

Journey of the Supreme Student Government Officers in Malabog National High School, Salvacion, Daraga, Albay

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Abstract

The journey of the Supreme Student Government (SSG) officers of Malabog National High School was explored in this phenomenological study. Story-telling and in-depth interview were carried out to describe and reflectively analyze their lived experiences, derive meanings and insights, and draw implications from the results of the study. I purposively selected five (5) SSG officers as my co-researchers who were at the same time under my supervision as the SSG adviser. Thematic analysis and reflections revealed six major structural themes incorporating the textual themes and symbols derived from their narratives: (1) gain knowledge and skills not explicitly taught inside the classrooms; (2) serve as an avenue for the development of life skills and soft skills; (3) building of citizenship skills and instrument to active citizenship; (4) enable development of growth mindset and grit; (5) serve as an inspiration to others; and (6) a tough job. According to my co-researchers, serving the SSG organization gave them the opportunity to serve the students especially those with academic difficulties, which I personally witnessed the commitment they gave to the projects such as tutoring and coaching. Further, the organization made an impact on the development of their life-long learning skills such as self-confidence, communication, critical thinking, problem-solving, and decision-making skills. Integrating my co-researchers' respective symbols of their lived experiences (pen, rainbow, circle, egg, and bird), a symbol of creative synthesis was developed. The symbol represents a window of opportunities provided by the SSG organization of developing leadership potentials among students' imbued skills and values, in addition to the support of the school and the bigger community from which the students also derive valuable experiences.

Keywords: journey, supreme student government officers, phenomenology

Introduction

As leadership affects every aspect of society, it is a significant topic and extremely relevant today. Gaining a clearer understanding of what is to be expected from the next generation of leaders is crucial as the transfer of information and position is made. It is naïve to assume that today's young leaders will lead in the same ways as the generation prior (Moguel, 2015).

Schools are the places where students are prepared for life beyond the four corners of the classroom. It has long been providing a means to develop motivated young visionaries who could be future leaders (O'Sullivan, 2004, in Gowthaman, 2019) with capacities to solve problems. Critical to the development of problem-solving skills is the creation of different opportunities at schools (Parlar et al., 2017) where students are given the opportunities to lead a team or an organization within the institution.

Following DepEd Order No. 34 series 2008, the Supreme Student Government (SSG) serves as the highest-level student organization in school governance to promote the welfare of the entire student population. It serves as the venue for the students to develop their leadership and social skills. It also looks to train students to become better members of society by keeping with them the ideals, and principles of participatory democracy and good

citizenship. More importantly, it intends to harness the student government as a partner in achieving quality education and academic excellence. But in working for the welfare of the students, the SSG programs, projects, and activities, must always adhere to the DepEd Mission Statements:

“To protect and to promote the right of every Filipino to quality, equitable, culture-based, and complete basic education” where “students learn in a child-friendly, gender-sensitive, safe and motivating environment”.

For the past five academic school years, from academic year 2017-2018 to present, 2021-2022, I actively served as the SSG adviser at Malabog National High School (MNHS), a public secondary school under the mandate of Philippines’ Department of Education (DepEd). The name itself, Supreme Student Government, serves as the supreme organization in any secondary DepEd school. The officers were the forefront of the students’ rights and welfare, and the model of the students’ excellence, grounded on good character, and deep sense of moral values. They are committed to pursue an independent stand, not dictated by other sectors, other than the students. The SSG officers are composed of the following key positions, from the President down to Peace Officers plus the grade level representatives from Grade 7 to Grade 12. These officers are expected to execute their duties and responsibilities all geared towards the realization of DepEd-mandated programs, projects, and activities in the school and community described above.

Within the five years’ service as an adviser, I had seen the culture, attitudes, and behaviors of my officers in every academic year, which I believed had contributed to the organization’s success and failure, as well as to the officers’ personal development. I saw the journey of the earlier and current SSG officers in the organization as they performed their respective roles guided by the mission and vision of the organization and my leadership and management. I had closely worked with these officers and journeyed with them until the end of every term of their office in the organization.

Purpose and Objectives

This study aimed to explore the journey of the Supreme Student Government (SSG) officers in Malabog National High School, Salvacion, Daraga, Albay. Specifically, this study sought to answer the following questions: (1) How may the journey of the SSG officers be reflectively analyzed and described? (2) What meanings and insights may be drawn from these experiences? (3) What implications may be drawn from the results of the study?

