Students' learning experiences in the Communication Program from a university in the Philippines

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Article Info

ABSTRACT

This study analyzed the students' learning experiences in the Communication Program from a university in the Philippines. A descriptive method was used in analyzing the data gathered from the researcher-made questionnaires and exit interviews of the perceived fourth year student-respondents. Using categories of students' learning experiences, findings revealed that experiential learning and social climate contribute mostly to their best and worst experiences in the university. Furthermore, aside from problem solving and application of theories into practice, quality of lectures, and discussion, three themes surfaced particularly related to the self, faculty, and university. As learners are encouraged to actively participate in the teaching-learning process and continue to make sense of their identity in a learning environment, the higher education institutions also have equal responsibilities of providing conditions that are conducive to achieving target learning outcomes. Such conditions comprise the schools' facilities and information technology infrastructure, and carefully designed instructional packages including quality instructional materials and competent teachers. This study provides recommendations in redesigning the Communication Program based on the students' learning experiences.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Higher education is understood to produce graduates who have acquired the needed knowledge and core competencies [1] and dispositions such as their ability to think logically and creatively, their values in dealing with complex situations [2] and their ability to be with different kinds of people. It is the university's responsibility to provide this quality education in order to make its graduates employable and capable of dealing with challenging global situations in an effective manner [3]. Hence, higher education institutions need to acquire data on how their students are engaged in all of the school's programs and activities so that they would understand better the extent of how these students are able to develop their discipline-specific competencies and higher-level learning outcomes [4]. According to Darmawan *et al*. [3], one way of getting this information is through identifying the elements that may come from the students' views and perceptions on their experiences regarding curriculum, resources, institutional factors, and teaching and learning. Apparently, research about student experience provides information on what happens inside and outside of classrooms. As such, student experience has become one of the tenets of quality assurance in higher education.

In this study, student experience refers to the overall engagement of students in all aspects of their student lives within and outside of the institutions [5] with factors ranging from academic related issues to campus experiences like engagement in school activities and social interaction. Although there are many studies on student experiences in the last few years, most of these focus on teaching and learning specifically for international students. It emphasized on their students' social life. It included: i) Campus environment and other non-academic matters [6]; ii) On student services such as accessibility to campus amenities or even campus reputation [7]; iii) On the relationship between students' satisfaction and teacher relationship, customer satisfaction in terms of perceived value, quality of service or service evaluation [8], [9]. Only a few studies focused on students' learning experiences as in the case of [10].

This study described the learning experiences of the students during their stay in the university. Through the self-administered questionnaires and exit interviews, this study analyzed the experiences of the pioneering graduating students in the Communication Program. Generally, results of this study are valuable as reference in understanding better the role of student experiences in improving the quality of student life. Particularly, the results could be used as one of the bases in redesigning the Communication Program of the university in order to produce competitive graduates. By knowing how students have viewed their learning experiences, the department able to establish connections between what it wanted its students to become while aligning these outcomes with what the students' own concerns and expectations are. The study is anchored on categories of students' perspectives of their ideal learning environment in higher education institutions [10]. A learning experience typically describes any situation where one learns a lesson from an experience, such as a heartbreak, bad investment, careless action or poor judgment. In an academic environment, it involves the course content, teaching styles, and group camaraderie, and aside from the school's facilities and infrastructure, and other student services [11]–[14].

Ideally, every course is designed to enable the students to achieve the program's target outcomes. For instance, through the different courses he is enrolled in, a mechanical engineering student is presumed to have advanced knowledge on how a car works and thus, knows how to repair one at the end of the program. Course contents then are critical in a student's learning experience since these are significant to the area of studies and applicable in future professions. Aside from this, students spend most of their time in schools where they are expected to engage in a teaching-learning process. One of the important factors in this process is the teacher who has a valuable function not only in applying pedagogy in teaching theoretical concepts and practical application of knowledge but also in providing a condition that allows the learners to maximize their potential and that shapes their personal development. Their relationship with their students contributes to the latter's learning experience. The role of other students in contributing to an environment that could either provide motivation or discouragement is likewise significant.

