

# Navigating the Learning Labyrinth of B'laan Students: A Phenomenological Study

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**Abstract**— The objective of this study was to delve into the experiences, situations and realizations of B'laan students as they go through their learning labyrinth. There have been previous studies affirming the essentials of learning labyrinth on the success of schooling. Within the circle of this affirmation, the present study unravelled the learning labyrinth of B'laan students employing qualitative method, phenomenology in particular, among 19 B'laan students.

**Keywords**— B'laan students , Learning Labyrinth, Navigating, Phenomenology, Philippines

## 1 INTRODUCTION

A good learning school is beneficial on any journey, particularly in complex journeys of the learners. Basic education is a complex journey in which learners form their purpose, establish initial vision for their lives, question long-held assumptions, and construct more complex ways of making meaning of knowledge, themselves, and their relations with others. To be a good learning school, students must be provided with appropriate guidance to empower them to direct their own learning journeys (Meszaros, 2007).

On the other hand, Pizzolato and Ozaki (2007) enunciated that learning schools enabled learners to see the complexity of knowledge, recognize that they needed to bring their own internal voices to knowledge construction, and see the importance of interdependent collaboration with others to make wise decisions and create new knowledge. They were supported in learning how to become full participants in knowledge construction, work through their own dilemmas, and build interdependent relationships.

Anent to this, Taylor and Haynes (2008) accentuated that by virtue of respecting learners' voices and experiences, learning is linked to learners' meaning-making capacities. They explicitly articulated the details of what teachers look for: learners who follow external authority uncritically, who are in a crossroads marked by tension between external voices and their internal voice, and who are coming to trust their internal voices. On the perspective of Day, Kington, Stobart, and Sammons (2006), schools are diverse, presenting challenges for understanding the needs of learners' learning problems.

The metaphor of the labyrinth is appropriate not just for explaining the experiences of the students but it also reflects the multiple difficulties for policy-makers and politicians (Howley, 2009). According to Brophy (2008), a plethora of disembedding education mechanisms create an increased illiteracy and social exclusion of marginalized learners. The marginalized learners find themselves outside of the "mainstream", unable to access the services that many of them take for granted. Moreover, Cameron (2006) added that lack of in-

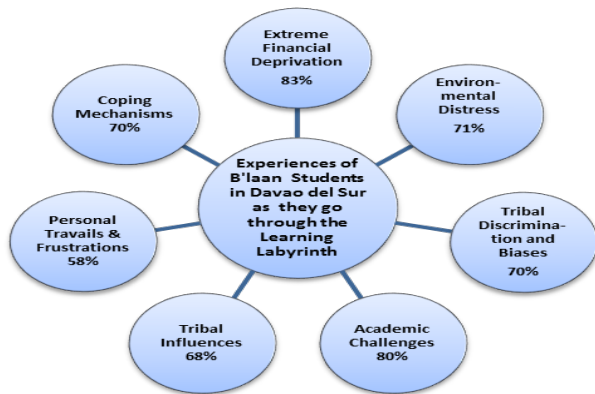
formation or understanding of their individual rights and unawareness about the available services and entitlements; literacy, access to information and communication technologies or language skills may be a contributing factor to marginalized learners.

In order to address issues and concerns on the learning labyrinth of marginalized students, I am motivated to conduct a phenomenological study to help disadvantaged students get an adequate education which equips them with the skills and qualifications necessary to gain adequate employment. A question arises about why do learning education problems of marginalized students persist despite the attempts to improve educational outcomes. In this sense, I will explore some explanations that may help understand this phenomenon and discover other risks that lurk in the learning labyrinth of B'laan students. The formulated research questions are as follows:

1. What are the experiences of B'laan students in Davao del Sur as they go through the learning labyrinth?
2. What are the life situations that draw the B'laan students to their present learning labyrinth?
3. What are the realizations of the B'laan students that they could share to their peers?

## 2 EXPERIENCES OF B'LAAN STUDENTS IN DAVAO DEL SUR AS THEY GO THROUGH THE LEARNING LABYRINTH

Figure 1. Major Themes on Experiences of B'laan Students in Davao del Sur as they go through the Learning Labyrinth



As shown in Figure 1, the B'laan students experience extreme financial deprivation (83%), academic challenges (80%), environmental distress (71%), tribal discrimination and biases (70%), tribal influences (68%), personal travails and frustrations (58%), and coping mechanisms (70%).

