PLEDGE OF COMMITMENT: THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF SCHOOL LOYALTY AMONG FILIPINO SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

Recently, schools experience losing students that might have been brought about by lack of understanding on the essence of school loyalty among students. Capitalizing on descriptive phenomenology, this study aims to grasp the essence of school loyalty as it is lived and experienced by a select group of Filipino senior high school students. Respondents were subjected to a two-part data gathering procedure namely, Robotfoto and semi-structured interview. With the use of cool and warm analysis, three views on school loyalty surfaced from the field texts collected, namely, leading views, laurelling views and lingering views. Validation of findings through critical friend technique was observed to establish the trustworthiness of the data. Intentionally, the study could pave way to advancing current literatures by shedding light to areas of school loyalty that is understudied qualitatively and locally.

Keywords: *school loyalty, descritptive phenomenology, Filipino students, commitment*

INTRODUCTION

This study aims to explore the essence of school loyalty among a select group of Filipino senior high school students through descriptive phenomenology. This paper posits that understanding the crux of student's school loyalty is crucial specially for academic institution managers for it may provide valuable insights significant in improving schools' management policies and activities in retaining old students. Rojas-Méndez, Vasquez-Parraga, Kara, & Cerda-Urrutia, (2009) for their part contended that school loyalty is viable and strategic advantage for keeping old students is less costly than seeking for new ones and the effect of loyalty on alumni helps the institution through support from form of word of mouth, financial contributions and job offers to new graduates. This assertion is supported by Carvalho and de Oliveira Mota (2010) by claiming that student loyalty signifies a more stable financial basis and continuous support after graduation for higher education institutions.

Loyalty by its very nature demands that people commit themselves to a person, group, or cause. The relevance of customer loyalty across different fields cannot be underestimated. Recently, studies on loyalty has been observed on brands (He, Li & Harris, 2012; Erdoğmuş & Cicek,2012; Laroche, Habibi & Richard, 2013) tourism,

(Zhang, Fu, Cai & Lu, 2014; Chen & Phou , 2013), companies (Martinez & del Bosque, 2013) and banks (Shanka, 2012) among others. In the field of education, school loyalty has been extensively studied by Ratanavaraha,., Jomnonkwao, Khampirat, Watthanaklang, and Iamtrakul, (2016), Wong, Woo and Tong (2016). Interestingly, even loyalty on vocational and technical education and trainings have been explored in a study by Awang, Alavi and Ismail in 2015. Baber & Khattak (2017) emphasized that customer loyalty is beneficial for all types of organizations. From this point, it can be inferred that loyalty is indeed is a significant factor in the successes of businesses and academic institutions, thus gaining interests in the field of academic research.

Education sectors now consider students as customers brought about by the rising competition among schools, thus, making them get more attention not only as learners but also as consumers. Brown (1996 as cited by Baber & Khattak 2017) described students' loyalty as students thinking to not only take admission in the same institution, but also use positive word of mouth for that institution. On a study conducted by Schelsinger , Perez- Cabañero & Cervera (2016) on higher education institutions, positive school image and shared values leads to loyalty of school. Scholars (Annamdevula & Bellamkoda, 2016) have also investigated student's loyalty with the impact from students' satisfaction, motivation and service quality. For studies to be conducted

in the future, scholars suggest that researchers should focus on other possible antecedents which arouse motivation and loyalty. Additionally, Akbar & Parvez (2009) stated that service quality is the antecedent to loyalty.

Despite the numerous actions taken by schools to retain students, they still suffer loses in enrollment due to different antecedents. Briggs (1996), for one stated that unpleasant learning experiences like bullying, traumatic experiences and teacher unfairness negatively affect student's perception of schools. Brown & Mazzarol (2009) have also observed conflicting ideas among factors affecting student satisfaction that ultimately leads to their loyalty. Carvalho and de Oliveira Mota (2010) also suggested to conduct more researches on school loyalty to explicit relational exchanges in the context of higher education institutions. Qualitative studies on this topic also remains a research imperative.

It is against this foregoing backdrop that this phenomenological study has been conducted guided by the central question, "How do Filipino senior high school students collectively view school loyalty?" Intentionally, this research undertaking can shed light to the field of school loyalty being understudied qualitatively and advance current literature on the topic in the Philippine education context.