The six categories applied in this study particularly in exploring the best and worst experiences of senior college students include: the quality of lectures, discussions, problem solving and applying knowledge in practice, experiential learning, social climate, and others encapsulate their descriptions of their ideal learning experiences. Quality lectures range from the application of information communication technology to the content of the subject matter and teacher's clear explanation of the theories and concepts. Discussion refers to the exchanges of opinions and ideas between students and the teacher. Problem solving and applying knowledge in practice indicates the application of theories into practice. Experiential learning emphasizes students' learning activities which are acquired outside the classroom. Social climate gives importance to soft skills, that is, an environment where values such as cooperation, respect, enthusiasm, and active participation are at work between and among teachers and students. Others point out to "less structured" responses.

In their study of students' experiences in higher education, Klemenčič dan Chirikov [15] explored the use of student survey data in improving teaching-learning practices and learning environments. One of the most common types of student surveys aside from student course evaluation and student approaches to learning and studying is the student experience (satisfaction) and engagement surveys. Quality education paired with a favorable learning environment is observed to significantly support students' experiences as presented in the next section.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The students' learning experiences can be influenced by the quality of lectures delivered by the teachers. Qureshi [16] investigated the students' perceptions of the qualities of excellent teachers by conducting a qualitative study from the student participants in Pakistan. Emerging themes of excellent teachers were found. These included four inductively formed themes, namely, qualities (character, experience, empathy, and approachability), personal appearance, lecture preparation, and lecture delivery. In preparing lectures, students' viewpoints towards excellent teachers were as: i) Content: providing updated and clear contents, explaining and simplifying concepts, avoiding jargon, and systematic; ii) Organization: their lectures are relevant to the curriculum, exam-oriented, related to practical and aligned with the

objectives; iii) Liveliness: sharing knowledge and enjoying in giving presentations; iv) Motivation: they make the students become inquisitive; v) Dedication: dedicated to profession and give maximum use of time; and vi) Content design: they use diverse materials and visuals like diagrams, flow charts, video, animation that enhance the teaching.

Results revealed that the qualities of an excellent teacher should be able to deliver the lecture in the following manner: i) Use simple and clear language, has a clear voice, fluent, with clear pronunciation, and non-authoritarian (speaking style); ii) Use the body movements and gestures to support the presentation, calm and confident, and walking through classroom instead of standing on one point (body language style); and iii) Must spare time for brief discussion with students (interaction). The data suggest the importance of the quality of lectures prepared and delivered to the classes of the professors including their personal qualities and appearance since these provide great impact to the students' success in learning.

Further, Enochsson [12] determined the differences between the outcomes of the oral classroom and written online discussion forums of 13 student teachers and examined how these discussions facilitate reflective practice. Using the video-recorded oral and written online discussions, the findings showed no differences between the two types of discussion in the group, but differences were evident at the individual level. Students' behavior tends to change when the mode of discussion is changed to another mode. For example, those who dominate in the offline discussion had less contribution in online discussion. Another student was found to provide feedback during online discussion compared to an offline counterpart. Students left in the classroom differ when the teacher led the discussion. The results suggest that teachers should teach outside the box. As pointed out by Enochsson [12], the digital world has many possibilities to offer in helping the student teachers become reflective practitioners.

Furthermore, Samson [17] recognized how creative problem-solving creates opportunities for students to become active and better learners as they link their curriculum with real life experiences. It was determined how creative problem-solving (CPS) motivates and engages students in learning. Results revealed that when faced with a task such as a social policy analysis project, the group explores ways in identifying and resolving the problem. Group dynamic as well as critical thinking skills contribute to the students' learning experiences. Integrating theory and practice results in a meaningful learning experience. In exploring the application of theoretical knowledge into practical learning experience, Samson [17] looked into medical students and staff to find out the barriers in utilizing theory in practice particularly in clinical settings. Using the semi-structured interviews, results showed five categories emerging as barriers and one of which includes the lack of enforcement or presence of resistance in the application of theoretical knowledge. Such findings could affect students' performance in class and in practical settings.

