RESEARCH ARTICLE

NEXUS OF UNIVERSITY AND COMMUNITY: TRANSFORMATIVE REFLECTION OF STUDENT VOLUNTEERS

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Manuscript Info	Abstract
……………………. 	…………………………………………………………… To connect the university and community, this paper aimed to describe how the student volunteers gave meaning to their participation in the ALS Assistantship Community Extension program. Anchored on Edmund Husserl's phenomenology, the researchers explored the experiences of 8 student volunteers, specifically the student interns, through their written transformative reflection journals. The result revealed 50 significant statements that generated 5 themes. These themes emphasize the experience of student volunteers in their participation in the community extension program of the department as 1.) Recognizing the highs and lows of the volunteers' community experience; 2.) Making strides toward becoming a dedicated individual; 3.) Aligning oneself to the calling of the teaching profession; 4.) Establishing nodes in the community through camaraderie, and 5.) Nurturing reflective practices toward excellence. These themes are further discussed through textural and structural descriptions. A description of the essence of student volunteers' lived experience is provided. Results from this paper offered practical insights into improving the implementation of community extension programs in the department and ensuring that the volunteers' participation truly enhanced learning.

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Introduction:-
One of the major thrusts of higher education complementing instruction and research is the community extension (Magnaye & Ylagan, 2021). It is a way of translating theory into practice. The university's desire to engage the community should be thoroughly ingrained in its community extension programs. As far as effective community extension is concerned, initiatives should have a dualistic goal of strengthening the community while simultaneously reforming community volunteer leaders (Meier et al., 2012). Because student volunteers are the driving force behind extension programs, knowing how their experiences shape them is crucial. They may be volunteers now, but they will become community leaders and professionals in the future, contributing to the betterment of society.

Volunteers are transformed into workhorses and visionaries who aid in social change (Brennan, 2007). They also acquire significant experiences and benefits as they facilitate social change. According to various studies, volunteers develop more robust social networks, healthier lives, more interpersonal contacts, and enhanced self-confidence, self-esteem, and working relationships with others (Schmiesing et al., 2005). Additional skills include studying, leading, establishing a community, and taking action as part of a group (Sandmann & Vandenberg, 1995). These

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1089

numerous research on volunteer experiences and learnings support the premise that university-community involvement over time allows for a more profound and mutual understanding, resulting in a positive impact on university students and the people in the community (Mercer-Mapstone et al., 2018).

In the context of the community extension program of the College of Teacher Education, volunteers are the vehicles of the university in helping the Alternative Learning System (ALS) learners who were considered "the last, the least, and the lost" as they continue their education and have a better quality of life. CTE volunteers for the initiative are pre-service teachers who will assist ALS students and teachers. Their experiences and engagements with the beneficiaries before the pandemic were documented through their transformative reflection, which captured their narrations of how they assisted the community and their learnings. This group of volunteers was able to visit the various learning facilities and engage with the ALS students and teachers in person for the entire period of the program. Therefore, it is essential to analyze the learning experiences of these volunteers, as they are an integral part of Extension programs aimed at improving the quality of life of the community's out-of-school youth.

As a result, this study described and interpreted the volunteers' learning experiences. It revealed and gave meaning to their experiences. The study's findings were summarized using eidetic insights. In addition, the result has the potential to improve the program's implementation, community status, and volunteers' quality of life.

Research Objective:-
The study aims to describe the experiences of student volunteers meaningfully on their involvement in the community extension program using their transformative reflection journal.

Methodology:-
The present research employed a descriptive phenomenological design. This approach focuses on investigating the ways of perceiving and interpreting experiences (Holstein &Gubrium, 1994). The basic premise of phenomenology is that knowledge is found in the specific meaning people give their lives and shapes their behavior and beliefs. Phenomenology is essential in studies that address learning processes, including in community extensions. It has considerable importance in understanding these processes, and it helps community extension implementors develop programs to give student volunteers avenues to learn from the community.