Literature Review

Loyalty is defined as "a biased response towards a brand or product expressed over a period of time and is defined by the purchase pattern of a decision-making unit which may be an individual, a household or a firm" (Mellens, Dekimpe & Steenkamp, 1996 as cited by Ishak & Ghani, 2013). Thus, loyalty implies consistent repurchase of a brand resulting from positive affinity of consumers towards the brand or the product. Jacoby and Chestnut (1978 as cited by Henning-Thurau, Langer, and Hansen, 2001) claimed that commitment is an essential element of loyalty and is at the heart of a company's success. However, early research on loyalty emphasized the behavioral dimension and numerous studies have considered loyalty only from a perspective of purchase intention (Homburg & Giering, 2001) In addition, the majority of studies on loyalty have measured it by an aggregated mix of items (Söderlund, 2006). Loyalty can be classified into four major categories, namely: undivided loyalty, divided loyalty, unstable loyalty and no loyalty. (Brown as cited by Srinivasan, Anderson, & Ponnavolu, 2002). In educational services, loyalty requires developing a solid relationship with students who eventually provide the financial basis for future university activities.

A student who is loyal to an educational institution must not only utilize this institution's services offered on a regular basis but must also have a positive cognitive-emotive attitude toward it, one that gives the core motivation for his or her behavior (Henning- Thurau et. al, 2001). Tinto (1975 as cited by Henning-Thurau et al 2001) for his part argued that student's commitment is a factor that directly influences loyalty, whereas the relationship between integration and loyalty is moderated by this commitment. Further studies have shown that loyalty can be influenced if the expectations and desires are met. Countless parents seek schools which they believe are safe and better environment for their children (Carr, 2005). Hence, good schools should provide all students with educational and personal opportunities in a positive, nurturing environment which enables students to achieve current and future goal (Beningga, Berknitz, Kuehn &Smith, 2006).

Seemingly, majority of studies presented were done utilizing positivistic approach. It is to be noted, however, that a paucity of qualitative literatures on school loyalty specifically in the context of the Filipino learners is evident. Thus, this study is impelled to understand the essence of the phenomenon via descriptive phenomenology.

RESEARCH METHODS

Study Design and Sample

This qualitative study was conducted to understand how Filipino senior high school students collectively view school loyalty using a semi-structured interview. Descriptive phenomenology guides this research underpinning for it purports to describe the universal structures of the phenomena being studied. (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007). Descriptive phenomenology according to Laverty (2003) and Lopez and Willis (2004) through engaging in-depth analysis to reality. Six (6) senior high school students (Table 1) participated in this study. Students were chosen through criterion sampling which involves selection of participants who meet some important predetermined criterion for it is necessary to select sample which most can be learned (Merriam, 2002). Criteria for the selection include the following: a) male or female; b) at least of legal age c) Filipino

citizen; d) senior high school student or graduate; e) have stayed in the same school from pre-school to senior high school; and f) did not repeat in any year level upon enrollment in the academic institution.

Table. 1 Profile of interview subject

Respondent	Age	Gender	Civil Status	Year Level	Years staying in the same school	Type of School currently enrolled in	Factors in deciding to stay in the same school
Student A	17	Male	Single	Grade 12	13	Private sectarian	Parents decision & peers
Student B	17	Female	Single	Grade 12	15	Private sectarian	Parents decision & personal decision
Student C	18	Male	Single	Grade 12	15	Private sectarian	Parents decision
Student D	17	Male	Single	Garde 12	15	Private sectarian	Parents decision
Student E	17	Male	Single	Garde 12	14	Private sectarian	Parents decision, peers and academic offering of the school
Student F	18	Male	Single	Garde 12	14	Private sectarian	Parents decision, personal decision peers

Study Site

The locus of this qualitative study is the city of Manila, Philippines. There are 4,830 private high schools, private and public universities and colleges, technical-vocational schools, and Philippine schools overseas that were authorized to offer senior high school program. One hundred three (103) private academic intuitions that offer different strands for senior high school have been listed in Manila alone (deped.gov.ph, 2018). The senior high school program was established in 2015 in response to the Philippine government's initiative to shift from the ten- year pre-university program to K-12 education system. (K12 Philippines, 2017) The said locus was accessible and most selection in the locale is qualified to become respondents. Hence, the said site was chosen as the location of the study.