Moreover, experiential learning is evident during college life aside from the classroom experiences. Students can be exposed to the facilities, libraries, laboratories, immersions, field work, field trips, research conferences, internship, webinars, and student organizations. However, students' satisfaction with their involvement in the university while still studying does not necessarily let the students become actively involved in their alma mater after graduation. For instance, Bizimana et al. [13] examined the students' satisfaction level together with their learning experiences. They also investigated the influence of students' satisfaction on their involvement in their alma mater in Ghanaian, Kenyan, and Rwandan public universities. The data suggest that students' level of satisfaction in academic and non-academic learning experiences were not predictors of their involvement in the university after graduation. In regard to the students' learning experiences, Bizimana et al. [13] recommended to put strategies in improving the student satisfaction with academic experiences so that would lead to the enhancement of their level of willingness to be associated with their alma mater. For the academic side, the universities should focus on improving the students' learning environment by means of investing in the physical infrastructure such as lecture rooms, libraries, laboratories, ICT infrastructure, and buildings for their academic staff. Thus, this study is relevant to the present study in relation to the students' learning experiences related to experiential learning.

As mentioned by Kalin and Steh [10], social climate pertains to the relationship between the students and teachers including their interactions with their classmates. More so, Henderson et al. [14] conducted a systematic literature review that examined the present studies on the impact of faculty who care for their nursing students' intention to earn the nursing program. Results revealed the significant influence of the faculty in the student's intent to graduate the nursing program. Faculty's caring behaviors are instrumental in their motivation to learn and finish the program. As pointed out in the study, a nursing professor's empathy helps the students become determined to continue their study while the professor's lack of empathic behavior could have negative results in the students' learning and quality of life. It is essential to integrate the human caring curriculum with education to help the students in alleviating their stress and enhance their learning outcomes. Then, students are motivated to learn in a compassionate environment anchored on mutual respect and positive encouragement. Most reviewed studies on the students' learning experiences were conducted abroad and consisted of participants who were not Communication students.

To fill the research gap, this study on the students' learning experiences in the Communication Program in the select university in the Philippines was conducted for the enhancement of the said program and strengthen its linkages with the graduates who can also help in the curriculum revisit. Using the framework of Kalin and Steh [10], this study sought to answer what students' learning experiences are shared by the Communication students in terms of quality of lecturers, discussion, problem solving and applying knowledge in practice, experiential learning, social climate and others. More so, aside from Kalin and Steh categories [10], it sought to answer what other themes surfaced in the students' learning experiences.

3.   RESEARCH METHOD
3.1.   Research design and instrument
This study used the qualitative research method in assessing the learning experiences of the graduating students of Bachelor of Arts in Communication through their exit interview responses. This study used the semi-structured exit interview guides that asked the participants of their best and worst learning experiences. The research data were coded and analyzed using Kalin and Steh [10] framework. Other themes which emerged but were outside of the framework were also organized. Exit interviews with graduating students are essential to assess and enhance the students' learning experiences, institutional processes, curriculum, and student services [18].

3.2.   Research participants
There were 38 4th year Bachelor of Arts in Communication students participated in this study. They were all graduating students who participated in exit interviews with the Chair of the Department who is the main author of this study. These students were from the two tracks of the Bachelor of Arts in Communication. There were 13 students from the Corporate Communication group, while 25 specialized in Media, the second track of the said program.

3.3.   Data collection, procedure, and analysis
First, the interview guides were prepared by the first author. Second, the consent was sought from the participants. Third, the exit interview was set and conducted. Fourth, the interviews were encoded, coded, tabulated, analyzed and interpreted. The fifth step involved verification of the coding and resolving coding disagreements through discussion to reach a consensus.

The data were coded by the first author and verified by the second and third authors. Using the framework of Kalin and Steh [10], the data were presented, analyzed, and interpreted. Modifications were made in categorizing the themes with sub-categories, namely, positive based on the students' best learning experiences while negative based on their corresponding worst learning experiences. New themes which surfaced but not aligned with the framework were also identified, coded, and categorized. The answers such as 'no data' and 'none' evident in the data were not included in the analysis (e.g., WS12: No data; WS30: None. WS31: None). To ensure that the voices of the participants were reflected in the data, verbatim quotations were purposefully included.

3.4.   Ethical consideration
Consent was sought from the graduating students who participated in the study during their exit interviews with the Chair of the Department from the university where the study was conducted. The students voluntarily participated in the interview and were explained of the purpose of the study. Further, they were made known that their non-participation would not affect their status as students. The anonymity of those who participated was kept. Interview guides with the cover letter were given to them to seek their approval in expressing their best and worst learning experiences during their four-year stay in the university. Their learning experiences were very beneficial to the administrators and faculty to improve the program since they were the first cohort. Lastly, the handling of the gathered data was strictly confidential and only the researchers had access. Proper disposal of such raw data was done once the information was organized.