This phenomenological research sought to explore how the SSG officers’ experiences shaped their identity and development, hence I was determined to investigate the essence of the experience and motivation as well as the meanings and insights derived from the journey of the former’s service to the student organization.

Methods and Procedures

Since the emphasis is on describing and reflectively analyzing the SSG officers’ journey so that the meanings, and insights from their lived experiences may be drawn, the phenomenological design was employed. Five (5) students who held various positions within the SSG were purposively selected as participants of the study. They hold the various post in the organization such as president, vice-president, and grade level representative. They were in frequent contact and communication with the adviser–researcher such as during planning conference and meetings, community activities, leadership trainings, and other DepEd mandated activities for the student body through the SSG.

Table 1. Co-researchers profile

CO-researchers	Age	Positions held in SSG (2017-2022)
Co-researcher 1	17	President (2022-2023) G7, G8, G9, & G11 Representative (2017-2018; 2018-2019; 2019-2020; 2021-2022)
Co-researcher 2	17	President (2018-2019; 2019-2020). G12 Representative (2021-2022)
Co-researcher 3	16	President (2021-2022) G8 & 9 Representative (2018-2019; 2019-2020)
Co-researcher 4	17	President (2020-2021; 2019-2020) Vice President (2018-2019) G9 Representative (2017-2018)
Co-researcher 5	17	President (2018-2019)

Given this context, the participants behaved and performed the tasks expected and assigned to them in the natural setting, an advantage for me to conduct the study without bias and discomfort on the part of the observed party. My prolonged engagement in the organization enabled me to gain an in-depth understanding of the people, the organization, and the broader context on which this study is based.

Storytelling was used in gathering the lived experience of my co-researchers. The storytelling method allowed the SSG officers to tell their stories, it gave them opportunity to reconstruct the experience in question. According to Potts (2004), in recounting a narrative, individuals put the pieces together for themselves, and in doing so, make meaning from the experience. This is proper because it is consistent with how psychologists think how memory works. Rather than reaching into our memory bank for intact memories, it is believed that we reconstruct our memories, creating our own individual perception of an event. When asking for a story, the researcher encourages self-examination, reconstruction of memory, and construction of meaning, all of which yield the depth of response we researchers hunger for. None of this is likely to happen for a participant who is merely asked to provide a sound bite response. We understand an experience from the individual’s point of view, and we hear their words as they tell it (Potts, 2004).

An in-depth interview was likewise conducted to shed light on the stories or accounts provided by each of the participant which need deeper exploration and interpretation. Interviews and stories were recorded and then transcribed so the data could be analyzed. The interview looked for a more comprehensive account of the participants’ specific traits developed through their SSG leadership experience. Additionally, through the interviews, the participants were asked about the meanings and insights gained from the journey and illustrate these with drawings and symbols.

To process my co-lived researcher's experiences, I followed the phenomenological procedures:

1) *Gathering of Lived Experiences*: I gathered the lived experiences of my co-researchers who were actively involved in the SSG organization as officers and have had held the highest post in the organization. Gathering of the lived experiences was executed through storytelling, and in-depth interview.

2) *Primary/First Thematic Reflection*: The first thematic reflection was performed through culling out themes (view and ideas describing our journey in the SSG) from each of their narratives and stories, transcription, and organization of the content of the narratives. The SSG officers shared the respective symbols which stood for them. The insights that came out of each narrative were classified as the first thematic reflection.

3) *Second Thematic Reflection*: This is the second reflection, the structural themes. This appears from the common patterns among themes and clustering them into broader thematic expression of the insights to get a deeper understanding from the first reflection.

4) *Third Thematic Reflection (Essential Insights/Postulates and Eidetic Insight)*: This is where essential insights were derived out of the series of reflections and from the structural themes. It is in this stage where I moved from evidence in the perceptual sphere to evidence in the imaginative sphere so that I can arrive at the constant and essential insights; and

5) *Creative Synthesis, Implications, and Possibilities*: In the final stage of doing the phenomenological study, I came up with my creative synthesis, implications, and possibilities, based on its findings, using eidetic insight.

