

Tracing the Lifelong Learners in a State University

Josefina S. Sana, Nueva Vizcaya State University, Philippines
Jacqueline V. Iglesias, Nueva Vizcaya State University, Philippines
Juanita B. Pascua, Nueva Vizcaya State University, Philippines
Vilchor G. Perdido, Nueva Vizcaya State University, Philippines
Jane D. Navalta, Nueva Vizcaya State University, Philippines
Cherry Ann P. Navalta, Nueva Vizcaya State University, Philippines

The Asian Conference on the Social Sciences 2019
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

Lifelong learners are those highly motivated to pursue acquiring skills and values in a formal and informal setting who signified varied personal, socio-economic, and other worthy cause and declared intentions to pursue a college degree of their choice. This descriptive-qualitative research analyzed the profile of students who took the entrance examination at a State University. The study used thematic analysis to analyze the reasons why lifelong learners decided to enroll in college during the K-12 transition period, which showed inferred themes and categories from the created codes.

The study found that lifelong learners predominantly belonged to age ranging from 17-20, single, Roman Catholic, graduated in 2015, no honors received, and graduated from public schools. Themes ranged from self, urgency of going back to school, valuing, and cost, and categories cited were beliefs, personal characteristic, attainment value, utility value, sense of time and preparation needed for schooling. Lifelong learners' beliefs are sources of motivation; they think that going back to school can help them realize their dreams and goals; they feel the urgency to enroll in college for they think that time is running out on them due to the implementation of K to 12 curriculum; attainment valuing is emphasized on the benefits that they will gain when they finish their course such as credentials and eligibility as well as prestige and recognition; and they said that they have that career maturity to pursue what they like and that they have financial stability.

Keywords: Lifelong, Learners, Tracing, K to 12, themes

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Introduction

Lifelong learning (L3) is a ceaseless pursuit of acquiring a degree or a formal education not only from books but equally important is the experience one gets from life. Hence, learners who is highly motivated to pursue acquiring skills and values in a formal and informal setting can be labelled as Lifelong Learners (Watson, 2003).

In the Philippine context, students who have stopped pursuing college education for various reasons and have not started enrolling in 2015 and years earlier could still pursue college starting SY 2016-2017 and SY 2017-2018. High school students who opted to graduate secondary education through the Alternative Learning System (ALS) may also pursue college before SY 2018-2019.

Alternative Learning System (ALS) under the supervision of the Department of Education, has perceptively considered administration of an examination that would cover the competencies of a high school graduate. The candidate should pass the ALS examination to legitimize him in finishing a high school education.

The two-year transition period for the 12-year Basic Education Program, which is on its first year of implementation has started last 2016. These two years, 2016-17 to 2017-18 pioneer the beginning of Senior High School and would allow the high school graduates of 2015 and years earlier to pursue college without undergoing the Senior High School. Thus, these entrants are the Lifelong Learners (L3) of any Higher Educational Institution. Needless to say, those high school graduates who would not enroll this SY 2017 could be compelled to enroll in Grade 11 and Grade 12 next 2018 (CHED Memorandum Order No. 10,) when the first batch of Senior High School would have finished the first batch of Senior High School.

Inevitably, going back to school for lifelong learners is a great challenge to accept. Since initial motivation and inspiration are not enough for these motives are short-lived and that more difficult academic loads are way ahead (O'Neill & Thomson, 2013). Certain experiences, convictions, inspirations and other forces may direct the energy of these students toward the completion of chosen program or course (Holman et al., 2015). For old and returning students, tension between and among priorities – schooling, work, family concerns and personal concerns, the interplay of pursuing dream and the hardship of attaining that goal, the constant struggle between encouragement and discouragement, bravery and defeat and the long battle to give up or continue to persist may be felt strongly and that it can lead to the point that wherein life experience become conflicting stories to live by (Connelly & Clandinin, 2001). These students have their own ideas and reasons why they are motivated to pursue and finish their course. At the same time, they are being critical of their life choices, sensitive to the evaluation of others and of the self and being frustrated and challenged in their financial, social and other concerns and struggles.

In 2010, the Philippine Statistics Authority estimated the number of Filipino high school graduates who did not have a college degree at 10.2 million. The Commission on Higher Education (2016) initiated a study to assess the share of Lifelong Learners among this group as well as an undeserved group that the sector cannot cater to. Based on the results of the Lifelong Learner Survey done by CHED, 31.8% of

respondents signified willingness to return to college. Also, 11.5% indicated that they would consider enrolling in college after knowing that the next two school years will be their best chance to go back to college before the new general education (GE) curriculum and revised college curriculum will be implemented by June 2018.