4.   RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
4.1.   Using the framework, what students' learning experiences are shared by the Communication students in terms of the quality of lectures, discussion, problem solving and applying knowledge in practice, experiential learning, and social climate? (Research Question 1)
The findings of this study are presented into two main sections. First is on the best and worst parts of the students' learning experiences in the university based on the framework of Kalin and Steh [10]. The second is on the new themes that emerged from the coding which are not found within the framework. Table 1 shows the views of the students toward their learning experiences.

Table 1. Students' best and worst learning experiences*

	Best experiences	Worst experiences	Total
Quality of lectures	2	1	3
Discussions	1	1	2
Problem solving & applying knowledge in practice	7	1	8
Experiential learning	23	7	30

*Please see Table 2 for the others, the newly-discovered best and worst learning experiences

4.1.1. Best parts of students' learning experiences

There were 38 graduating students asked to describe the best parts of their learning experiences. Around 23 of the responses fall under the experiential learning category while a little over half of this figure, 12 to be exact, is categorized under social climate. The categories that yielded relatively low counts are the quality lecture and discussion categories.

a.   Experiential learning category

This category describes the students' learning experiences and their own initiated activities. Also, this illustrates the students' engagements in learning groups to accomplish a task or to contribute to the realization of a goal. The 23 distinct high counts of the students' responses in this category may suggest that their engagements in the learning activities were dominant and lasting. They were able to recall and describe these experiences. Activities that bring about personal development add value to the students' overall experiences and the more engaging these activities are, the more the students remember [19]. Such is indicated in Extracts BS2 and BS38. There is a repeated mention of the students appreciating the activities that were afforded to them by their teachers.

> BS2: *We got so much opportunity like were always expose into the activities outside the university that relate to our course and from that we learn so much.*
> BS38: *One of the best parts that I've experienced in this university is gaining my self-confidence. Though communicating and interacting with other people, which is necessary in my course, I've built a lot of my self-confidence.*

b.   Social climate category

This category highlights the relationship between the teacher and the students. When the teacher provides an encouraging and friendly, motivating and fun environment, students are enthusiastic to work or to connect with other students to accomplish their tasks. This category ranked next to the Experiential Learning category. There were 12 students professed that the Social Climate category gives them a good experience. The data imply that they had a positive relationship with their teachers and classmates.

This result supports the findings of Ko *et al.* [20] that student–faculty interaction as well as class participation has significant effects on improving students' learning outcomes integrated with experiences. When teachers are able to provide a positive environment for learning, students are encouraged to learn. The observation is supported by previous studies [21]–[23]. Teachers' interpersonal characteristics as manifested in class climate significantly affect student motivation, interaction, learning, academic performance and overall wellbeing. Students believe that their learning is greatly enhanced through personal interaction with their instructors and with other students. Because this category is tangible and observable, there is a greater chance that students could easily identify it. Extracts BS5 and BS16 highlighted the students' having established positive relationships with their fellow students and their teachers as indicated in their gaining friends, getting support from colleagues, and having teachers who were patient and understanding. This observation is shown in the following extracts.

> BS5: *The best part of my learning experiences here in the university is that I gain friends who will support you always and have teachers that guided me which became my friends eventually. Also, the university molded me to whom I am today. I experienced a lot of things which are very relevant to my course/major.*
> BS16: *The best parts of my learning experiences in this university are my teachers. I have been slow at a lot of things & my teachers were very patient, understanding and caring about my performance & it encouraged me a lot.*

c.   Problem-solving and applying knowledge in practice category

This category puts into application or practice the theories that students learn. Teachers provide specific problems and require their students to solve them. As shown in Table 1, only seven responses considered this category to be one of the bases of the students' best learning experience in university life. The students' responses are consistent for both their best and worst experiences. Although they positively recognized their exposure to problem-solving situations and practical applications as reflected in Extracts BS33 and BS8, they also had a negative perspective towards this category especially when they were made to extend their time to do these tasks outside of class schedules as evidenced in WS18.