Results and Discussions

1. *THEME 1: To Be an SSG Officer is to Appreciate Opportunities Provided by the Organization and to Gain Knowledge and Skills Not Explicitly Taught Inside the Classrooms.*

One of the many significant roles played by any student organization is to give the students, especially its officers, the opportunity to work on real problems and starts projects in a safe environment, while also being responsive to the needs of student body, with teachers' support. The SSG being the umbrella organization in Malabog National High School, has played this role, founded on its primary objectives: "to help students develop...competencies that would enable them to realize their full potential...". Interestingly, there are competencies which were learned by the SSG officers which were not explicitly taught during instruction inside the classrooms.

Co-researcher 1 emphasized that classrooms are meant for learning about different subjects, but there are also those that cannot be learned within the four corners of the classrooms, rather, through SSG experience. He said, and I quote, "*There are things that I cannot learn in the classroom or in my subjects. I learned it from the supreme student government. So, I embraced it and valued it more*". His decision to embrace and value SSG more put premium on the learning he gained from the organization.

Co-researcher 2 pioneered several school projects aimed at helping struggling students in modular learning. According to her, "*my experience during the pandemic made me realize that it's not only me who suffers, there are even more who are struggling with modules...So, when you asked, sir, to think of a project that can help address this issue, I thought, we can have peer coaching*". She added that despite her personal academic struggle too, she learned a lot from this project especially that she was tasked to take charge of setting up partnership with other learning centers.

The earlier experience in SSG of Co-researcher 3 gave him the advantage on how to run or lead the organization. He said, "*during those times in elementary and Junior High School where I was surrounded by more grown-up leaders, I learned and gained more skills that help me enhance me leadership ability*". Co-researcher 3 gained learning and skills developed were from his experience in the SSG in previous years.

According to Co-researcher 4, "*It's my being an SSG officer that marked my turning moment and a change in thinking in my life. Since, it creates a lot of chances for me to improve my knowledge, skills, and ability to lead students more effectively*". She further describes that without her involvement in SSG, perhaps she will not be able to learn new knowledge and skills, which she hasn't learned in the class.

Reflecting on these lived experiences of my co-researchers, SSG positively performed its role of providing opportunities to the SSG officers through various programs, projects, and activities to learn knowledge and skills they didn't learned while inside the classroom and if learned, to enhance them further.

1.2 THEME 2: Supreme Student Government Serves as an Avenue for the Development of Life Skills and Soft Skills.

To develop self-confidence, critical thinking, problem-solving, decision-making, and learning among the student body and to use these skills in contributing towards nation-building is the fifth objective of Section 6 of the SSG Constitution and By Laws as per DepEd Order 47, series 2014. Along this line and according to the lived experiences of my co-researchers, SSG served the purpose of developing student leaders and equipping in them the skills needed for nation building through promotion of life skills.

Co-researcher 1 explained, *“Whenever I solve problems, I make sure to find first the root cause of the problem. And before I think of solutions. That is also where my holistic thinker status will come in, which was developed more when I became a student leader because I must always think broadly about things and always be optimistic about any problem that everyone can solve. I apply this also even at work, and at home.”* In short, co-researcher’s 1 belief on how to solve problem signifies his application of critical thinking and analytical reasoning.

Co-researcher 2 likewise believes that confidence is one of the advantages he gained from his journey in SSG. To his words, *“the most important help I got from SSG is that I gained self-confidence and self-esteem. The confidence I developed helped me socialize with others, therefore I was able to express myself better.”*

The same with Co-researcher 3. He described how his experience of being an officer boosted his self-confidence. He went on to claim that *“being surrounded by more senior SSG Officers helps me to gain more confidence and be more mature as the times I grow up”*. He continued by saying, *“when my Ates and Kuyas discussed different topics, I was amazed at how confident they were. Not only because of the flow of the topic, but because also how everyone takes part and enjoys all their activities. Knowing our ages are similar, they have gained many attentions because of their confidence.”*

He further explained that, having self-confidence brought him some advantages. He told that, *“being confident is one of the advantages that I am thankful to have in my journey as a student leader and a student. If you are confident, people respect you as a leader because they think that you know what you’re doing”*.

In addition to self-confidence, self-awareness was another skill developed to Co-researcher 2. She said, *“What I can say about the leadership that is effective to me is the servant leadership. I am not effective when it comes to leading or being a leader that is why I wanted to be a leader on my own ... but I know to myself that I have my own kind of abilities that make me a good leader”*. Her awareness of her own strengths and limitation as a leader is a skill that is instilled as a result of her journey in the SSG.

