

“I have loans”: A Communicative Study Teachers Living with Loans

ABSTRACT

The study looks at the life of teachers at the public school living with loans through the Phenomenological Tradition of Communication that conceives communication as a dialogue or experience of otherness. The study, a phenomenological approach, sought to answer the overarching question: how is the life of teachers who have loans? Specifically, it sought to answer (1) what are their reasons for resorting to loan?; and (2) what are their coping mechanisms to provide their daily needs? The study assumed that teacher's motives and actions towards loans could only understand through their experience. The study designed qualitatively wherein teachers from public a public elementary school at the Schools Division of Puerto Princesa City, Philippines were intentionally chosen (non-probability) and interviewed based on their common experience.

Four public elementary teachers with loans and take-home pay of four thousand pesos participated in the study. A semi-structured interview was done and recorded with their permission. The data were transcribed and analyzed by coding and constructing themes. Teachers have loans because of their (1) perceived personal needs such as (a) expenses for their wedding; (2) and perceived family needs such as (a) expenses for baby's needs, (b) tuition of family members, (3) housing for the family, (5) and to pay the debt of the family. Their perceived needs direct them to resort to loans, which led them to have a take-home pay of four thousand pesos, wherein for them, it is not enough to sustain their daily needs. Thus, it urges them to have various coping mechanisms to maintain their everyday living that include (1) re-loan and "bunggo," (2) seeking financial help from other members of the family, (3) and becoming a wise spender. It further revealed that to sustain the authentic relationship between teacher (self) and loan (other) both must have a continuous perceived needs and benefits. The study recommended some recommendations wherein teachers and school heads may consider.

Keywords: Qualitative. Phenomenology. Communication. Experience. Teachers. Loans. Financial Literacy

1. INTRODUCTION

Let's start this study by defining the most popular word in the group of teachers when they meet "financial crisis" at the cross-section- "Loan." According to Kagan (2019), a loan is a monetary, property, and other material things lent to another party payable within a period along with interest and additional charges after reaching an agreement between teachers and the lending entities.

I view a loan as a product of the communicative process. Most of our teachers in the DepEd have loans, and sometimes we use it as a joke to residence- "TagaLoandon kami!". In the study conducted by Imelda et al. (2017) which they examined the level of financial literacy of public and private pre-service teachers and professional teachers in the Philippines revealed that both professional and pre-service teachers have very low basic and sophisticated financial literacy skills. This study is also in cognizant with the international

study that revealed that there is a widespread of illiteracy in both developed and rapidly changing markets (Lusardi & Mitchell, 2011). As workers who will be retiring to service whether private and public, financial literacy is critical to retirement security that most of us also tend to “underestimate” (Lusardi & Mitchell, 2011).. It is also evident that there is a need for the Philippines to intensify financial literacy among its citizen specially in the young professionals and to immediately take actions such as inclusion of it in the tertiary curriculum (Imelda et al., 2019; Castro, Salamat, & Tabor, 2020).

Financial literacy is knowledge and understanding of financial concepts and risks, motivation and confidence to apply such knowledge and understanding in order to make effective decisions regarding the range of financial contexts and also to improve the financial well-being of individuals and society, and to enable participation in the economic life (Imelda et al, 2017).

In my ten years in DepEd, I witnessed how teachers live with loans. Taking loans is a financial decision made by a certain individual. In an increasingly risky and globalized marketplace, people must be able to make well-informed financial decisions (Luzardi& Mitchell, 2011). There are some risks that accompanied with taking loans such as big fee upfront, early pay-off penalties, high interest rate, not being able to make your payment, getting too deeply into debt, and hurting your ability to borrow in the future (Parker, 2021; Bieber 2021). However, despite of these risks, teachers still resort to a financial decision to avail loans. In this sense, I would like to clearly understand their views and behaviors toward loan looking into their own experiences in the communicative view using the Phenomenological Tradition of Communication. This tradition of communication theorized communication as an experience of otherness or a dialogue (Craig, 1999). It problematizes the absence of or failure to sustain an authentic human relationship. Although in Craig's Tradition of Communication, he is referring to "human" like other, in this study, the "other" is the "loan," which is an inanimate object. The experience of dialogue happened between teachers and loans and how teachers and loan build relationship. Thus, I looked into how is the life of a teacher living with loans? Specifically, it sought to answer (1) what their reasons for resorting to a loan are? And (2) what are their coping mechanisms to provide their daily needs? The study assumed that understanding the teachers' motive and action towards loans is through their experience and others.

Moreover, having the knowledge of teachers' experiences with loans can give the policy makers, organization, and educational institution of an in-depth understanding why most teachers opted to avail loans.

2. METHODOLOGY

Qualitative aims to understand the experience of others in their context (Merriam, 1998 as cited by Zeek, 2002). It does not forecast; instead, it is an analysis that provides a depth of understanding for those interested in the events of a particular setting and time. This study utilized the phenomenological research method to understand the lived experiences of public elementary teachers in one of the schools in the Schools Division of Puerto Princesa City. Public Elementary teachers are experiencing income difficulty because of several factors affecting their finances. A qualitative approach to this study will present detailed descriptions of the teachers' lived experiences to describe the phenomenon accurately. The phenomenological research can give us the background in understanding the situation of teachers living with loans because of their lived experiences which serve as the phenomenon that I would like to understand.

This qualitative study used phenomenological inquiry. It used a casual and informal conversation to obtain the lived experiences of four elementary teacher-participants. The study used the phenomenological approach to understand the subjective aspects of elementary teachers' lived experiences with loans. "Researcher in the phenomenological mode attempt to understand the meaning of events and interactions to ordinary people in particular situations" (Bogdan&Biklen, 2003 as cited by Zeek, 2002). As for this study, I would like to understand the meaning of events and interactions with the others- loans. I captured personal experiences and drew out detailed descriptions and deep sense from my participants as they described the nature of their lives living with loans.

Data Collection

There six teachers in the school where the researcher conducted the study. The researcher chose only the four participantswho shared the same phenomenon- "loan". In qualitative study particularly the use of non-probability sampling the "researcher's goal is in-depth, idiographic understanding rather than more general, nomothetic understanding" (Saylor Academy, 2012).All respondents were female. They were utilized to provide the evidence needed to understand the lived experiences of public elementary teachers living with loans. I had an unstructured interview with the participants to solicit their views and experiences regarding life living with loans. After the unstructured interviews, I informed them that the information I obtained from them would remain confidential, and I will use pseudonyms to protect their privacy.

All conversations were audio-recorded to capture the themes of dialogue and to ensure its correctness. The conversation is in Filipino; however, I translated it into English for this research.

Data Analysis

I used Zeek's (2012), which anchored from Moustakas' (1994) modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen analysis method, to analyze the phenomenological data. First, I listed all relevant statements of the participants. This process is called,horizonalization; each comment held equal value. Second, I recorded all non-overlapping, non-repetitive statements. These statements were the invariant horizons of the experience. Third, I grouped invariant horizons into themes. Fourth, I used the invariant horizons and themes to construct an individual textural description of each participant's experience, including verbatim examples. Fifth, I created a unique structural description of each participant's experience drawn from the personal textural description and imaginative variation. Sixth, I constructed a textural-structural narrative of the meanings and essences of each participant's experience, including the invariant constituents and themes. Finally, I used the individual textural-structural descriptions to develop a composite description of the elements of the experience for all participants as a whole. This description was the heart of the lived experience.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Lived Experiences of Teachers with Loans

The lives of teachers with loans started from their reasons, which resulted in different mechanisms for dealing with their various needs each day.According to the BangkoSentral ng Pilipinas (BSP), there has been a significant increase in Filipinos getting a loan from 29% in 2017 to 41% in 2019. This comes to no surprise as more Filipinos begin to understand the value of managing their finances and learn more about the available services that can help leverage them financially like loans (CIMB Bank, 2020).Teachers' lived experiences with

loans is about becoming resilient in dealing financial burdens by finding ways and being strategic in meeting the needs and demands of themselves and their families.