BS33: *The best parts are when the learnings were practical & hands-on like in our comm planning and advert classes where we conceptualized & realized ad efforts.*
BS8: *The best parts were the moments wherein my capabilities of being a student and a person were tested. Specifically, during the thesis or any other academic activities that challenged me.*

However, previous research [24] argued that students' higher order thinking and performance skills are upped through application of knowledge to new situations and problems and generating ideas and solutions for these problems. It can be achieved through collaboration so even when students do not entirely find this category their best learning experience. Teachers must ensure that their students are given an opportunity to transfer their knowledge to new situations or applications through hands-on inquiries and problem-solving activities [25].

The last two categories, namely quality lectures and discussion received less recognition from the students as sources of their best learning experiences with two and one cases, respectively. Extract BS32 shows that *"teachers were also key in my learning experience as they taught me well,"* as explained by the student. However, data on students' worst experience reveal that their typical lecture sessions required them to simply sit and listen to their teachers. Apparently, the learners were not engaged; hence they did not have a satisfactory experience with this category. For lecturers to ensure students' engagement and understanding of the course content, they have to diversify their teaching strategies and methods [26]. The same can be said for the discussion category. If students are not engaged actively in the lecture probably due to teachers' dull disposition, or poor student relations, insightful discussions leading to good exchange of opinions and viewpoints between teachers and students or students and their peers may not happen. Improved relationships with students and the teachers make lectures more exciting, engaging, and insightful.

4.1.2. Worst parts of students' learning experiences

Kalin and Steh [10] categorized five items on student learning experiences. Among those items, social climate received the greatest number of responses under the worst experience category. However, other themes under this category evidently surfaced which are discussed in the next sub-problem.

a.   Social climate

In contrast to their best experiences' result which shows more inclination to comment positively on their experiential learning, students offered more disapproval in their social climate finding their relational experiences with some teachers and students problematic. Building and maintaining rapport in class is important in a structured learning environment since this avenue provides a place for personal and interpersonal growth. Relationships are shaped by interactions with peers and teachers and learning experiences are made more significant and productive when learners are given opportunities to share their thoughts with and to learn from others. The work of Suarman [26] pointed out that positive rapport has been proven to stimulate a student's willingness to become more engaged in the classroom. As indicated in the excerpts, relationships among students, and between teachers and students tend to lean towards discontentment in the teachers' way of assigning tasks (i.e., inconsiderate) and in group works which are considered nuisance and inconvenient (i.e., relying on other people to get the job done).

WS5: *The worst part of my learning experience here in the university some teachers are inconsiderate…*
WS8: *The worst part as I remembered was encountering conflicts with my friends that concerned an academic activity.*
WS26: *The worst parts were stress and conflicts in groupwork.*

As exemplified in excerpts WS5, WS8, and WS26, students perceive group work as a cause of conflict. Although they did not elaborate reasons for such conflict, drawbacks in group work are revealed in the study of Roskosa and Rupnieceb [27] which include unequal distribution of contribution in the assigned

tasks, varied level of competencies, dependence, difference in opinions and work phase. Their attitude towards collaborative tasks is not always positive.

b.   Experiential learning

Closely related to the negative comments in social climate is their negative comments on their experiential learning particularly due to school works, deadlines, and exams as revealed in excerpts WS34 and WS38. Experiential learning emphasizes students' experiences toward a particular goal. This type of learning encourages students to apply theories into practice, to think critically before speaking or writing, and to accomplish individual or collaborative outputs. In the work of Roskosa and Rupnieceb [27], experiential learning gives students educational responsibility. Through direct experiences such as campus patrol competitions, their values, knowledge, and skills are developed.

> WS34: *The worst parts are during finals week; deadlines are coming simultaneously. Also, there are times that are many (sic) or too much work to do in one subject.*
> WS38: *One of the worst parts I've experienced was doing finals week. There's just so much pressure from my peers, my family and also the school. We also need to submit different types of paper works, project outputs, presentations and written exams on top of that.*

As students engaged in the learning process, they are bound to express dissatisfaction in the workloads and deliverables. Most of the comments received under this category are oriented towards their sentiments on the bulk of activities, exams and projects demanded by one course. In a regular semester, students have an average of seven to nine courses which require different assignments and outputs to achieve the target learning outcome. Undoubtedly, these requirements have taken their toll on the learners' physical and mental health. Although minimal, the remaining items in the framework of Kalin and Steh [10] particularly the quality of lectures, discussion, and problem solving and applying knowledge in practice received one comment each as illustrated in WS33, WS27, and WS18, respectively.