One method of gathering data in qualitative research is through reflective journals (Janesick, 1999). The reflective journal is considered an excellent tool for obtaining a person's thoughts (Cohen et al., 2007). They represent what happens during the delivery of any program and how participants interpret these processes. Researchers can also use this information to assess the process's or change's impact or success. Strauss and Corbin (2008) noted that it is possible to explain phenomena within the research data. The identification of the aspects of the studied phenomena allows for a better comprehension of its significance as well as the establishment of a reliable data mapping into categories that are constructed "from" the volunteers' perspective (Guba & Lincoln, 1989)

The present study attempts to learn more about how the student volunteers describe and make meaning to their experiences in their involvement during the community extension activities based on the information written in their transformative reflection journals.

Data Gathering:-
The present study focuses on the transformative reflection journals of eight student volunteers in the community extension program of the college of teacher education. The research was conducted for one semester during the Assistantship for Alternative Learning System (ALS) implementation. The volunteers tutored the ALS learners who are out-of-school youth and conducted classes. The volunteers assisted and helped the ALS teachers and learners weekly during their classes in various community learning centers from the partner school division.

The volunteers were asked to record their transformative reflection journals narrating their experiences during their assistantship, including their difficulties, successes, and learning insights. The transformative reflection journals were submitted every week to the community extension coordinators, who read and gave feedback on their experiences. According to Crème (2005), using journals has several advantages for volunteers. This includes allowing them to construct questions and reply freely to their thoughts and experiences. Since community

extensionis not part of the academic requirements of the volunteers, writing in their transformative reflection journals enables them to express their experiences freely.

Data Analysis:-
Mousataka's (1994) phenomenological data analysis, as cited by Cahapay (2021), was carefully followed. The researchers looked at the student volunteers' experiences using the phenomenology-specific approach to analyzing data. With the use of a qualitative data analysis software, MAXQDA 2022, the researchers went through four major phases of data analysis: a.) identifying significant statements in the transcript from the student volunteers; b.) classifying the significant statements into themes; c.) synthesizing the themes into a description of the experience among the student volunteers; and d.) creating a composite description of the essence of the experiences. This data analysis framework was carefully followed in the writing study's results as its process is aligned with the study's objective, which is to give the meaning of the experiences of the student volunteers in their involvement in the community extension program.

Results:-
Phase 1: Significant Statements:
The process of horizonalization is the first step in the transcendental phenomenology analysis, in which specific sentences in the transcripts are found that convey information about the participants' experiences. These key statements were extracted from the transcripts and provided to the reader for them to gain a better understanding of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994).

Table 1:- Significant Statements.

Significant Statements
"It is my challenge as a future teacher to know the different attitudes of my learners."
"It is good to be part of this community extension because we shared something good for learners."
"I am thankful because my mentor gives me this opportunity that will improve my capability in teaching in the future."
"I am very happy because I help them, they are very eager to pass their requirements for them to graduate, I can see their hard work and I believe that they will achieve their goal to graduate and to be professional in the future."
"My ALS day is one of my favorite days of the week."
"Through those evaluations, I have encountered and interviewed different kinds of learners with different inspiring stories..."
"...it is not easy for me as I was tasked to have my demonstration…."
"I gained self-confidence and improved communication skills in the activity…."
"There were learners who carry their baby... we offered to carry the baby so that they will be able to cope with the lesson properly and answer the activity..."
"It is good to be part of this community extension because we shared something good for learners."
+ 40 other significant statements

The result shows the 50 significant statements shared by the student volunteers in their transformative reflections. These statements were subjectively derived from the master transcript. There was no attempt to classify them or arrange them in any particular order. In the community extension implementation, the researchers mainly focused on providing the people with the lived experiences of the student volunteers as they participated in the community extension activities. This horizonalization process generates preliminary notions regarding the participants' perceptions of the study's relevance. As defined by Moustakas (1994), the horizon is the grounding or condition of the phenomena that give it a specific character.