Data Measure

In its aim to grasp the underlying" noesis" of the phenomenon being studied, a two-part approach to data gathering was employed. For the first part, a Robotfoto (Klechterman & Ballet, 2002) was duly accomplished by each selection asking them vital information regarding personal aspects of their life student life such as: age, gender, civil status, year level, year of stay in the academic institution. The second part of data gathering process is comprised of a semi-structured interview (Ryan, Coughlan & Cronin,2009) with an aide memoir as a guide. Culled from the apriori codes collected from related literature, the questions in the aide memoir comprise of the respondent's perception of school loyalty. Interviews are considered the primary data collection procedure in qualitative research. (Ryan, et.al, 2009) and are

utilized to gather information about the participants' experiences, views and beliefs regarding a specific research question or phenomenon (Lambert & Loiselle, 2007). Both the emic and etic perspectives of the participant will be acknowledged.

Data Collection and Ethical Consideration

With the permission and willingness of the participants, an interview was conducted in the aforementioned locus from January to March 2019. Prior to the data gathering procedure, an informed consent form was signed by each interviewee indicating their voluntary participation in the study. Confidentiality of the data gathered was assured and the selection was informed of their right to stop the interview at any time they feel the need to do so. A summary of interview questions was then relayed to each interviewee. Afterwards, using the Robotfoto and the aide memoir the researcher probed into the interview. Along with questions in the guide, follow-up questions were raised to deepen the understanding of the selection's responses (de Guzman & Tan, 2007). The interview was done based on their availability at the locale of the study. This practice is done to develop a rapport and create a comfortable and conducive environment between the researcher and the interviewee. Further, each interview lasted for 50- 60 minutes and was tape recorded with the permission from the respondents.

Mode of Analysis

Managing words, language, and the meanings they imply are the crux of qualitative data analysis (Miles & Huberman,

1994). Data from the semi-structured interview were transcribed verbatim to come up with field texts. The transcribed tape-recorded interviews were then re-read and will undergo cool and warm analyses (de Guzman & Tan, 2007). The cool analysis part will involve the creation of significant statements which consists of anchors and its phenomenal referents. These statements will pave way for the formulation of data categories and themes on the warm analysis part. The reading of the significant statements in the with-in and cross- case analysis will help surface the essence of the phenomenon. Through this mode of analyses, themes will evolve and will serve as the core of the study. Additionally, the themes and data categories which will be surfaced in the warm analysis will be vetted through critical friend technique to establish trustworthiness of the findings.

FINDINGS

Through the utilization of the cool and warm analysis on the field texts collected in this study, three recognizable views were emerged from the verbalizations describing the view of school loyalty among a select group of senior high school students (see table 2), namely leading, laurelling, and lingering views. Although it was observed that these views take place in a specific status where student is currently situated in, it has been noted, however, that these views may occur simultaneously throughout a student's residence in an academic institution.

Table 2. The 3L views on school loyalty among a select group of senior high school students

View on School Loyalty	Compelling drivers	Student status
Leading views "How my family and friends view school loyalty ?"	Family and Peers	New student
Laurelling views "How my school is making me view school loyalty?"	School, Administration and Environment	Regular student
Lingering views "How do I view school loyalty myself?"	Developed loyalty with the school through the years of stay	Senior student

Leading Views

In this study, it is interesting to note that in the early years of stay of a student in an academic institution, personal relationships play a vital role in a student's view on loyalty. Respondents of this study view school loyalty the same way it was viewed by their family members, relatives, and peers.

Family for instance has great impact on student's decision to be loyal as expressed by the students, as stated by a selection, "My parents are my main reason why I stayed in this school." This was supported by another interviewee by the statement "My whole family likes this school so much." Surprisingly, familial traditions that is passed down from parents to children and parents being an alumnus of the school they are currently enrolled in were also a contributor to this view as stated, "My parents trust this school so much because my father graduated here." Another respondent mentioned "My father stayed here for four years due to financial constraints. I think that's the reason why he wants me to stay, so I stayed."

Notably, peers and classmates were also seen as great compeller of this loyalty view. Being with a company of people in the school that shares the same plight was a great motivator to stay as a respondent expressed, "I have a lot of companions that faces the same situations in life here that is why I stayed.". This was also evident in the verbalization of another respondent that goes "Of course, my friends were my reason. We have the same personalities that made me feel connected because I have a support group that helps me overcome all the difficulties and events in the institution.". Another statement by a respondent seems to include friends from home as a significant factor for staying as he said, "Almost all of my neighbors who were my playmates and friends were also my schoolmates.,"

Generally, a student's view on loyalty in an academic institution was greatly shaped by the people they have close ties with parents playing the greatest role among others in the beginning years of schooling, thus being called the leading views on school loyalty in this phenomenological investigation.

Laurelling views

As a student continues schooling, they will be spending majority of their days in the school, thus, its great role in compelling the student to be loyal. Through the course of a student's stay in school, the development of an attachment to the academic institution took place as one respondent mentioned "The longer that I stay in this school, the better I get to know it. Because of it my commitment to my school deepens although I get tired of the school system sometimes."

It is important to note that in this statement, the view on school loyalty did not change despite of issues on the school system once the student developed a commitment to it. This view is evident in another statement of a student that goes, "It is hard to leave because you got used to it for you've been staying in the school since you were a kid. And besides, I already grew up together with my peers here and the administration is somehow performing well that is why I am committed."

Moreover, the school environment was mentioned to be a crucial player in a student view on loyalty. Ambiance, for one, was verbalized as a one component as accounted by the respondent, "The ambiance makes me feel light and able to feel close with everyone,". The safety and comfort of the place were also determined as a factor in the interview answers as follows, "I never experienced any trouble in this school. Never. And I think it's one of the reasons I stayed here." "I already expected that I will stay here because I felt comfortable right away." Further, students tend to be loyal because of the inconvenience it may cause them to transfer as stated, "It's difficult to begin again when transferring to another school. You have to look for a new set of friends, then you have to adjust to the new environment. It is really difficult for me." From these verbalizations, it can be inferred that apparently, the school environment is a basis for the students to be loyal.

Besides the school environment, a school's performance has great part in the student's commitment to stay. The capacity of the school management to handle difficult situations, acquire achievements and maintain a positive image were in fact making students feel more committed to the school evident in the following verbalizations, "The achievements of the school specially in inter-school competitions makes me proud of my school." "The first thing I liked about is the system of my school. When there are changes and problems, we are being informed right away. That is why my perspective of my school never changed for

I got used to this practice". "I love my school and I see my school on a positive light as a whole."

Salient to the school performance, positive experiences being offered to the students that in turn make them decide to be loyal suggest a role in one student's view of school loyalty. The verbalizations of the respondents speak highly of experiences as a strong reason for staying. "My experiences in this school, that's it, that made me stay." My experiences inside the classroom and the campus were my main reason of staying for years now."

Responsible for making a school operate and provide quality service, the school management, teachers, and its staff were also seen as actors in this essence. When students feel connected to the people inside the institution, they tend to stay committed. Administrators as the head of the academic institution were mentioned to be influencing factors in the following verbalizations "The administrators care for the student's welfare. They really made us feel important that is why we feel connected to the school". Teachers as the main staff of an academic institution are seen as a reason to stay, as mentioned, "The teacher make me feel that the school is my second home for I can seek advice from them." In addition, the clinic and office staff and their show of concern to the students make them feel better with the school as verbalized by one respondent, "The office and clinic staff always check the status of my leg therapy that often leads to deeper conversations. This made me change my insights with the school." Generally, the school community and its people have greatly made the respondents view loyalty in another light as mentioned in the following statements "It's the people of the school who make you become committed to it." I have made acquaintance and friends with a lot of people in this school. It is really hard to leave it for it also formed me as the person I am now".

By and large, as stated in presented verbalizations, the school as a place, its performance, and people seemingly take part in making a student view school loyalty on a different light in the duration of their stay. This view of school propelling a student's view on loyalty is being referred as laurelling views of school loyalty in this study.