> WS33: *The worst parts would be the typical lecture type of classes where we just sat and listened to the lecture for more than an hour. (Quality of lectures)*
> WS27: *It would be my first economics class. The discussions weren't clear and understandable, and when I decided to drop, instead of getting INC, I got a 5.0, which really had a great impact on my GPA. (Discussion)*
> WS18: *The worst part was our journalism classes because it was a burden on my part since our class has to extend outside the school and the teacher was really hard on us students. (Problem solving and applying knowledge in practice)*

As presented in the previous discussions, these categories demonstrate the teacher's proficiency, using appropriate learning styles and methods, in explaining the course content in a manner that is engaging and intelligible (quality of lectures), enable students to take part in meaningful exchange of ideas with their teachers (discussion), and provide opportunities for theoretical application (problem solving & applying knowledge in practice). Apparently, only a few expressed their experiences in these categories as undesirable. Higher education institutions have long been mandated by the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) of the Philippines through its CHED Memorandum Order (CMO) 37 s. 2012 to integrate outcomes-based education in their academic programs. However, few teachers are still more comfortable with the traditional lecture classes. Further, with the role of technology in the educational system, students expect their teachers to provide them with PowerPoint presentations or upload lecture notes online. In addition, a handful of students need to be reminded of the importance of practical learning particularly if this involves working out of their comfort zones.

4.2.   What are the newly discovered students' learning experiences? (Research Question 2)

In this study, newly discovered students' learning experiences were identified. This study provided operational definitions of the self-related, school-related, and faculty-related students' learning experiences. First, self-related student's learning experiences are personal attributes, attitudes, skills, and values evident in the students' interview responses. Second, school-related students' learning experiences refer to their perceptions on their varied exposure in school. Lastly, the faculty-related students' learning experiences pertain to their perceptions towards their professor's qualities and classroom management skills. Table 2 shows the newly discovered themes on the Communication students' learning experiences during their college life at the university.

Table 2. Newly discovered themes on students' learning experiences

	Best experiences	Worst experiences	Total	Rank
Self-related	3	7	10	1
School-related	5	4	9	2
Faculty-related	2	5	7	3

4.2.1. Best parts of students' learning experiences

For the best parts of the self-related learning experiences, the highlighted point was in having a positive outlook in encountering challenges and obstacles. This could manifest self-confidence, resilience, and optimism in facing trials in life. Since the students are already graduating, it implies that they were able to continue schooling despite challenges they encountered in the university. The study of Hill *at al.* [28] argued that the personal attributes such as self-awareness, self-confidence, personal autonomy/self-reliance, flexibility and creativity are one of those graduate attributes that gained in favor of the university. Extract BS12 demonstrates these self-related positive learning experiences when the student appreciates his/her hardships as one of the ways in knowing himself/herself better while the students in Extracts BS13 considers the values, virtues and confidence as their best learning experiences.

> BS12: *The best part of my learning experience is that I get to know myself better through the hardships as well as the success that I have gone through in the course.*
> BS13: *I believe that it's the values and virtues that you learn that help you grow as a person.*

4.2.2. Worst parts of students' self-related learning experiences

On the contrary, students had perceived negative learning experiences related to self. These could be stress, depression, anxiety, pressure and waking up early in the morning as illustrated in WS23 and WS24. These manifestations could be attributed to their ability to handle themselves during stressful situations supported by Henderson *et al.* [14] who argued that it is essential to educate students to handle stress to become emotionally resilient.

The study of Bizimana *et al.* [13] mentioned that universities should capacitate the administrators of the students' affairs through hiring counselors to address the students' psycho-social and career guidance needs. The data also suggest how significant the role of the class/year adviser is to the students in regard to their psychological/mental health. Both extracts WS23 and WS24.1 had difficulty in facing stressful situations and pressure in school especially in managing themselves.

> WS23: *Stress, Borderline depression, anxiety & panic attacks, deadlines, existential crisis, physical/mental/emotional/spiritual tiredness, pressure.*
> WS24.1: *Also, waking up early to attend a 7:30 am class is one of the worst.*

4.2.3. Best parts of school related learning experiences

According to Bizimana *et al.* [13], students' overall experience affects their perceptions and feelings towards the university in the future. The data suggest that the university provides the students with many opportunities to make their student life become meaningful. Immersing students in varied activities helps them become engaged with learning in ways that ask them to produce information that they could consider deeply positive and rewarding learning experiences [29].