Phase 2: Meaning Units or Themes:
The second stage of the analysis eliminates statements that are conceptually redundant and extraneous to the topic of this work. The researcher then grouped the remaining significant statements into meaning units or themes (Moustakas, 1994). They are carefully discussed as they situate with the existing literature to explain the lived experiences of the student volunteers. The result is shown in Table 2.

Table 2:- Meaning Units or Themes.

Theme	Sample Supporting Significant Statement
Recognizing the	"I am so happy because when we gave them an activity, we saw that they were happy with

highs and lows of the volunteers' experience	what they were doing while they learned…." "I hope one day that I and the ALS learners will realize our dreams." "At the very first time, I felt nervous because what if I cannot answer all the questions that they had in their reviewer." "It was really a challenge for me and on-the-spot demo discussion was never easy."
Making strides toward becoming a dedicated individual	"I am also thankful because I was allowed to enhance my communication skills as part of my training…." "I have been able to handle big responsibilities in the absence of my mentor." "While I was teaching, I saw in their eyes that they really want to learn. So, I did all my best to explain it to them…." "Every time I go there I always make sure that they learn something from me…."
Aligning oneself to the calling of the teaching profession	"I was listening from my mentor and I was able to get information out of the discussion and I was able to learn from it." "I was part of the discussion and I was able to share my knowledge about science." "Here, I understand better the beauty of teaching most especially that you can see that they learn something from you." "I was an evaluator, I was there to give an assessment ot the topic they discussed."
Establishing nodes in the community through camaraderie	"One of them told me that if he has difficulty in Math,, especially in fraction, he will go to our house to have a tutor…." "I am having fun every time I was there because I learned from them simultaneously they learn from me…." "Even though their mobile teacher is not around, they are still listening to us…." "My student are few but we continue my responsibility to teach them because they are eager to learn. I realized that to become a good volunteer, inspire the students to encourage them to continue in the dreams, to give them a meaningful knowledge."
Nurturing reflective practices toward excellence	"Community service inspired me to do everything that can help to have a successful life, because education is the key to have a better future." "I realized that even if there is a lot of trials in our life as long as there is a willingness in our hearts, we will conquer those trials and achieve what we want to achieve…." "I realized that being unprepared will affect your performance…." "As I was carrying the baby, I realized how hardworking and how they value education…."

Five themes emerged from the process of creating meaningful units or themes. These themes describe the experiences of student volunteers as 1.) Recognizing the highs and lows of the volunteers' experience; 2.) Making strides toward becoming a dedicated individual; 3.) Aligning oneself to the calling of the teaching profession; 4.) Establishing nodes in the community through camaraderie, and 5.) Nurturing reflective practices toward excellence. These are further discussed below.

Recognizing the highs and lows of the volunteers' experience:-
Community involvement offers multiple facets of a volunteer's experience. The people in the community influence the highs and lows of their emotions. To recognize one's emotions is necessary. Once you recognize these emotions, it will give insights to situate yourself as you adapt to the community culture.

The volunteers recognized these emotions shown in their nervousness, "I felt nervous because what if I cannot answer all the questions, they had…" as expressed by Volunteer 2. Other volunteers showed happiness and inspiration as they progressed every week, saying that "I hope one day that the ALS learners and I will realize our dreams…" as detailed by Volunteer 3. This recognition of emotions entails a better understanding of volunteers' role in the community extension program.

Making strides toward becoming a dedicated individual:-
One of the positive benefits that volunteers reap from involvement in the community extension is by molding them to be dedicated individuals as they do their tasks in their respective learning community centers.

Many volunteers showed their "best" as Volunteer 4 conducted her teaching demonstration for the ALS learners. Other volunteers "exerted extra effort" in studying their assigned subjects though they were not aligned with their specialization. These actions of volunteers depict dedication to their craft.

Aligning oneself to the calling of the teaching profession:-
Student volunteers are expected to acquire skills ascribed in the beginning teacher indicators of the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers. Hence, their experiences in the community call them to respond to the call of the nobility of the teaching profession.

