of the negative lived experiences of the student leaders, one is time constraint. Their time is divided to their studies, their families, and other social responsibilities.

As could be noticed on the following excerpts from the narrative essays of student leaders, there is indeed a difficulty on the management of time on their part:

“Being a student leader is very hard because you need to budget your time.”

“Sometimes, my attention to my studies is taken away. I don’t have time sometimes helping my family at home because sometimes we have to finish some activities... and meetings...”

One of the effects that could be noticed is that the focus of the student leaders to their studies is being diverted to the organizations they are leading.

It corroborates with the findings of [17] that there are effects of leadership on student achievements, may it be positive or negative impact. For other students, they can be achievers and at the same time leaders. However, to other student leaders, it is really hard, especially those bread winners and with families of their own or have child responsibilities.

Unsatisfaction with the Position

This theme could be drawn from the following excerpts on the lived experiences of the participants as written on their narrative essays:

“This is my first time to be an officer of higher position... there is no significant experience that I encountered because I am not satisfied with my position.”

“I just feel like I’m not doing anything in my position. I just attend meeting. That’s it!”

It is one of the reasons why student leaders fail to achieve their goals or accomplish less. That is because they do have the drive or inner motivation to pursue. When student leaders are not satisfied with their positions, they do not feel like they are doing anything or contributing anything to the organization. Sometimes, they just see it for compliance.

When some student leaders were interviewed, mostly made mention that the reason for unsatisfaction of the position is that they do not find any interesting activity of the organization and that sometimes, they are not heard when they are suggesting. That is why they feel like they are

unlikable for the positions. To others, they are not just interested with the positions they are in, and that they were just accidentally voted for it. Hence, others would just tend to attend meeting just for compliance and nothing more.

3.2. Effects of the Lived Experiences of the Student Leaders to their Studies

This section presents the impact of the lived experiences of the student leaders to their studies.

According to [17], there are effects of leadership on student achievements, may it be positive or negative impact. In addition, “student experiences and involvement including academic involvement, student-faculty relationship, peer relationship, leadership position in class and in student organization” are considered as factors affecting student leadership [18].

Mentioned in the following are the positive and negative impacts revealed as to the lived experiences of the respondents:

Positive Impact

As to the positive impact of student leadership to the studies of the respondents, it was revealed that students engaging in leadership positions would tend to *become well-rounded persons - developing critical thinking skills, decision-making or problem solving skills, socialization skills, and communication skills.*

As per interview, the president of the Political Science Society shared that she was able to become confident to speak in class because she believed she gained the confidence through joining the organizations. Indeed, as validated by [5], providing opportunities for students to voice out their ideas would create meaningful experiences that would help develop their needs, as youth; otherwise, they would not find meaning in their school experiences.

As commonly experienced by all the student leaders, they undergo leadership training that would enhance their potentials and skills.

Negative Impact

It was further revealed that the negative impact of student leadership to the studies of the respondents is *that student leaders tend to struggle with time management, especially when there is too much demand of responsibilities.*

Most of the student leaders mentioned that they are having a lot of meetings in the past because there are a lot of activities undertaken. As part of their responsibilities, they have to attend the set meeting, otherwise, they will be fined. However, that would also mean sacrificing their classes. As per interview, one student leader shared that being a student leader is very hard because you need to budget your time

Hence, student leadership provides a variety of experiences to students that would not only make impact to their studies, but also to their whole life as an individual. May it be

positive or negative impact, they learn to live with such experiences and become the individual they choose to become. It is always a matter of choice on the part student leaders, whether to become the wise and good leader or the otherwise.

IV. CONCLUSION

The lives of student leaders comprise both positive and negative experiences. This also results to the fact that there are positive and negative effects of student leadership to their studies as they try to balance their studies and their responsibilities as officers.

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