The Why's of Loan: Family, Education, and Personal

The accounts of teachers with loans revealed that they have loans due to some reasons - personal and family-related matters. These include paying the family's debts, sending family members to school (tuition fee), spending for the family's basic needs (milk for the baby and their daily needs), and housing. They felt the need to provide for their family, such as to give back to the family. On the other hand, personal matters include having loans because they spend them during their wedding and do not know how to spend their income wisely. These reasons somehow direct or urge the teachers to have an immediate response to their perceived needs.

On the account shared by Angel, she said her income is not enough because her take-home pay is only more than five thousand pesos. She sought the services of a lending investor such as Cash and Easy because she has a baby to feed (milk). She also emphasized that she opted to loan from the bank when she got married as additional finance in their expenses for a wedding. It followed when she gave birth to her son. She also mentioned that she spent some of the amounts on repairing her father and mother's kitchen. She felt the need to give back to her family because of "amorpropio." Angel's experience is relatable. Providing for our family is our main agendum. In addition, it also implies that starting a family is not that easy. We need to be ready financially from planning your wedding until you have your children to feed.

Moreover, Rosana also shared that one of the reasons why she sought the helped of lending investors to sustain their daily needs. In her account, she mentioned she didn't manage her income very well, and most of the time, she relied on her husband. Her statement implies that it is essential for us to know how to manage our finances. Educating oneself regarding financial management and not just relying on your partner would help us spend our finances. Being a financial supporter to children's education and for siblings is what the account of Anna's had revealed. According to her, she often availed of loans for tuition when her children went to university. And she also added, she allocated some of her loans intended for her siblings.

On the other hand, Andrea resorted to loans because of the family pressure of paying the debts. She revealed that she got irritated with her mother because she kept repeating the money they spent on her during her application in the police department. So she decided to borrow money to pay the debts of her family.

Results above mentioned some reasons why they chose to avail loans such as education, paying the debts, financing the basic needs of the family, and other personal expenses such as wedding (a major life milestone). These results are also in cognizant in the survey conducted by Banko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) (2019; CIMB Bank, 2020). According to the survey, there were 5 reasons mentioned why Filipinos resorted to loan. These include education, medical expenses, setting up a business or investment, home and auto improvements, and debt consolidation.

Furthermore, participants accounts also confirmed the study (Lending Tree, 2022; Push & Frankel, 2022) about personal loans that the American availed due to consolidation of debt, cover emergency expenses, home improvement projects, finance funeral expenses, help cover moving costs, make a large purchase, cover a major life milestone, and pay for vacation.

Coping Mechanisms: Re-loan and Bunggo, Sought support from member of Family, and personal adjustment

Having loans will mean decreasing take-home pay for our teachers. In this sense, on being resilient, teachers experiencing an ample amount of take-home pay. Their responsibilities as a family provider urge them to have various coping mechanisms to sustain their everyday living, including re-loan, "*bunggo*," seeking financial help from other family members, discussing the family's financial status, and on becoming a wise spender.

Re-loan and Bunggo. Angel, in her account, revealed that she helped loan wherein she can re-loan every three months. Also Rosanna mentioned that- "*labeled re-loans and 'bunggo'*". In the Philippines context the term re-loans means borrowing again by paying the existing loan and extending the term of loans while "bunggo" refers to compromising in advance the benefits that about to receive such as salary, bonuses, and other benefits.

Sought Support from Member of Family and other money lenders.

Angel finds it essential to communicate to her husband their financial status and the type of loans she availed to sustain their daily needs. Angel prioritized the needs of her son. She also talked to her husband and explained that she only received an ample amount from her salary. She also shared they were not able to buy new clothes. If ever they wanted to buy things for themselves, they consulted each other before buying it. This coping mechanism of reduction of expenses is also paralleled to study conducted in Africa about household coping method in malaria treatment expenditure (Etiaba E, Onwujekwe O, Uzochukwu B, Adjagba A., 2015)

On the other hand, aside from considering the different types of loans when she has nothing to spend, Rosana asked for rescue from her husband. She mentioned that expenses in their house and their children's needs were equally divided between her and her husband. However, she is always asking for her husband's helped to sustain the other needs. The account of Rosana implies that it is vital that both husband and wife have their work to help each other to meet the needs of the family.

