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Education for Sustainable Development (ESD): A Journey Towards Sustainable Future

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Abstract. Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) becomes an imperative trend among educational institutions, which requires a change in education in this modern society. Consequently, all learning institutions need to revisit its functions if it plays its vital role in transforming society by promoting social and environmental equity. This qualitative research intends to explore the faculty members' experiences in a State College in Negros Occidental of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). Four faculty members were purposely selected and voluntarily participated in the study. Their relevant ESD experiences were collected using semi-structured in-depth interviews, and results were analyzed using a thematic approach of Lichtman. Analysis of the data reveals exciting themes of their experiences. On becoming a greening organization member, their professional advancement and interest in the care for the environment prevailed. On the meaning of ESD, they highlighted the academe's role in promoting sustainability. Lastly, on their ESD experiences in their classes, actions for learning through the inculcation of sustainability competencies among learners were evident. Generally, the findings suggest teachers' significant role in promoting ESD and the importance of providing an avenue for learners to acquire the necessary knowledge, skills, and values to promote sustainability.

Keywords. social science, sustainable development, qualitative, Negros Occidental

1. Introduction

Sustainability is a primary concern of the world (Mahat et al., 2016), and Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) becomes an emerging imperative which requires a change in the functions of education in this modern society (Dawe & Martin, 2005; Mohanty & Dash, 2018). United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organizations (UNESCO) mentioned that ESD refers to holistic and transformational education. It addresses learning content and outcomes, pedagogy, and the learning environment. It achieves its purpose by transforming society. More broadly, it is defined as environmental education to include international development issues, cultural diversity, and social and ecological equity (Calder & Clugston, 2003). For the furtherance of ESD, United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) number four, Quality Education indicator 4.7, states that by 2030 ensure all

learners acquire knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development (UNESCO, 2017, p. 2). Hence, educational institutions have an essential role to play.

The educational institution has a leading role in carrying out sustainable development at the local, national and global levels (Bertschy et al., 2013; Kaivola, 2007; Mohanty & Dash, 2018). With this role, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) need to carry out transformational change in sustainable development. In the Asia – Pacific Region, there are substantial progress in ESD through innovative programs and projects and exploring sustainability's learning dimensions (Ryan et al., 2010).

In the Philippines context, the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) took initiatives to respond well to the academic quest for Sustainable Development. The Commission articulated its commitment in its Strategic Plan 2011 – 2016 to integrate ESD in tertiary education to respond to UNESCO's Agenda 21 and reform the HEIs (Balanay & Halog, 2016). Moreover, in 2017 CHED issued a memorandum signifying its support in promoting *Ambisyon Natin 2040* and the Philippine Development Plan 2017 – 2022 (*Ambisyon Natin 2040*, 2017). These two lay down the Philippines' commitment and priority plans to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to empower every Filipino to attain future generations' aspirations (Voluntary National Review, 2019).

Previous studies conducted on ESD in school focused more on students in Shandong University (Yuan & Zuo, 2013); students and faculty of secondary schools from rural and urban areas in Malaysia (Mahat & Idrus, 2017); public elementary school teacher in Tacloban City (Mazo, 2017). Besides, some studies involved other social institutions, like involving 70 different institutions worldwide in Lozano et al., 2015. At present, there is a dearth of substantial evidence that supports the lived experiences of faculty members of ESD in a state college, particularly in the State Colleges and Universities (SUCs) in Negros Occidental. Hence, it is in this context that the researcher will pursue this phenomenological study.

This qualitative research intended to explore the Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) experiences of the faculty members in a State College in Negros Occidental. This paper focused on the following central questions: What is the meaning of the Education for Sustainable Development for faculty members in a State College? Furthermore, How do the faculty members in a State College experience the Education for Sustainable Development in their classes?

2. Methodology

This work applied a qualitative research design using a phenomenological approach to examine and understand State College faculty members' lived experiences on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) in their respective classes. The primary participants for this qualitative inquiry were the faculty members in a State College who have experienced the phenomenon of ESD in their classes. They were determined using the purposive sampling technique. Guided by the inclusion criteria, the participants must be a member of the Greening organization of the State College; have been with state college for at least three (3) years and above; have at least five (5) years cumulative teaching experience, and have ideas of ESD or Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). A letter to the institution's president was sent to seek permission to conduct the study.

In this study, the primary data gathering method involved in-depth semi-structured interviews with the participants. According to Bevan (2014), an interview is the most dominant method for data collection in phenomenological research. Furthermore, through interviews, the researcher will collect rich and detailed qualitative data about the participant's experiences

based on the description and meaning they attached to it (Ruben & Ruben, 2012 as cited by Castillo – Montoya, 2016).

The interview ended with a debriefing that reiterated the study's purpose and data presentation in the professional community. The researcher likewise emphasized the observance of confidentiality with regards to the interviewee's identity and responses. She expressed her appreciation to the interviewees for their cooperation. After each interview, there was a verbatim generation of transcriptions. Finally, there was a review of transcription in preparation for analysis. Lichtman's recursive textual data analysis framework or three Cs

(coding, categorizing, and conceptualizing) was employed to cull out the faculty members' lived experiences on ESD.

To address ethical issues, the researcher secured the respondents' informed consent and emphasized that their participation in this study will be voluntary, and they have the right to withdraw if they feel uncomfortable in gathering information from them. Also, they were assured of total confidentiality among participants. No information that discloses their identity will be released nor published without their specific consent to the disclosure and only when it is imperatively necessary.

3. Results

This paper aims to explore the experiences of state college faculty members of Education for Sustainable development. In aid of discussion, this section presents the three themes that emerged in the conducted interviews.

Professional advancement/development and interest in the care for the environment

The participants believed that their formal training in undergraduate and graduate studies qualified them to become part of the institution's greening organization. Some of them are Science teachers, while others had pursued graduate studies related to the environment, namely MS Biology and Masters in International Sustainable Development. These formal training further enhanced their passion for the care for the environment. Also, these formal training propelled further their love for the preservation and protection of the environment. Participants shared these thoughts:

I am a science teacher, and I teach environmental science, and of course, I have a minor in my MS environmental biology and that gave me a heart for the environment and I'm so interested with the helping in the preservation of our environment. I'm so in with recycling...

My formal training education, my masters is in international sustainable...development and I took it in 2004, I finished 2006 at Brandies University and then I engaged with the practice for two years in the same university...

On the other hand, one of the participants shared that he got interested in joining the organization because he wanted to learn more and participate in the activities to better know the college's program.

Academe's role in promoting sustainability

The majority of the participants shared that before their membership to the institution's greening organization, they already have ideas about Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) or Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Two of them shared that they learned the concept in their graduate studies, one from reading and hearing the news, and the other got acquainted with the idea when introduced in the institution's greening organization.



Meanwhile, the participants define ESD as the promotion of sustainability. They believed that education plays a vital role in its attainment. The following narratives provided the data:

Sometime in 2000 they declared what we call as the Decade of education for sustainable development in order to promote, propagate the concept in the formal setting especially in schools from basic education to higher education daw naging respond siya sng anu ...natun (it became our response) about caring the environment for the future's generation especially in our case since we are in the academe ...

We're looking for sustainability especially in education na kay ka kadako kayo sang iya nga factor in the development of a nation, kon naplastar ang education as a base line kag kung makita nila ang foundation mas mabakud kag madala ang tanan (it is a big factor in the development of a nation, if education is in place as baseline and they will see that the foundation is strong it will encompass to all).

Furthermore, all of them believed that ESD and SDGs are related. Their responses cited that education can be a vessel in promoting the seventeen (17) SDGs. Below is the demonstration of their thoughts:

...if we educate the youth in helping in the development and of course having sustainable development of the environment of the world this can answer some of the goals of the UN.

They are interrelated, they are linked, so when you want to educate people about sustainable development today you have to educate them not only about the definition of that pillars but about the targets of sustainable development and these are the 17 goals and the bottom line is always to end poverty.

Meanwhile, the participants also have ideas of sustainability. The data they provided highlighted their sustainability ideas, which focused on preserving the limited resources. The following section provides the information that the participants revealed.

it is doing something or making or using up the resources but thinking of maintaining it's still being there... if you're going to cut the trees kag nagplant ka (and you planted) otherwise you are not allowed to cut, it should be sustainable...

...sustainability is to ensure that it has implications in terms of resources so one is the assumption there is that resources of the planet are not infinite, they have limits and so therefore because they have limits to sustain that we have to do some protection, we have to do some conservation and there are many areas involved in sustainability aside from system also relationships, relationships founded on respect for justice, for human rights, for the dignity of human person, integrity of creation, because the moment the interaction relationship is this values are missing and what prevails is greed it is no longer sustainable so that's why it's begin with these core values.

sustainability continuous...planning and doing implementing activities programs and projects not only for the present time but of course for the future generations and for the future future's children.

Also, one participant underscored the meaning of sustainability in the field of education. He asserted that for education to be sustainable, it should be able to empower the learners. They must acquire that will enable them to make sound decisions and become responsible in taking actions in whatever situation they may be. Consequently, they will be ready in the future.

Actions for learning through the inculcation of sustainability competencies

All the participants affirmed that they had experienced ESD in their classes by integrating topics about the environment, social issues, and waste management, among others. Whenever possible, they made it a conscious effort to engage the students in sustainability or SDGs issues. They provided an avenue by asking questions or giving examples to share their ideas on solving real problems related to the environment or social issues. The participants shared:

I discuss it of course, we discuss each goal I ask them as students don't give me, as if you are the president of the Philippines, as students, what can you do to help and meeting this goal? So they will get simple way of meeting the needs kay ti syempre kasami nila planting trees (most often they respond planting trees)

If you are to actualize it as a teacher is regardless of the course you teach, once you teach your students to not only teach but once you empower them, once you teach them with capacity to address challenges that they can see in their day to day life that is already education for sustainable development because you are making them capable of dealing with challenges of life.

Furthermore, they gave their learners opportunities to present their ideas on how they can contribute to the needed solution to resolve their community's social issues. They let them engaged in the exchange of experiences with their classmates. Hence, allowing their learners to reflect on their experiences and interactions inside the classroom. Below is the portrayal of the participants of their experiences:

What are the challenges? Poverty, hunger, graft and corruption, the climate crisis, pollution, waste. The moment you bring them out bring these issues out in the classroom, make them fully aware on this and then do something about on their own little way that is for education for sustainable development in action

...Rizal classes or in the history, naintegrate siya (it's integrated) like for example touching the social issues and problems in our society so pwedi na gina integrate siya SDG (it is possible that it is integrated) as to what is the role of the local government unit, role of the educators, role of the students themselves, role of the community in fulfilling the in helping the nation.

Also, they let their learners engage in varied classroom activities to enable them to develop their skills such as critical mindedness, collaboration, and creativeness. The following narratives captured their experiences:

...environmental awareness protection, so I required my students to develop slogans naghimo sila syempre indi man ta face to face naghimo sila poster and then mga video clips about sa how they take care the environment. anu ang



nakita nila nga issues and problems in their localities and then nagpropose sila kon anu nga mga projects nga mas nami tani nga himuon sang LGUs
(so I required my students to develop slogans, they made it since there is no face to face class interaction, they made poster and then video clips about how they care the environment. They identified the issues and problems in their localities and they proposed projects that can be feasibly done by their LGUs.)

kay ti tungod sina nakatukod kami didtu sang UOEP - Unified Organization for Environmental Protection nga club kag tungod sina naka gain ko officers kag nakapangita ko sang mga bata nga interested sa environmental protection (because of that we established UOEP - Unified Organization for Environmental Protection Club and because of that I gained officers and students who have interest in environmental protection).

Uniquely, one participant gladly shared that ESD should start at home. She believed that *the children's learning at home could bring with them and hopefully convince others to do what they learn in school.*

On the contrary, one participant acknowledged that there is still a need to improve the consistency between ESD theory and practice. There is still a need to translate the learning into actual practice. The participant said:

...in all of my courses, I have integrated ESD in terms of what practice, practice of... I think what they have here in CHMSC, the hours of sustainability which is our student more conscious about recycling, about reusing, about conserving resources. I've personally, I am conscious and I've been doing that but it's still remain a challenge in terms of real practice of our student and the rest of people in the school

The participant further added:

not everyone is practicing it ahhhh and most people say, they believe in it, but the part that... the hardest part is practice, because to my analysis sometimes there is inconvenience

4. Discussion

The results of the study revealed several remarkable insights into the participants' experiences of ESD. All the participants are members of the institution's greening organization. The results suggest that the professional advancement they took before joining the organization influenced the recommendation made for them to become members. Aside from this advancement they had, results revealed that they already had a particular interest in the care for the environment, and it is further enhanced as they became a member of the organization. This result is in consonant with the study of Yuan et al. (2017). Their research revealed that there is a positive correlation between care for the environment and environmental sustainability. It thus contributed significantly to professional development and a sustainable environment. Hence, professional development in the education sector is essential in achieving quality education, thus achieving sustainable development (Havea et al., 2020). In sharing one participant, he clearly emphasized that he wanted to learn more, so he decided to join. This professional advancement can be formal training like pursuing graduate studies or informal training, like seminars, workshops, or seminars.