It is in this context that the researchers were prompted to conduct this study to determine the profile of selected lifelong learners, and their reasons for the delays in pursuing a college education.

Objectives

The study was conducted to evaluate the lifelong learners of the Nueva Vizcaya State University from first semester, SY 2016-17 and first semester, SY 2017-18.

Specifically, it aimed to:

1. trace the profile of the Lifelong Learners in terms of:
 - a. age
 - b. sex
 - c. civil status
 - d. religion
 - e. year graduated
 - f. honors received
 - g. school graduated from
2. discuss the reasons for the delays in pursuing college education

Methodology

UNESCO (1976) declared that lifelong learning denotes an overall scheme aimed both at restructuring the existing educational system and at developing the entire educational potential outside the educational system. Lifelong learning should extend throughout life, include all skills and branches of knowledge, use all possible means, and give the opportunity to all people for full development of their personality.

Field et al. (as cited by Braun and Clarke, 2006) examined the evidence for claims that lifelong learning has a measurable impact on people's lives. It considered evidences in three main areas: the economic impact, the impact on individual well-being, and the impact on the wider community. The research findings considered implications for policy, practice, and research based on the follow up done on individuals over time, asking them periodically about different aspects of their lives.

Horrigan (2016) made a survey on Lifelong Learning and Technology where a large majority of Americans seek extra knowledge for personal and work-related reasons. Digital technology plays a notable role in the knowledge pursuits, but place-based learning remains vital to many and differences in education and income are a symbol of people's learning activities.

Selected lifelong learners were asked the overarching question of why they decided to go back to college and follow up questions encouraged them to share their reasons as

to the sources of motivations that encouraged them to enroll again in college; and the needs they felt.

This descriptive-qualitative study used thematic analysis to analyze the reasons, why L3 decided to enroll in college during the K-12 Transition period.

The participants of the study were the 492 Lifelong Learners of the first semester, SY 2016-2017 and first semester, SY 2017-2018.

First step was familiarization of the data. Since most of the coders worked in the university testing center, we were given the chance to browse the response as well as engage in a conversation with some of the respondents during the test administration of the college entrance test. **Second step** was generating initial codes. A round table coding was done in a session. The negative effect of consensual coding was lessened through brainstorming. **Third step** was searching for categories and themes. At this part, one led in the selection of emerging themes as guided by the theories. **Fourth step** utilized Patton's (1990) dual criteria for judging categories – internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity. The themes presented are clear and identifiable. **Fifth step**, defining and naming themes was incorporated. It focused on the essence of the themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006) as it is clustered together or separately.

Results and Discussion

Profile of the Participants

The 492 Lifelong Learners predominantly belonged to age ranging from 17-20 (59.15%). Participants were equal in number in terms of sex, 50% for both males and females. In terms of civil status, majority were still singles (94.51%), Roman Catholic (62%), 196 (39.84%) have completed their secondary schooling in 2015, 112 (22.76%) in 2014; majority (96.95%) did not receive any academic award, and majority (83.13%) graduated from public schools.

Reasons of Lifelong Learners why they decided to go back to school: An overview

The qualitative result of the study based on the research question: What were the reasons why lifelong learners decided to go back to school were discussed in this part of the paper. Each theme explains and describes the reason for returning in school and illustrates how it fits into a broader overall story of lifelong learners.

Table 1: Summary of Themes, Categories and Codes

Themes	Categories/Definition	Codes
Self	Beliefs	It realizes their dreams/goals It is the course/career they want to pursue It helps them gain knowledge It improves their career path
	Personal characteristics	They are getting older They are able to feel their self-worth
Urgency of going back to school	Sense of time	The quick passing of time Implication of K to 12 program
Valuing	Attainment Value	Credentials and eligibility gained from finishing a course Prestige and recognition gathered from others
	Utility Value	Offers a better future Improvement in socioeconomic profile Family and social responsibility will be fulfilled
Cost	Preparation needed for schooling	They have maturity in choosing a career They have more financial stability to pursue schooling

Self

Lifelong learners' beliefs and personal characteristics influence their reasons for returning to school. Their beliefs are sources of motivation. They think that going back to school can help realize their dreams and goals.

