

A Case Study of Third Year Sociology Students at the Polytechnic University of the Philippines

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to utilize the qualitative research techniques to gain an understanding of the experiences of third year sociology students at the Polytechnic University of the Philippines. In particular, this study seeks to know the limitations faced by the students as sociology majors in a state university. By looking at the experiences of these sociology students, we can somewhat gauge the possible prospects of sociology in the Philippines.

Keywords: Philippine sociology, student, practice

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this study is to utilize the qualitative research techniques to gain an understanding of the experiences of third year sociology students at the Polytechnic University of the Philippines. In particular, this study seeks to know the limitations faced by the students as sociology majors in a state university. It has been argued that the eventual significance of sociology in helping develop the quality of mind necessary to understand the intersection of self and society is absent “among the better minds in the younger generation” (Bautista, 1987, p.9). “One of the reasons for this is the inadequate flow of talented college graduates who are reluctant to take low-paid teaching jobs” (Yadov, 2013) Few would actually choose sociology as their profession. This problem is further exacerbated by the weaknesses of the discipline itself.

Nevertheless, studies focusing on the experiences of Filipino sociology students are limited. Most literatures available on the development of sociology in the Philippines have focused on the knowledge produced by more seasoned and full-fledged sociologists (Abad & Eviota, 1982; Bautista, 1994; Cariño, 1980; David, 1977; Hunt, 1984; Talledo, 1993; Weightman, 1987). There is an absence of literature pertaining to the contribution made by undergraduate students in the shaping of the discipline.

The next generation of sociologists is given the task of carrying the torch to the 21st century (Bautista, 1994), so to speak. Thus, where that gap in the knowledge is present, it is where this study would like to stand-in. The undergraduate students are much part of the discipline as other seasoned and full-fledged sociologists. If one would like to undertake a painting of the complete picture of Philippine sociology, one has to account for every detail of its structure. By looking at the experiences of these sociology students, we can somewhat gauge the possible prospects of sociology in the Philippines.

In looking at the prospects of sociology in the Philippines, a case study of undergraduate sociology students shall help in covering all fronts. The interpretive character of this study shall contribute to a more holistic approach in the assessment of sociology in the Philippines.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Most studies on the character of Philippine Sociology traced the historical evolution of sociology in the Philippines (Abad and Eviota, 1982; Antolihao, 1999; Bautista, 1999; Catapusan, 1957; Talledo, 1993). For example, Abad and Eviota (1982) gave an overview of sociology's historical origins in the Philippines from 1886 towards the end of the nineteen seventies. However, Catapusan (1957) insisted that in 1957, although there is a considerable development of sociology in the Philippines, Philippine Sociology is yet to exist. