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### RESEARCH ARTICLE

#### STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES WITH ACADEMIC CONSULTATION.

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#### Abstract

The student is the centre in the teaching-learning process. The ultimate goal in teaching is to unfold the best in the student and to develop his total being. But there are students who cannot make it until the end due to valid reasons. Thus, academic consultation program is conceptualized to assist students who have difficulties in their college life. Using the Charmaz (1990) constructivist research method, this study employed interview and focus group discussion to describe the experiences of 32 graduating students in academic consultation. The data revealed seven (7) categories that emerged in the analysis namely: self-examination, trust, emotional attachment, self-consciousness, encouragement, facilitating skills of teachers, reflection. Academic consultation shapes the bond between the teacher and student. The bond is the emotional attachment. The teacher's facilitating skills allow the student to share and unfold his experiences through reflection. Reflection allows the student to examine himself and be conscious on his strengths and weaknesses. Assured of the teacher's encouragement, the student learned to trust his teacher. The trust is the stepping stone to student's emotional attachment to the teacher. Students who are emotionally attached to their teachers tend to be open-minded and accept their strengths and weaknesses. These categories intertwined with emotional attachment as the core category. Recommendations include the evaluation of the structure of the university's academic consultation, further studies on how academic consultation influences the performance of students in class, and another study will be undertaken to verify the theory on emotional attachment versus other variables.

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#### Introduction:-

The Northern Mindanao Regional Development Plan Framework (2011 – 2016) stressed the improvement of well-being and welfare, and education youth empowerment. In the framework, improvement of individual's health and nutrition, access to shelter, security, social welfare, and access to asset reform is clearly emphasized. Secondly, education and youth empowerment which mean improved access to quality basic and higher education was further stressed for the economic development of Northern Mindanao. With this premise, it is the aim of this study to describe the categories of the experiences of the College students with academic consultation. Both the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) and Philippine Association of Accrediting Schools, Colleges and Universities (PAASCU) require faculty members to conduct academic consultation with students. The encounter between the

faculty and students during academic consultation allows them to discuss issues that may hinder the students' schooling. CHED further requires the faculty to input in the faculty's course outline the schedule of academic consultation and the specific contact hours. Further, PAASCU monitors the institution's student academic programs which include academic consultation.

### Objective of the Study:-

Believing the thrusts on youth empowerment among the Northern Mindanao Regional Development Plan Framework (2011 – 2016), CHED, and PAASCU, the researcher is motivated to describe the students' experiences with academic consultation.

### Method:-

The study used the constructivism approach of research by Charmaz (2006) as shown in Figure 1.



Figure 1:- Constructivist design, Charmaz (2006).

In constructivist design (Charmaz, 1990 in Creswell, 2012), the researcher makes decisions about the categories throughout the study, brings certain questions to the data, values, experiences, and priorities. Any conclusion developed is suggestive, incomplete, and inconclusive. In applying constructivist design, the researcher explains the feelings of individuals as they experience a phenomenon or process. Charmaz (2006) suggested a social interaction approach in using grounded theory that emphasized the researcher's interaction and involvement with participants in constructing theory. In this study, the researcher conducted series of interview and focus group discussion with the participants of the study. The responses of the students were coded and analysed to describe their experiences with academic consultation.

The participants of the study were the 32 graduating students.

The researcher used semi-structured interview. A key participant was identified as a starter until all the thirty two (32) student teachers were interviewed. The proceedings of the interview were coded. Categories and themes were identified. Gregory (2010 in Cho and Lee, 2014) stressed that researchers need to make comparisons between empirical data and concept, between concept and categories, among data, among categories, and among "different 'slices of data' in order to reach higher levels of abstraction and advance with conceptualization. In this study, the raw data were treated following the research process shown in Figure 1 until a core category was identified. Agoncillo (2013) mentioned that at successive stages in grounded theory research, themes moved from a low level of abstraction toward becoming major and overarching themes rooted in the concrete evidence provided by the data. These overarching themes served as the foundational pillars of theoretical saturation. He quoted Bowen (2006) who said that the researcher then is able to achieve "theoretical saturation" when the additional data for such themes failed to uncover any new ideas about the developing theory. In this study, the researcher felt that "theoretical saturation" was reached at the 20<sup>th</sup> participant. But she continued to the 32<sup>nd</sup> participant to make sure that enough chances were done to decide that data saturation was met.

The results of the study could be the basis for enhancing programs and projects based on sound research (Objective 2, NEDA Northern Mindanao Regional Development Plan, 2011-2016). In this way, the University may revisit the activities designed for students.

### **Results and Discussion:-**

Academic advising is one way of engaging students with faculty (Wyatt, 2006). Through academic advising, students learn to become members of their higher education community, to think critically about their roles and responsibilities as students, and to prepare to be educated citizens of a democratic society and a global community (National Academic Advising Association in Drake, Jordan, & Miller, 2013). In this study, academic advising is taken in the context of academic consultation. The faculty schedules specific hours in a week for consultations with students. The consultation allows the students to verify their performance in class, share their concerns, and get feedback on how they can cope with the challenges they currently experience. Race (2010) mentioned that feedback helps students to make sense of what they have done. It enhances the students' desire to learn by increasing their self-esteem and confidence whenever possible, and by helping them to believe that they can achieve the intended learning outcomes. This study looked into the university's academic advising/consultation program. It described the experiences of students in academic consultation. One of the services in academic consultation, which this study focused on, is regular communication with faculty to identify and conduct outreach to students who are struggling in class, attending class sporadically or have stopped coming completely, or are disruptive (Behling, 2014).

The academic consultation binds the teacher-adviser and the students. In their encounter, the teacher listens to the experiences of the students in class. When students start to share their stories, the strengths and weaknesses are identified. Deeper learning tells a story. Humans are storytellers. Storytelling is the primary way that people makes sense of their experience. It is the way that they hang on to and communicate their experience (Lenz, 2015). In all classrooms, even in the hard sciences, professors use stories, usually in the form of anecdotes, to illustrate points, to elucidate information that may be abstract. Story, especially personal story, is one of the most powerful ways to educate (Hooks, 2010). The entire stay of the students in the University allowed them to experience the varied activities designed to develop their whole being. The academic consultations are regularly scheduled for the faculty to monitor the performance of the students in class. Their experiences in the University allow them to form their own story.

Students' stories led to a storyline. Agoncillo (2013) said the storyline served as a guide for the researcher to be able to step back and weave the story into a higher level of abstraction and saturation through interchangeability of incidents and transferability of the theory to other areas by integrating structure and process at them time.

Students experienced varied difficulties in trying to finish a tertiary education. They shared difficulties which include: adjusting to college life, complying with the demands in the courses enrolled, supporting one's education either by having a part-time job or being a work scholar of the University. All of these are made known during academic consultations. As Drake, Jordan, & Miller (2013) mentioned that academic advising plays an important role in supporting student achievement, particularly in helping students reach their potential. Kuh et al. (2005) further affirm the role of academic advising in supporting students. It is a way to connect students to the campus and help them feel that someone is looking out for them.

Programs were offered by the University to help the struggling students cope with their difficulties. Student development programs were designed like orientations, symposia, conferences with the dean, recollections, enhancement programs, organizing clubs, and consultations with teachers. Among the programs were students could avail of are consultations conducted by a faculty which is the focus of this paper.

Consultations allow students to reflect and see in themselves their potentials. As the students begin to narrate their experiences with academic consultation, it was noticed that the narration started with the cognitive aspect. They began to recall experiences on how the faculty helped them, listened to their stories, and the benefits they got from academic consultations. When trust was established, the student started to open up and revealed his feelings. Thus, their affective aspect is necessary to see the value of their experiences. Sharing of experiences involves *self-examination*.

In every difficulty a student experienced, it is helpful if he shares it with the teacher who observed his performance in class. As a participant said, "Consultations helped me realize my strengths and weaknesses. Through the pieces

of advice of the teacher, I am able to think of ways on how to overcome my weaknesses.” Dewey (in Drake, Jordan, & Miller, 2013) emphasized that teachers help students attain realization of one’s full potential and the ability to use acquired skills for the greater good. Teachers guide students to create meaning from their learning.

The *trust* between the faculty and the student must be build. As a participant said, “I have the difficulty of sharing my concerns or problems to a teacher whom I know a little. I am afraid that the teacher will get mad or will not understand my situations.”

When *trust* is built between the faculty and the student, a *feeling of emotional attachment* emerged. “The faculty shows great respect, understanding of the situation, and guidance” says one participant. The emotional attachment led to *openness and acceptance*. The student started to share every single detail of his difficulty. When sharing happens, there is unloading of baggage, giving room to the development of “confidence, self-esteem and knowledge oneself.” A participant mentioned that “I become more patient, creative, resourceful, disciplined, understanding and can manage my time well. Because the faculty shows care I am able to adjust and become more effective in my studies. I learned to evaluate myself and find ways on how to solve the problems I encountered.”

Students who begin to see their inner self are more conscious of their actions. *Self-consciousness* led to “belief in oneself.” The participant shared “having all the positive thoughts during the challenges, help me to accomplish things. In difficult times, I learned to focus on the issue and find meaning from it.” When students are able to identify their feelings, they begin to learn on how to regulate them. As shared, “when my confidence is developed, I have the courage to do what is right. When I have done what is right, I feel contented.” “I learned to become open-minded and listen to the suggestions of others” added one participant.

The consultation with faculty “helped me to unload the burden I experienced. This burden if not shared could affect my teaching” said the participant. Further, she shared that “I need words of encouragement to go forward. I need the teacher to push me to the limit and pressure me to become a diamond at the end. The teacher could tell me never ever give up. Personally, the teacher helped me become stronger, more confident, more thankful and prayerful to God.” This was further supported by a participant who said “never settle for less, find ways to improve and understand my duties and responsibilities as a student.” Another participant emphasized that “I am firm in whatever decisions I made. The pieces of advice of my teacher had taught me to put in my mind and heart that whatever mistake I made, learn from it and never do it again.” *Encouragement* allows the students to evaluate self.

As students narrate their experiences during academic consultations, *reflection* was noticeable. Lenz (2015) said that reflection is a critical component of learning. It is an opportunity for the student to tell a story of what she has learned. Telling a story is the moment when learning takes place. Reflection leads to retention. As mentioned by the participant in the academic consultation, “I reflect on my problems and find solutions. I express my feelings too. At the end, I start to develop my confidence.” The role of the teacher in facilitating the academic consultation is very important. Her *facilitating skills* help the student to *reflect*. A participant said “The teacher should be a good listener. This is a good way to facilitate the flow of ideas and feelings.” The sharing of ideas shows the student’s thinking. It is a revelation of what she thinks about her experiences and a manifestation of learning.

The student and teacher relationship is important to build the students’ academic life. It is important that a structure in the school design to promote student-teacher relationship. The teacher and students share how they are feeling. The teacher teaches on collaborative skills, facilitates group discussions and activities to confront issues of diversity in the context of the students’ curriculum (Lenz, 2015). Relationship is built when the student started to reveal herself to the teacher. Student who is comfortable with the teacher becomes more open with her feelings. As narrated, many of the participants revealed that they feel “happy, better, free, grateful, relaxed, satisfied, inspired, encouraged, light-hearted, cared, appreciated, and relieved” after their encounter with the teacher-adviser. Participants stressed “I feel nervous and have lot of fears during the consultation but relieved after sharing my problems”; “I feel relieved after sharing my problems and secrets. I share my problems with someone who is willing to listen”; “I feel relieved and happy that someone really cares and is willing to help me with the problems I encounter. She understands what I feel. I find the pieces of advice helpful and effective as a college student to overcome my problems”; “I feel better because I share the things that bother me, thoughts that make me down, and as a result, anxieties are gone. I feel relieved”; and “I feel I have many rooms for improvement. I become an open-minded person. I accept criticisms to grow and develop.” The testimonies of the students describe their *emotional*

*attachment* with the teacher-adviser. These positive emotions gained after the academic consultation allows the students to value their experiences in the university.

The experiences of the students in the university impact on their overall impression of their college life. Sy (2013) claimed that positive educational experiences deliberately sought through advising can lead to increased academic success, improved college experiences, and long-term benefits as graduates who become contributing citizens in society.

### Summary:-

Consultation provides opportunities for students to share about their college life. It is also a way where teachers could relate with students and learn about their experiences in class. Students are diverse in terms of their abilities, skills, coping mechanisms, and the way they handle difficulties. Not all students in class are able to cope with the course requirements. Some of them fail in class; others are at risk of dropping due to multiple reasons while some are not performing well. These type of students give headache to the teachers most of the time. But they cannot just be driven away. The university sets programs to help these types of students. This is the reason why the teacher conducted academic consultation. This study employed the constructivist approach of qualitative research method by Charmaz (1990). It explored on the experiences of students with academic consultation. Interview and focus group discussion with 32 graduating students were used to gather data. Categories were identified to describe the experiences of the students with academic consultation.

### Conclusion:-

Students' experiences on academic consultation centre on self-examination, trust, emotional attachment, self-consciousness, encouragement, facilitating skills of teachers, reflection. The categories point to the core category on emotional attachment. This means that the academic consultation shapes the bond between the teacher and student. This bond is the emotional attachment. The teacher's facilitating skills in allowing the student to share and unfold his experiences lead him to reflect. Reflection allows the student to examine himself and be conscious on his strengths and weaknesses. Assured of the teacher's encouragement, the student learned to trust his teacher. The trust is the stepping stone to student's emotional attachment to the teacher. Students who are emotionally attached to their teachers tend to be more open-minded and accept their strengths and weaknesses.

### Recommendations:-

In the light of the findings and conclusion of this study, it is recommended that the university evaluates the structure of the academic consultation on how it improved the well-being and welfare of the students. Further studies may be considered on how academic consultation influences the performance of students in class. Another study may be undertaken to verify the theory on emotional attachment versus other variables.

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