These findings are significant to Kouzes and Posner (2011) assertion that knowing oneself is the first step in becoming a leader. That is, one must examine their beliefs and principles since one cannot look at others, identify their potential, or assist others in becoming leaders without first examining one's own values and principles. As a result, one's attitude and behavior provide the foundation of leadership. It is comparable to responsibility, in that those in positions of leadership who are aware of their responsibilities nevertheless have control over their own actions and decisions.

1.3 THEME 3: SSG Paves Way for Building of Citizenship Skills and Openness to Serve as an Instrument to Active Citizenship.

The Governance of Basic Education Act of 2001, Section 2, provide, among others: *“The goal of basic education is to provide students with the skills, knowledge, and values they need to become caring, self- reliant, productive, and patriotic citizens”*. This provision attests to the importance of teaching students the social skills and values about citizenry and love for the country.

In connection with this educational goal, my Co-researcher 5 claimed that *“SSG has been*

a way for me to serve others without expecting anything in return. It has also taught me to be a good student and a responsible citizen of our country. This is important in maintaining our democracy, just like when we do exercise our right to participate in issues on our school as well as being leaders in our community. This is to show that we value and protect our democracy”.

Likewise, my Co-researcher 3 emphasized, *“the SSG is the most important organization in our school. Through its officers and members, we understand better the different opinions or needs of our co-students like how to improve their studies. The SSG also serves as a role model to influence the students to behaviors and attitudes.”*

In short, the findings find it relevance to what Prof. Joseph M. Lozano claimed that *“the exercise of leadership cannot be understood solely from competencies or technical skills. It must include a connection to values. A personal process that develops the person’s ability for perception, learning and inner reflection”*. This implies that leadership involves inner awareness, and values (Lozano, 2019).

1.4 THEME 4: SSG Enable Development of Growth Mindset and Grit.

I agree with LeBoeuf (2020), who said that *“leadership programs offered by student government associations helped them to work autonomously, be more diplomatic in situations, and added their skills in managing outside activities, and forming relationships with others who have diverse backgrounds and beliefs”*.

Since this is evident from what my co-researchers gained from their participation in the SSG. As my Co-researcher 3 claimed, *“being an SSG officer was a turning point in my life and my way of thinking. Since, it provides me with several opportunities to improve my knowledge, skills, and ability to lead students more effectively. It helps me increase my network and cultivate good relationships with others”*.

On a similar note, Co-researcher 2, said *“as a leader, I become more visionary, particularly in resolving challenging problems and encouraging each individual to move forward.”*

Another insight was made by Co-Researcher 4, who understood that self-confidence strengthened their performance in leadership situations. She said, *“If you are confident, people respect you as a leader because they think that you know what you’re doing”*.

1.5 THEME 5: To Become an SSG Officer is to be Inspired and Serve as an Inspiration to Others.

The SSG officers served as an inspiration to others. In turn, served as an instrument of exploring and understanding oneself. Thus, Kouzes and Posner (2011) are correct that becoming a leader starts with discovering oneself. That is to look into one’s values and principles because without looking at it within oneself, it’s not possible, to look at others, and recognize their potential and help others to become leaders.

Co-researcher 3 admitted that her being a leader is influenced by their former SSG President. She said, *“I was deeply influenced by the former SSG President of our school who is Philippi Moico. We call him “Kuya Philip”, and he always inspire people to be the best version of themselves. He really motivated me and made me realized that I can be an inspiration also for many”*.

Co-researcher 5 went on to say, *“The SSG gives me the fortitude of character and the ability to alter the lives of others while encouraging them to be their best selves-courageous, strong, and grounded-while doing it with humility, kindness, and grace. In the end, I think, it is more about who we develop because of both the best and worst experiences of our lives than it is about our success, achievements, or titles”*.

On the other hand, not just the SSG officers have general influence on leadership. The parent is. This is the case of Co-researcher 4, who said that *“I think the one that inspired me was my father because being a barangay police officer in our place, I see how my father gain*

respect from other people”.

1.6 THEME 6: Being in the SSG is a Tough Job.

Becoming an SSG Officers entails a lot of hard work and perseverance to reach the organizational goals. It tests the officer’s commitment to the organization and resilience to adapt the demands of work. It is also about the willingness to step out of the comfort zone. Yet worth experiencing, emulating, and rewarding for they were able to experience of being a leader for not everyone is given the opportunity to become one.

