

Perceptions of Higher Education Students to the Barriers in Learning through Photovoice

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Abstract

Most students in higher education appreciate photovoice approach (Wass et al., 2019). Integrating photovoice to understand different perceptions and review educational policies may help the policymakers formulate an improved educational guideline on their respective institutions. This study was focused on the barriers in learning perceived by the students in higher education. The result of the study showed that the barriers in learning came from insufficient educational resources, facilities, manpower, and good communication. Understanding that the locale is under development, hence there were more chances of an overall improvement for the benefit of the students learning. Learning doesn't always come from the teacher but the overall environment.

Keywords: Photovoice; Barriers in Learning; Higher Education; Students, Policy

1. Introduction

As defined by Washburne (1936) learning is "an increase, through experience, of problem-solving ability,"; in addition to this is the argue of Lachman (1997) in which he stated that practice and experience affects the learning of an individual, hence it is not absolute and not a unitary process (Tuttle, 1946). There different types of learning, as reclassified by Tudor (2013) it is through formal, non-formal and informal learning. Among all, the Philippines still consider education as the most valued form of learning. Formal learning can be typically achieved through attending a face to face courses or through schooling (Lavenberg & Caspi, 2010).

Through the years, academic institutions in the Philippines aim to improve their quality of educating the students and engaging in more strategic planning. "Strategic planning is a way to help an organization be more productive by helping guide the allocation of resources to achieve goals" (Gürel, 2017). Some institutions use SWOT (strength, weakness, opportunities, and threats) to help them analyze the needed plan to achieve their goals (Sammut-Bonnici & Galea, 2015). Standardization of policies in all institutions may not work as a good strategy. The study of Lim et al. (2018) argued that academic equity is a necessity. Hence knowing the academic institutions' weaknesses through different perspectives may markedly influence a good strategic plan and management.

Perceptions of the teachers and students are highly considered to create a good strategic plan since they are the ones who are experiencing the day to day educational cycle (Okoduwa et al., 2018; Wentink et al., 2019). Although observations of the student and teachers may share similar theoretical considerations, the concept illustrations seemed to vary for some areas (Maulana & Helms-Lorenz, 2016). The day to day interactions of the students and teachers influence the measurement of their perceptions, and the implications of students' evaluation could give a fresh insight into better strategic planning.

Photovoice is a classically qualitative research methodology into which the participants were asked to photograph areas, reflect and communicate the issues being silently voiced out by the photos (Budig et al., 2018). It has been internationally practiced (Sutton-Brown, 2014), however, it is a moderately fresh idea in the Philippines. Using photovoice to students might voice-out some issues that academic institutions may use as a tool for policy improvement (Melanie Zuch et al., 2013). Hence, this study aims to perceive the students' perspective on barriers to learning by the use of photovoice and the actions of the academic institution to the sighted issues of the students.

2. Methodology

This study utilized the qualitative research design in which provides deeper insights and understanding from peoples' experiences and perspectives (Denny & Weckesser, 2019). Specifically, this study used the photovoice by "which people can identify, represent, and enhance their community through a specific photographic technique" (Wang & Burris, 1997). As cited from the study of Budig et al., (2018), photovoice was developed to empower people to express, record, and reflect strengths and concerns of the community, and reach the policymakers for an enhanced policy through the use of photography.

The present research used the purposive, non-probability sampling in gathering the data and responses from the participants. The researcher sixteen (16) Allied Health students of PHINMA Saint Jude College, Manila, Philippines. Concerning the objective of the study, the researcher ensured the safety and protection of the participants and locale. Written consent forms were distributed to all participants of the study before conducting the study.

The participants were asked first to photograph the areas of the academic institution in which they perceived as a barrier to learning. After collecting the photographs, the researcher asked the participants to categorize their photographs in line with student services. And lastly, the researcher asked the perceptions of the participants in line with the photographs.

As a follow-up action, the researcher used action research to promote more collaborative, collegial and participatory practices between people (Townsend, 2019). The researcher presented the gathered data from the students to the student services office for verification and response action to the gathered perceptions.

The study used qualitative data analysis to understand the responses of the participants. Data collection, documentation, analysis, and interpretation are the traditional elementary procedure for qualitative data analysis. In addition to this is the study of Akinyode and Khan (2018) in which they provided an additional step-by-step procedure for qualitative data analysis to wit: data logging, anecdotes, vignettes, data coding, and thematic network.

3. Results and Discussions

Figure 1 shows the first photograph captured by the participants. In photograph presentation, the respondents were asked if they recognize the captured photo. All (16) of the participants recognized the photo in which they identify as the Allied Health Laboratory room. Follow up question had been asked if they

perceive the first photo contains a barrier in learning, only two (2) among all responded none. Another question was asked to those students who perceived that the first photo contains a barrier in learning, thematically, all of their responses falls to the facility improvement.