They also think going back to school can lead to pursuing the course they want to finish, and career that they want to follow. In this process they also gain knowledge. They also believe that finishing school can improve their career path. One lifelong learner emphasized that taking a second course can contribute to career enhancement. Likewise, personal characteristics such as getting older and self-worth pushes these lifelong learners to enroll again in college.

Urgency

Lifelong learners feel the urgency to enroll in college for they think that time is running out on them due to the implementation of K to 12 curriculum. If they will not enroll within the prescribed time, they will be forced to take subjects in the K to 12 program. This will be a source of additional years in schooling.

Valuing

Despite the fact that these lifelong learners stopped schooling for some time, the importance of education is not forgotten. The socialized essence of education among lifelong learners emerged as they looked into the attainment value and utility gathered from finishing a course. Attainment valuing is emphasized on the benefits that they will gain when they finish their course such as credentials and eligibility as well as prestige and recognition. One student said that he is planning to put up a Christian school which requires academic credentials; and another student wants to take this second chance of opportunity to make her parents and daughter proud of what she is doing.

Whereas, utility values come in the form of better future, improved socio-economic status and fulfillment of family and social responsibilities. These positive outcomes of graduating in college motivate students to decide to go back to school. One lifelong learner mentioned that his dream is to become successful because he is tired of working in the field; and another one said that he wants to finish his plan in life that is to help his family and others who need help; and one learner claimed that he wants to finish a because according to him, it will be so hard not to have a stable life in the future.

Cost

These are the reasons of lifelong learners why they decided that this is now the right time for them to enroll. This includes the preparation they have to make so that they can enroll as well as the things they had sacrificed before they decided to enroll. They said that they have that career maturity to pursue what they like and that they have financial stability. One lifelong learner said that he decided to study now because he already know what course he is taking/getting; and one mentioned that he earned money for his studies and let his siblings finished their studies and for them to help him also in his studies.

The emerging themes of self, valuing, cost and urgency were selected based on the responses of lifelong learners and how it captured a relevant concept to the overall research question. The first three themes: self, valuing and cost describe the socio-cognitive motivation of learners. Their beliefs about the self and personal characteristics contribute to the decision of lifelong learners to go back to school. Their belief in their ability that they can finish the task at hand (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000) and their personal belief on the education lead them to that decision. The lifelong learners also emphasized the importance of schooling and education in gaining credibility and eligibility as well as prestige and recognition (Attainment Value). The utility value was shown in their reasons for they appreciate the usefulness of education in uplifting their economic conditions and having better future. That is why they decided to enroll at all cost, and increase their effort in attaining their goals. They did initial preparation in order to prepare themselves for the challenges in college such as career maturity and financial stability.

The practical reason why they decided to go back to college is more of urgency since they think that time is running out on them due to the implementation of K to 12 curriculum. If they will not enroll within the prescribed time, they will be forced to take subjects in the K to 12 program.

Conclusions

Based on the results of the study, the following are concluded:

1. Lifelong learners predominantly belonged to age ranging from 17-20, single, Roman Catholic, mostly graduated in 2015, very few had honors received and graduated from public schools.
2. Themes ranged from self, urgency of going back to school, valuing, and cost; and categories cited were beliefs, personal characteristics, attainment value, utility value, sense of time and preparation needed for schooling. Lifelong learners' beliefs are sources of motivation; they think that going back to school can help realize their dreams and goals; they feel the urgency to enroll in college for they think that time is running out on them due to the implementation of K to 12 curriculum; attainment valuing is emphasized on the benefits that they will gain when they finish their course such as credentials and eligibility as well as prestige and recognition; and they said that they have that career maturity to pursue what they like and that they have financial stability.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusions, the following recommendations are for forwarded:

1. The **administration** to provide interventions such as: adjustment program, needs assessment, specialized trainings to mentors to mention a few to satisfy the unique needs of these students; curricular offering including scholarships and other support programs that would fit the needs of lifelong learners; prioritize needs assessment and realign course offering to make subjects more relevant and beneficial to them; and plan creative strategies on how the lifelong learners can cope with the new learning climate and how they can be ushered to steps toward motivation and success.
2. **Future researchers to conduct** an in –depth study on reasons for the delay in college education may be done.

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Contact email: juanitapascua@nvsu.edu.ph