In addition, an overall positive learning experience and perceived belongingness to their learning community and high satisfaction with the student support were reported by the students who experienced remote learning during the pandemic [30]. The wide exposure of the students during their stay in the university was evident through the diverse training in BS10.1 while BS37 shows that the students are also trained to help the community.

> BS10.1: *The way how the university train their students are incredible. We really get to learn so many things every day at the same time there is no pressure included which will make us have a good time while learning.*
> BS37: *Being able to help other people in terms of their Community Extension Service Program.*

4.2.4. Worst parts of school related learning experiences

Most of the students highlighted the lack of resources in the library for their research, lack of teachers who are experts, curriculum, and interference of school activities in studies. The results could be attributed to the newly offered program whereby the library system of the university is still acquiring needed instructional materials. To support the claim, Bizimana *et al.* [13] pointed out that the universities had to

prioritize the students' learning environment through the physical infrastructure like lecture rooms, libraries and laboratories. Extracts WS7 and WS17 show few of these newly discovered faculty-related learning experiences as regards the lack of references and the curriculum including the lack of accommodation in the registrar's office.

> WS7: *Maybe the worst part is the lack of references for our researches on our first two years as pioneers.*
> WS17: *The curriculum. I honestly don't approve it. It was messy as well as the unstable schedule and lack of accommodation by the registrar/school admin.*

4.2.5. Best parts of faculty related learning experiences

In regard to the faculty-related experiences, students find it best to encounter excellent and competent teachers during their college life. Both extracts BS11 and BS14 show evidence of competent teachers in the Communication Program.

> BS11: *Meeting quality teachers.*
> BS14: *The best parts of my learning experiences are having the best teachers for the major subjects.*

4.2.6. Worst parts of faculty related learning experiences

Concerning faculty-related learning experiences, the experiences were considered the worst. The study of Henderson *et al.* [14] mentioned that the faculty members need to be aware of students' learning environment and align their teaching styles with the students' learning outcomes. They also added that the faculty had to keep the balance between control and flexibility to build the students' confidence, growth, compassion, and success in skills and knowledge. Extracts S14 and WS24 illustrate the qualities and classroom management style of their professors.

> WS14: *The worst part would be getting sick and be pressured into getting better right away because some of the teachers do not want us to miss any lessons.*
> WS24: *To be honest, the minor courses are probably the worst because these minors demand more than the major ones.*

In general, the newly discovered themes of the students' learning experiences include those concerns for the self, school and faculty which contribute to their personal growth through diverse training and exposure in the university, competent teachers, and ability to reach out to the local community. Hence, students imbibe the core values of their home university in their learning experiences.

5. CONCLUSION

The empirical results revealed the critical contributions of experiential learning and social climate in students' learning experiences. As learners are encouraged to actively participate in the teaching-learning process and continue to make sense of their identity in a learning environment, the higher education institutions also have equal responsibilities of providing qualified, competent and nurturing faculty as well as environmental conditions that are conducive to achieving target learning outcomes. Such conditions comprise the schools' facilities and information technology infrastructure, and carefully designed instructional packages including quality instructional materials. Further, aside from students' academic and social life, their attitudes and values towards themselves and to others also formed part of their entire learning experiences. Therefore, these aspects of students' personal life must be considered by every university in order to produce wholly formed individuals for the competitive workforce.

Based on the conclusions, several recommendations are formulated: i) Students could be given opportunities to be exposed to activities, seminar, immersion and training to enrich their experiential learning in the university; ii) The Communication Program can focus on one track that is very feasible and marketable in the workplace; iii) Further studies could include a tracer study of the pioneering cohort who already had actual experience in their present jobs and studies on stress management, crisis management, and resiliency in collaboration with guidance counselors; iv) Learning resources should be added in the library system; v) The Bachelor of Communication curriculum should be revisited to tailor fit the needs of the students; vi) Communication faculty should be aware of the students' learning experiences and finish their post-graduate studies to expand their expertise, attend seminars and workshops on the application of the outcomes-based education, and classroom management; vii) The students should be provided seminar-workshops on stress

management, time management, and other topics to develop a positive attitude towards learning related to self, faculty and school; and vii) The alumni of Bachelor of Communication could be invited for their feedback to match the curriculum with their actual learning experiences in the workplaces.

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