On the **extreme financial deprivation**, B'laan students go to school without eating and allowance because their parents are jobless. They could not pay school fees for which reason, none of their siblings graduated from high school. Despite these, they continue to work hard to finish their studies in order to alleviate their acute financial difficulties.

Most of them face **academic challenges**. They experience difficulty in understanding different subject matters such as English, Science, Math, T.L.E., Social Studies, etc., that results to failing grades and the decision to drop from school because of their low coping mechanisms in learning.

B'laan students also experience **environmental distress** such as heavy rains, floods, landslides, political and tribal conflicts in their respective places. At times, they need to evacuate to safer places to avoid violence among their tribe. These factors negatively affect their attendance in class.

Moreover, they endured **tribal discrimination and biases**. They are teased, bullied, belittled, mocked for their complexion and even stoned because of their tribal origins. Denigration is oftentimes experienced.

On the other hand, **tribal influences** prevailed that these students are inspired by some of B'laan professionals. They long to become professionals especially those who are recipients of tribal scholarships. They are happy during tribal festivals and are proud to be members of the B'laan tribe. Likewise, proud parents give them a source for confidence.

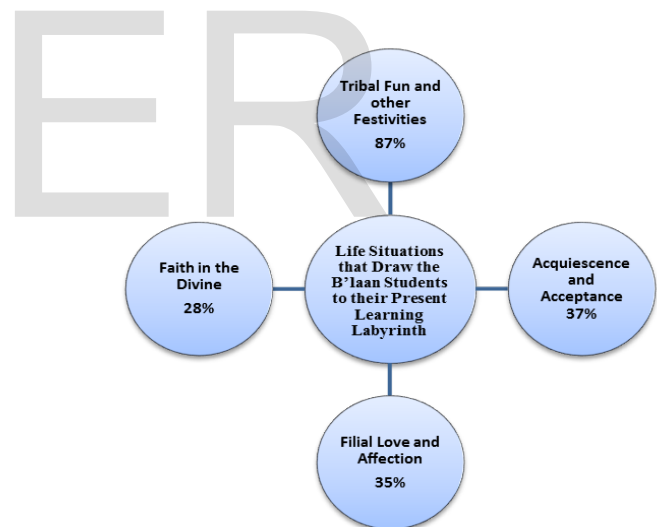
Meanwhile, most of them felt **personal travails and frustrations** since the school is distant from their houses. They have to hike from the highlands to reach school. A number of them suffered due to parents' separation, death or remarriage. While some are tired moving from one relative's house to another, some also claimed not having received care and support from relatives and from their tribe at all. Frustrations also arise

from having ineffective teachers whom they can not understand during classes. In addition, loveless betrothal results to further problems.

Furthermore, most of these students have **coping mechanisms**. This means they become emotionally stable because they fight their battles of their lives with fairness and pride. When faced with problems, B'laan students have different approaches. Some students disclose to their friends, teachers and parents while some keep their own problems to themselves. Most of them find jobs to augment family income and reflect sacrifices of parents by doing good. They believe education is a way out of poverty and they shun away from potential conflicts. Others are content of letting the problems pass and let life be.

### 3 LIFE SITUATIONS THAT DRAW THE B'LAAN STUDENTS TO THEIR PRESENT LEARNING LABYRINTH

Figure 2. Major Themes on Life Situations that Draw the B'laan Students to their Present Learning Labyrinth



As shown in Figure 2, the life situations of the B'laan students were strengthened with tribal fun and other festivities (87%), acquiescence and acceptance (37%), filial love and affection (35%), and faith in the Divine (28%).

B'laan students enjoyed **tribal fun and other festivities**. They are happy during tribal dances, intramurals, school programs and other significant activities in the municipality. Such activities keep them motivated in attending the school.