Many volunteers "understand the beauty of teaching" as Volunteer 6 conducted her teaching demonstration and saw that learners had learned something from them. Other volunteers reinforce these experiences when they become learners as they "learned from the mentor's discussion". This situation portrays the student volunteers simultaneously becoming a teacher and a learner.

Establishing nodes in the community through camaraderie:-
The heart of the community is the people, and the blood that pumps it is the relationship among the people. Volunteers and community partners should establish rapport as they help one another.

Many volunteers reported that they were able to "get to know more about their learners," as they were invited and joined team buildings and discussions, Volunteer 5 disclosed. As weeks went by in their volunteer duties, they developed "friendships" and "bonds" among the learners. This depicts that learners build rapport and are "able to get along with them", Volunteer 1 revealed. Other volunteers also help the learners to focus as they "carried the baby" of the ALS learner when they took the exam. It can be gleaned that their relationships develop the core value of camaraderie.

Nurturing reflective practices toward excellence:-
Learning during participation in community extension is manifested when volunteers reflect on their actions and practices. A reflective experience enables the volunteers to make sense of what they do as they gain insights.

The community "widens" their experience in teaching as Volunteer 7 articulated. Their experience made them realize the "value of education", as revealed by Volunteer 8. They consider these experiences as instruments to become a "better teacher" in the future. These reflective practices enable them to nurture themselves towards the path of excellence.

Phase 3: Textural and Structural Descriptions:
The researchers present a textural and structural description of the phenomena based on the initial data analysis that created the themes. The themes are synthesized into a description of the texture. Then the textural description is evaluated from many perspectives or imagined variations to arrive at a description of the structure (Moustakas, 1994). Discussed in the following are the textural and structural descriptions of the lived experiences of the student volunteers on their involvement in the ALS assistantship program.

Textural Description:-
The participants used key terms such as "grateful", "learned", and "happy" with related terms such as "appreciate", "thankful", and "friends". One participant described their experiences as "one of the happiest experiences in college" in which they are "thankful to experience the community extension program of ALS". The transformative reflections of one participant revealed that in "I also learned from my mentor and the learners" in community extension, which reverberates the reflections of other participants that they were also able to "review concepts in subjects that I already forget".

Structural Description:-
In their reflections, most of the community extension volunteers narrated that community involvement is a journey to an unfamiliar place. As time went by, they left a memorable trail in the place in which the experience of being a student volunteer emerged. The Alternative Learning System as an unfamiliar place is portrayed by one of the volunteers who highlighted that "at first I did not know what to do". The leaving of the memorable trail is described by the participant who said that "It is good to be part of this community extension because we shared something good for learners".

Phase 4. The Essence of the Lived Experience:
The textural and structural descriptions of the student volunteers' experiences were incorporated into a compound depiction of the phenomena using "intuitive integration" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 100). This description serves as the

framework for the "essence," which encapsulates the meaning ascribed to the volunteers' experiences as expressed in their transformative reflections. The essence of their experiences is discussed below.

In their experience, volunteers experienced ups and downs as they responded to challenges they met. However, volunteers learned to adapt to these challenges as they strive to make an impact on the community. As they share their help, they also established strong relations with the community partners, especially the ALS learners. This ultimately leads them to have gained lifelong insights from their experiences.

Discussion:-
This phenomenological paper aimed to describe the lived experiences of student volunteers as they write in their transformative reflections about their involvement with the ALS Assistantship community extension program of the department. This paper revealed five themes underlying the essence of their experiences.

Ogan (2019), in his study, described that students encountered challenges in the involvement of community extension with different factors. The first theme describes the recognition of the volunteers of their emotions as they respond to the different challenges and in their fulfillment after they surpass these challenges as "Recognizing the highs and lows of the volunteers' experience". (2019)These challenges experienced by the volunteers are being brought about by adjusting and adapting to meeting new people. However, as time goes by, once they can get to the ALS learners, they can appreciate the learning benefits they get from their involvement.