Lingering views

Students in their final year of stay in an academic institution view loyalty in the way they show actions towards their school. From the interviews, it appears that, as they develop loyalty throughout the duration of their stay, they

tend to showcase some actions that ultimately benefit the school they were affiliated with and this is how they view this phenomenon.

For example, when a student feels that their school is being badmouthed by other people, they are compelled to defend it as transpired in the respondent's statement, "If ever I will hear someone say something bad about my school, I will surely correct them." Surprisingly, the students also tend to recommend the school to acquaintances, friends, and relatives as shown in the following verbalizations, "I endorse the college, I tell them that it is a good school." "I tell my cousins and neighbor about my school. I tell them that the location is good, and the quality of education is excellent. "If someone asks me about my school, I recommend it to them by telling them its best features such as the environment and competent teachers."

It is also important to note, however, that students seem to see loyalty as convenience. For practical and financial reasons, they stayed in the school because they can afford it as expressed by one student, "I also chose this school to graduate in, since the school is convenient both for me and my parents" To add, the development of the feeling of belonginess with the school specially during school events, seems to makes them see loyalty as said by a student" During events, everyone in the school is asked to participate and that makes us feel connected with each other."

A developed commitment with the school was seen a driving compeller for the actions in the verbalizations to manifest loyalty and this may remain amongst the students who will pass the loyalty to their children, one students said " With my experience here in this school, I see my kids in the future studying here." Hence the emergence of this views collectively called as lingering views on school loyalty.

DISCUSSION

School loyalty among students across the available literature was seen as great advantage for academic institutions. Understanding how student's view school loyalty could provide potential insights that can be used as guide for school administrators and academicians alike, hence this phenomenological study. The capacity of descriptive phenomenology to surface the essence of the phenomenon in this investigation offered insights into the reality among

student participants and made us closer to the world they are living (Van Mannen, 1990). Notably, the 3L Views on School Loyalty among a Select Group of Filipino Senior High School Students sheds light on this aspect of school loyalty being understudied qualitatively.

As shown in this study, a student's view on loyalty at the beginning is greatly patterned from the views of their family and peers. Parents seem to be a great motivation for this phenomenon to surface. This aspect can be understood for parents, are very critical in choosing a school for their children. Similarly, Meoroff (cited in Johnson et al. 2000) posited that selecting a school for a child is one of the most important decisions a family makes. Parents, particularly those with high incomes, choose their children's school carefully (Huffman 2005). It can be said that since parents are the ones who send their children to school, their choice could be rooting from their own loyalty for the school and that in turn is how the students view loyalty in the beginning. This aspect might hold true for recent of studies on school loyalty were actually done in the context of parents (Sallerud, 2011; Li & Hung, 2009; Badri & Mohaidat, 2014). Fathers, according to James in 2001 in his study on team loyalty, were mentioned to be a great influencer on team preference. However, de Guzman, de Castro, Aquino, Buenaventura, Duque, and Enriquez, (2008) contend that even if Filipino parents are loyal to their school, this does not play a great role in choosing a school for their children.

Peers were also mentioned to be influencing a student's view on loyalty. Studies have shown that positive experiences with friendships become a platform for students to feel belongingness towards their school (Hamm & Faircloth, 2005). Sense of belongingness among students is found to predict school interest (Alva, 1991). A study on brands however revealed peer influence directly strengthens loyalty in China (Niu, 2013). Berndt (1992) also claimed that friendships have an important influence on adolescents' attitudes, behavior, and development. Family and peers in general, were also seen by Barber and Olsen in 1997 as primary and influential environment among youth in the United States.

As soon as the student becomes regular in an academic institution, they now view school loyalty based on how the school make them view it. Several school characteristics were mentioned to be surfacing this view such as location, environment, and the people. Interestingly, recent studies on school loyalty have explored different school features and its effect on loyalty such as, instructor quality, administration

quality, physical environment quality, social environment quality and curriculum quality and school image (Murcia & Miralles, 2017; Awang,e t. al , 2015), positioning (Mehra, Jain & Khare, 2015) among others. Location (from strategic perspective) was also found by Agus (2019) to significantly moderate the linkage between customer satisfaction and customer loyalty. Additionally, comfort was seen to directly affect customer satisfaction that often leads to loyalty (Khuong & Dai, 2016).