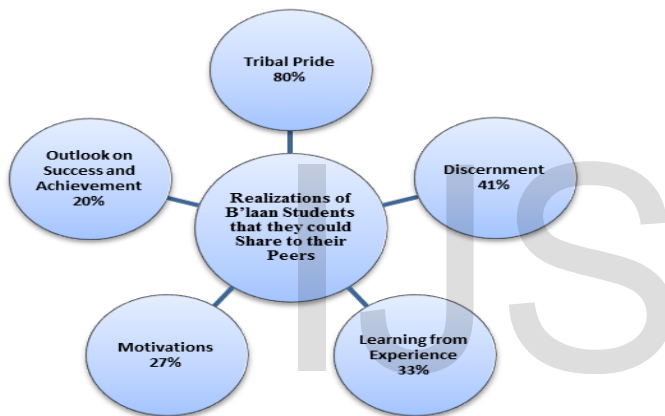
Certainly, **acquiescence and acceptance** took place in their minds and hearts through facing problems and situations with positive attitude. They try ignoring the bullies and judgmental people around them. They also try to be content with what they have and not be discouraged.

Conversely, **filial love and affection** appeared to remind them to help their family for a better future. They think for the family and desire to lift them from poverty. Their determination to help the family is evident.

Consequently, **faith in the Divine** surface to lead and guide them to praise and worship God in moments of sadness and during times of success. They attend masses and call on God to forget problems. They believe that pastors are helpful during difficult times.

#### 4 REALIZATIONS OF B'LAAN STUDENTS THAT THEY COULD SHARE TO THEIR PEERS

Figure 3. Major Themes on Realizations of B'laan Students that they could Share to their Peers



As shown in Figure 3, realizations of the B'laan students came out because of tribal pride (80%), discernment (41%), learning from experience (33%), motivations (27%), and outlook on their success and achievement (20%).

B'laan students have **tribal pride**. They fight for their rights using the right weapons: the heart and the mind. They are proud to be B'laan and believe the tribe must unite for a common goal.

Seemingly, **discernment** has arrived to B'laan students for they believe that schooling is important to them and they try not to be affected with their problems. They acknowledged the school as a big help for them and do not allow hindrances to impede their education. They are persistent of reaching their goals.

**Learning from experience** intensified them to avoid people with negative attitude towards them. They are hopeful that they can overcome their problems by not giving up. Because of their experiences, they avoid mocking and judging other people. They learned to be hopeful and continue education during crisis. Confiding to others becomes their outlet during problematic times.

As they came across the ups and downs of their learning labyrinths, they think of **motivations** to ignite; fuel them to learn and study; and be inspired of their accomplishments for them to continue to fight their battle cry of having adequate education. Tribal scholarships, sports, education and personal accomplishments keep them driven in their life quests.

In addition, B'laan students are reflecting on **their outlook on success and achievement** which is necessary to heighten their drives to become successful and achieve their long-cherished dreams. They are gratified and elated when given recognitions for their achievements. Although other B'laan students tend to forget their roots and others get envious when they become honor students; they still aim to become successful even without parental support.

#### 5. CONCLUSION

The outcome of the study disclosed that B'laan students experience extreme financial deprivation; academic challenges; environmental distress; racial discrimination and biases; tribal influences, personal travails and frustrations; and coping mechanisms. On one hand, the life situations of the B'laan students were strengthened with tribal fun and other festivities; acquiescence and acceptance; filial love and affection; and faith in the Divine. Moreover, realizations of the B'laan students came out because of tribal pride, discernment, learning from experience, motivations, and outlook on their success and achievement.

These factors emerge in the sense that students who are aware of their learning labyrinth experience more positive views than those students who are not aware of one's self as they travel the learning milestone of educative processes. If the individual critically examines his views, opens himself to alternatives, and consequently changes the way he sees things, he has transformed some part of how he makes meanings out of the world. This thought of a fundamental change in perspective or frame of reference is at the heart of the transformative learning. When someone undergoes such a change, he has in essence "transformed" his view of the world, how he interacts with others and his environment.

This is exactly what educators love to see happening in their students: they come to understand that they have held a limiting view of the world or how things work, and they adjust their thinking to accommodate a more accurate or expansive understanding. Whether this is a part of disciplinary realizations or a part of self-understanding in relation to the world, the student has transformed a perspective of his personal view of reality in the labyrinth of learning.

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