Same scheme revealed in the study conducted in Bangladesh about families coping strategies in financial burdens caused by hospitalization. They managed finances from the informal sector such as a contribution/loan from relatives, friends or their employer (50%) and borrowing from the local moneylenders (11%), micro-finance schemes set up by nongovernmental organizations or banks (Alamgir, N.I., Naheed, A. & Luby, S.P. ,2010).

Personal Adjustment. Furthermore, having another source of income is also important. Ana said there was a need to borrow money. She only considered the vital needs in her expenses. She also explained to her children that the money she gave to them was not from her income; instead, she borrowed it from the bank/lending investor. Their other needs could sustain because of the tricycle. Its boundary was able to maintain the allowances of her children. In addition, Andrea revealed one of her coping mechanisms is that she spent her income for her needs only. She also added that before, she always spent her time in the city proper while she went to city proper twice a month only for the past months. Andrea also spent her money wisely. If she bought new clothes, she makes it sure that it is not expensive. She didn't pamper herself anymore.

Loan as a Communicative Process

Craig (1999), in his article, explains how communication theorizes in the Phenomenological Tradition of Communication. It theorized communication:

"as dialogue or experience of otherness. Communication theorized in this way explains the interplay of identity and difference of authentic human relationships and cultivates communication practices that enable and sustain authentic relationships."

Since I viewed the teacher-loan as a communicative process and had identified loans as the other, I will discuss how the teachers and their loans have built an authentic relationship through communication.

Experiencing the other-loan, which has a negative connotation as financial burden, has developed a social identity as a provider teachers' needs among teachers through human-inanimate object communication. The teacher has established an authentic personal relationship with a loan as an inanimate object through their perceived gains or benefits of having such a loan. Every time the teacher feels the need to support, whether, for a personal or family matter, she thinks of loans. The participants' expressions such as "to address needs", "to pay debts", "for education", and others are signifiers that urged the participants to take actions by thinking of the term of "loan". Both participants and the term "loan" demonstrate a mutual understanding of their status regarding finance that only of them can comprehend. Loan then communicates support to teacher's needs. It becomes the breadwinner of breadwinners or a great provider for great providers. In addition, the two parties (self-other) maintain their relationship through a continuous lending process, and it will only end when the conditions of the teacher end. Hence, in sustaining their authentic relationship, there must be a continuous perceived needs of self from others.

4. CONCLUSION

This study has informed how the lives of the teachers living with loans. It gives the impression that teachers cannot be judged by simply looking at their pay slips and their record of loans and labeling them with anything based on our standards. Their actions, having loans, rooted from what they perceived as urgent to provide and support. In addition, the numerical representation of salary is not a determiner factor that you can provide well for your family. What matters is how you decide and manage your income based on the demand and needs of your family.

Theoretically, an authentic relationship is also possible with an inanimate object. The more you acknowledge the importance of the thing, the more the relationship becomes more potent. However, in the perspective of financial management, the more the relationship between the teacher and loan, the more difficult it becomes for the teacher to experience financial freedom.

5. RECOMMENDATION

I want to encourage teachers to:

1. Spend wisely of their income in terms of needs and wants;
2. Have at least another source of income aside from their salary;
3. Invest in an educational plan for their children;
4. Save for future use; and
5. Have their school-based cooperative borrow money and save for their future needs on a low-interest basis.

Furthermore, additional research is recommended to expand the scope of this study. Due to this study's limited range and methodology, I would recommend the following research topics to develop further and verify this research:

1. Replication of this study is possible with increased numbers of participants to compare findings;
2. This study sought experiences and perspectives of elementary teachers through personal views. Experiences and perspectives of members of the family and non-family associated with public elementary teachers are unknown. The inclusion of others in the study such as a spouse, children, extended family, and friends would allow triangulation of the data; and
3. Comparative studies targeting the perspectives of male or female public elementary teachers would add another dimension to this research.

CONSENT

Author declares that written informed consent was obtained from the respondent.

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