Thomas (2011) studied loyalty among post-graduate students and found that student's satisfaction from the teaching staff, services, administration, food, and accommodation, affects student's satisfaction that in turn influence their school loyalty. School's reputation in this study has been also found to impact loyalty as well. A study in a Malaysian university among international students have shown that student services, student satisfaction and school reputation greatly influence student loyalty (Fares Achour & Kachkar, 2014). Another study on school loyalty in India suggests that academic facilities, administration services, support services and campus environment have been found to be an important input to student satisfaction that develops their loyalty to the school eventually (Subrahmanyam & Bellamkonda, 2016). Maximus (2013) for his study in Indonesia posits that the fulfillment of student expectations and maintaining the image of the university are two major aspects that affects school loyalty. From these, it can be implied that students view loyalty as how the school and its people show it to them through providing them with quality and satisfactory services.

In the students' senior year, when school loyalty is assumed to be well developed among them, respondents view loyalty in the actions and feelings they show for their alma mater. Students for their part tend to defend their school out of their loyalty. This finding is supported by Hamer and Muniz (2011) in their study on loyalty among consumers. The researchers claim that customers may manifest their loyalty in social settings by actively defending and promoting their brand as superior to a particular competitive offering. Loyal students as found by Fisher in 2001, spread positive information about the school to prospective students and donors and join activities that could promote the image of the school. Dick & Basu (1994) for their part claimed that word of mouth is one of the consequences of customer loyalty although research on this aspect remains imperative that time.

Recommending the school to other was also seen as an emanation of school loyalty among the participants of this study. This finding is evident in studies of loyalty in different fields such as in health particularly among primary health physicians (Platonova, Kennedy, & Shewchuk, 2008) and bank services (Ladhari, Souiden, & Ladhari, 2011) where loyal or satisfied customers tend to recommend the product or services to others. However, Keiningham, Cooil, Aksoy, Andreassen, & Weiner, 2007) argued that solely depending on recommending intentions as sole predictor of loyalty appears to flawed and may lead to misallocation of resources.

Convenience among the respondents is considered a manifestation of their loyalty to the school. One of the driving reasons for this is the cost of studying in their school is affordable. This finding runs parallel with a study on loyalty among Vietnamese customers where comfort and price are seen to have significant relationship with customer satisfaction that leads to loyalty (Khuong & Dai, 2016). The same holds true to an investigation conducted by Atik in 2009 among Turkish airline travelers where price and convenience plays a great role in developing loyalty.

It is also interesting to note that loyalty, if well-developed among alumni, posits a great contribution to a school. A loyal alumnus according Osayawe and Taylor (2009) provide current students with job-related information, internships, hosting a reception to discuss alma mater with prospective students, keeping other graduates connected to the school's alumni, assisting with raising funds for the school, attending sporting competitions that involve the school's team, attending alumni meetings, reading and/or listening to news about the school, and other related behaviors. Generally, the participants commit actions and develop feelings for their alma mater that in turn became their view of how school loyalty is. Loyal customers as Bowen (2003) puts it in the context of hotel industry, do more than patronize, they also encourage other people to try.

CONCLUSION

This study successfully surfaced the essence of school loyalty among a select group of senior high school students reflected in their leading, laurelling, and lingering views. By the guidance and influence of their parents and peers, school environment, actions and feelings towards the school,

students see loyalty as they begin, stay, and leave the academic institution they belong. This investigation contributes to the current literatures by shedding light to the areas of school loyalty being understudied qualitatively specially among students. This study however has limitations, given the number of participants and study site, findings may not reflect the views on school loyalty of all students nationally and internationally. Still, this study found trends that merit further research. The wide scope of school loyalty among senior high school students calls for a great need of more qualitative research endeavors to fully capture its depth and eidetic features. Nevertheless, school administrators and managers are invited to consider the views of students of school loyalty in developing policies and programs that will satisfy students' needs and expectations that will eventually lead to loyalty.

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