In addition, theme 2, "Making strides toward becoming a dedicated individual", expresses the realization of one of the department's core values, which is dedication and commitment. Laverie and Mcdonald(2007) stress the importance of the commitment of the volunteers in their participation in community services are instrumental to the success of programs that also has a profound impact on their development. The volunteers exerting efforts in helping teach the ALS learners enabled them to learn the value of dedication even if the topics assigned to them by the mentors are not aligned with their field of specialization.

On the other hand, theme 3, "Aligning oneself to the calling of the teaching profession", enabled the volunteers to heed to the calling of the institution's core values of alignment where all the activities they are doing, they make sure that these are geared towards the priorities of their teaching profession. Rubio et al. (2016) emphasized that benefits are expected among students who participated in the community involvement as these made them experience lessons relevant to their personal and student lives. As future teachers, doing things connected to their degree program could provide them with more understanding of their craft and gain real-world or realistic experience with their courses (Fletcher & Major, 2004). In this way, their experiences provide a relevant learning opportunity for becoming a future professional.

Furthermore, theme 4," Establishing nodes in the community through camaraderie," shows how the student volunteers are enabled to connect and establish relationships with the ALS learners and mentors. Karasik(2020) pointed out that community partners and academe benefit from each other as they engage and work together. This connotates that with similar goals, the community and the volunteers could build connections and strengthen these nodes through camaraderie in various community interactions.

Lastly, theme 5, "Nurturing reflective practices toward excellence", revealed the importance of writing in the transformative reflection on the pathways toward excellence. Minar et al. (2019) emphasized that doing self-reflection as students practice enabled them to understand themselves better, contributing to their personal and professional growth. Applying its implication to the context of community extension participation of volunteers, volunteers must keep track with the record of their experiences in every community involvement to see if their participation truly enhanced learning.

Conclusion:-
Anchored on Edmund Husserl's (2010) phenomenology, this study aimed at describing the lived experiences of the student volunteers on how they give meaning to their involvement and participation in the community extension program of the department. As documented in their written transformative journals, the phenomenon of volunteer participation in the community extension program necessitates the need to capture the significance of community

extension through their lived experience. This paper provides a significant contribution to this particular field of interest.

The results initially revealed significant statements that generated five emerging themes of student volunteers' participation in the department's ALS assistantship community extension program. These themes highlight the experience of student volunteers as 1.) Recognizing the highs and lows of the volunteers' experience; 2.) Making strides toward becoming a dedicated individual; 3.) Aligning oneself to the calling of the teaching profession; 4.) Establishing nodes in the community through camaraderie, and 5.) Nurturing reflective practices toward excellence. In addition, these themes of the volunteer's lived experience can be framed within the textural and structural description of similar expressions and a journey to an unfamiliar place, leaving a memorable trail to that place as time goes by. These themes and descriptions combine to summarize the essence of student volunteers' lived experiences as they participated in the department's community extension program.

Through its descriptions of the phenomenon, this study contributes practical knowledge on the involvement of student volunteers in community extension activities. Several insights can be drawn from the study results to strengthen and encourage more students from the lower year levels to participate and learn through community service since most of the volunteers are student interns. This may be done by strengthening the incorporation of community extension in the curriculum so that they can apply their learning in the classroom to the community. In addition, it is recommended to refine the mechanisms of self-assessment among volunteers to make sense of their experiences in the activities and programs they participate in at the university. It is also crucial to capacitate the volunteers before deploying them to the community so that they will be more ready as they interact and offer their service. Indeed, a nexus of the university and community can be seen in the volunteers' transformative reflection journals.

It should also be noted that there are limitations in the conduct of the study. While the number of participants is appropriate based on the design used, it should be taken into account that additional data could still be added, which may provide additional insights. It is also interesting to know from the perspectives of the community partners, specifically the ALS learner, about their lived experiences with the student volunteers. Also, it would have been better to have an interview session with the participants to supplement the reflections written in their journals.

Conflict of interest:-
Authors have no conflict of interest to disclose

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