As Co-researcher 2 admitted that *“it took me a lot of courage to step up and voice out my concerns... and “it’s hard for me from the start to keep up with experienced leaders because I cannot easily come up with plans and solutions to things that need to be addressed.”*

She further revealed that from the beginning of her being an officer of the SSG, she has a tough time. She said, *“I do not have much experience when it comes to doing proposals. I also have difficulty connecting with other people and fellow officers. Honestly, I have a tough time”*.

The reason she told for having difficulty in connecting with other people and fellow officers was that *“I am the type of person who is afraid to speak out my opinions and has ineffective communication skills. Have stage fright and have low self-esteem.”*

For Co-researcher 4, she said *“my leadership experience was not without challenges. Being exposed to a lot of worked, my organizing and communication skills were put to test under intense of strain”*.

Co-researcher 5, on the other hand, admitted to having difficulty with time management. He said, *“I have encountered the challenge of managing my schedules between the organization works and academics, I experienced being physically and mentally unhealthy and the struggle in managing time. I see these challenges significant especially as a student leader because it can make us either a better or worst leader.*

2. Postulates/Essential Insights

The SSG serves as laboratory where some knowledge and skills not explicitly taught during regular classroom instruction can be taught and learned. Like a laboratory room where discoveries are anticipated applying scientific method, SSG give the students varied experiences guided by the adviser and support staff, where they can apply their existing knowledge and skills and learn and develop further new knowledge and skills as they implement projects and activities.

Core skills that are essential to effectively deal with different demands and challenges of everyday life can be learned in SSG. Various experiences afford possibility of further self-discovery, self-improvement, love, care, and respect for others, radiating it to the whole community. SSG journey therefore is the school’s vital “window of opportunity” for building core life skills, and for community to provide the much-needed support.

The journey in SSG is inspiring for it afforded students with opportunities to further promote the importance of excellence, to push oneself to do better and serve as a good role model to others. This therefore gives them a call to work hard towards establishing a good image of their selves.

Journeying in SSG requires plenty of work and warrants solutions to address issues and problems that coexist. The actual exposure and hands on training is no easy job but help students gain the required knowledge, core skills and proactive attitude to help them complete the job.

3. Eidetic Insight

The SSG officers’ journey in the organization is not a smooth-sailing one, but the experiences are like sails across the waters and their encountered risks that educate them geared towards the realization of organizational goals and objectives especially of developing students and leaders imbued with the knowledge, life skills, and character that our nation needs most.

4. Creative Syntheses

The creative synthesis is the integrated symbols based on the lived experiences of my co-researchers which elucidate how SSG journey open window of opportunities that has impact to their transformation. Like a (pen), SSG offered the officers the freedom and responsibility to serve as the voice of the student body, while journeying filled with new hopes and new beginnings in pursuit of fulfilling the dreams (rainbow) amidst the ups and down (circle) in the organization.

Nevertheless, the journey itself makes them strong yet soft (boiled egg), with the ability to face challenges along the way without breaking, and to rise above like capable of soaring high and taking with them the learnings gained from the experiences.

5. Implications of the Study

Supreme Student Government. The result of the study provides the essential insight for the MNHS-SSG of its triumph of providing the students window of opportunities to be become better citizen of the country. It also provides an insight that the journey toward achieving the goals and objectives of the organization taught through direct instruction, and to let the innate skills be further developed and harnessed as demanded by every project and activity through guidance of SSG Adviser.

The role of the organization to student development cannot be overvalued. The perceived change in attitude, knowledge, skills, and behavior by the journeys themselves is a sign that the organization is positively performing its role of developing the future nation builders.

Supreme Student Government Advisers and Teachers. Reflective analysis of the study underscores the vital role of the SSG adviser and support staff, their commitment to lead the way, to guide and support the officers as the latter carry out their duties and responsibilities. The adviser may just be at the background, but its role is crucial to the success of the organization for it serves as the captain of the vessel, from whom the crew (officers and members) obtain the necessary information about the organization. Advisers and teachers therefore need to create a safe and nonthreatening yet challenging environment to keep the officers engaged and motivated.

DepEd Youth Formation Division. This study can also inform the DepEd-YFD of its essential role among the SSG organizations across the division and recognize support every SSG organization needs from them to help make the SSG a truly functional SSG organization, capable of delivering the services to the organization, capable of delivering the services to the students through its projects and programs and ultimately targeting its important goal of effecting student development.

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