In addition, results revealed that academe plays a vital role in promoting sustainability. As teachers, participants acknowledged that they are responsible for making their students

aware of their role in preserving and protecting future generations' environment through classroom undertakings. In the study of Alvarez-Suárez et al. (2014) on a sustainable model of consumption as teaching intervention among trainee teachers, results revealed that subjects taught among students could increase their knowledge of the subject to better awareness on actions to take about sustainable consumerism. Consequently, developed behaviors adhering towards sustainable consumption.

Since environmental protection is everyone's duty, education will enable the learners to think, analyze and act judiciously towards promoting sustainability. Developing these knowledge, skills, and attitudes among students is vital in making them sustainable literate. Consequently, they can serve as positive agents of change in their future workplace and even with their personal lives (Cebrián & Junyent, 2015).

Moreover, results emphasized that ESD and SDGs are interrelated. According to Blessinger et al. (2018), both go hand in hand. It implies that academe has a responsibility to reorient education gearing towards the cultivation of critical and creative thinking skills that would develop a value system that gives premiums to oneself, others, and the planet. Thus, a shift in education which highlights sustainability should be evident in higher education.

Finally, it became salient to do actions for learning by inculcating sustainability competencies in the courses they taught. Results yielded the integration of sustainability topics related to the environment, waste management, and social issues in the participants' respective classes. It was evident that the participants provided empowerment avenues for their learners inside and outside the classroom. Participants believed that their activities like slogan making, proposal making, club activities, discussions, or debate inside the classroom provided opportunities to inculcate environmental values. Boyes & Stanisstreet (2012) emphasized that teaching actions that promote the benefits of education in changing the learners' practice, like an increase in recycling and planting trees, are vital.

Also, through class interactions, learners will acquire knowledge of different environmental and societal issues. The acquired knowledge can lead to furthering their sustainability awareness and hopefully push them to take actions that can help alleviate their community's situations based on informed decision-making. Rieckmann (2018) said that ESD is a tool that will promote knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes that will empower learners to make informed decisions and responsible actions for environmental integrity and a fair society. Cebrián & Junyent (2015) further supports it, and they believed that infusing sustainability competencies in types of pedagogies and teaching and learning approaches will help the students become empowered and globally – responsible citizens, therefore becoming active agents of change.

Conversely, one divergent idea emerged on the consistency between theory and practice on sustainability. Learning sustainability in school is very feasible. However, translating it into practice is another thing. It implies that changing students' beliefs about issues will not directly push them to take action due to some factors like social norms and situational influences (Boyes & Stanisstreet, 2012). According to Sterling (2004, p.49), sustainability implies a double learning challenge. It relies on widespread and deep learning within the higher education community and policymakers. A systems-based staged learning model offered a tool for thinking about the difficulty and possibility of such profound change and the idea of co-evolution as a learning process between institutions and their communities.

5. Conclusion

The participants' narratives of their lived experiences of ESD indicated the academe's vital role in promoting ESD. Teachers should make a conscious effort to integrate the different sustainable development goals in their respective classes. Consequently, the students may

acquire the necessary knowledge, skills, and values to promote sustainability. Meanwhile, their professional development helped them advance their knowledge of ESD.

The findings suggest that teachers have a significant role in promoting ESD. Teachers need to become more innovative in their teaching pedagogy so that academic institutions can take their role as a leading social institution that will promote sustainability. This opportunity will align the thoughts and actions of students towards responsible stewardship of the world's resources.

However, a challenge of consistency from theory to actual practice must be addressed, not just among the students but also among all school community members. It means that the administration can conduct an assessment to identify its strengths and areas that need improvement. Hence, the application of the whole-school approach will come in. Therefore, starting and achieving sustainability is everyone's responsibility.

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