“There is a barrier for laboratory apparatus which some laboratory tests are not being done due to the barrier in this premises but still the learning is there especially through manual processing.”

The students were also asked if they have suggestions to resolve the barrier in learning observed. Thematically, all of their responses fall to the improvement of facility. In line with this, the researcher asked the student services office representative. The representative argued that the school is a newly acquired school and still under development. The facilities and apparatus needed are already requested. They apologized for the inconvenience of the construction, especially with the dusts and noise; and asked for the understanding of the students. Supporting students’ perception is the study of Oliva (2016), wherein she argued that one barrier to be resolve are the resources to learning.



Figure 1. Allied Health Laboratory

Figure 2 shows the second photograph captured by the participants. In photograph presentation, the respondents were asked if they recognize the captured photo. All (16) of the participants recognized the photo in which they identify as the Allied Health Laboratory floor. Follow up question had been asked if they perceive the second photo contains a barrier in learning, only three (3) among all responded none. Another question was asked to those students who perceived that the second photo contains a barrier in learning, thematically their responses falls into the sanitation and facility.

“Dirty environment, not pleasing to the learning environment; Sirang table and chairs ang init”

The students were also asked if they have suggestions to resolve the barrier in learning observed. Thematically, all of their responses fall to the improvement of facility and sanitation practice. The response of the student service office representative to this concern was since the area is still under renovation, they offered a learning environment area beside their office. The study of Alenezi (2018) supported this finding, wherein he argued that proper learning management must greatly consider having good learning facility especially for institutions seeking for advance technology programs.



Figure 2. Allied Health Floor Area

Figure 3 shows the third photograph captured by the participants. In photograph presentation, the respondents were asked if they recognize the captured photo. All (16) of the participants recognized the photo in which they identify as the Accounting/Cashier office. Follow up question had been asked if they perceive the second photo contains a barrier in learning, eight (8) among all responded none. Another question was asked to those students who perceived that the third photo contains a barrier in learning, thematically their responses falls into the services offered.

“Time spent in queuing, a lot of windows but 1 teller, few seats that could not accommodate larger queues especially during exam days”.

The students were also asked if they have suggestions to resolve the barrier in learning observed. Thematically, all of their responses fall to the improvement of the services of the employee. In which I quoted one of the responses “Better management, more tellers, more seats”. The student service office representative raised this concern to the accounting/cashier. Indeed, there were lapses with the number of employees, but they argued that the volume of the students is only increase during enrollment and exam week. Hence, the student service office representative offered help to decrease the concern of the students during these moments. On the article of Zwane and Malale (2018), they cited the statement of Donald, Lazarus and Lolwana (2002) which stated that there were internal and external barriers in learning. And staffing is one of the internal factors that must be considered to improve services on students learning.



Figure 3. Accounting/Cashier Office

Figure 4 shows the fourth photograph captured by the participants. In photograph presentation, the respondents were asked if they recognize the captured photo. All (16) of the participants recognized the photo in which they identify as the Accounting/Cashier office. Follow up question had been asked if they perceive the second photo contains a barrier in learning, four (4) among all responded none. Another question was asked to those students who perceived that the third photo contains a barrier in learning, thematically their responses falls into the services offered by the employee and facility improvement.

“lack of books not all are available; the staff were short temper and not so accommodating, it seems like they don’t want us to borrow books”.

The students were also asked if they have suggestions to resolve the barrier in learning observed. Thematically, responses fall to the improvement of the facility by adding necessary books or give them access to electronic books, also to improve the attitude of the employee among students.

The student service office representative raised this concern to the campus librarian, in which the librarian informed the students there’s a number of books per students. However, they are also considering the electronic books so that the students will no longer have this type of barrier in learning. In addition to the attitude of the employee, the student service office representative asked the librarian to extend their patience to the students for educational and social sound of the environment. “Employee training represents any activity that develops skills, knowledge and behavior and teaches employees how to better perform their present jobs” (Panagiotakopoulos, 2016).



Figure 4. Campus Library

4. Conclusion and Recommendation

“Photovoice projects, which fall under the heading of youth participatory action research, represent promising vehicles for this work” (Smith et al., 2012). Using visual methodology to voice out current issues could attract peoples’ attention for good development. Photovoice methodology is being used nowadays especially in health and social sciences. Photovoice may also link the disparities of the perceptions of the individual. Indeed, different eyes may give different perception regarding issues that should be resolved, and by this, more solutions can be formulated for better strategic planning.

Truly, considering the perceptions of the students to certain issues may be young but gives another side of viewpoint. In this study, the students highlighted their issues on the facility, sanitation and the approach of the employees towards them. Clearly, the barriers of students’ learning come from the lapses in information distribution and quick action of the student services office to the students’ concern. It seems like there were disparity on students – student services office social connection. By this, the researcher would like to recommend the both sides to be more open to all concerns and issues which could result for a better strategic plan and management in education and learning.

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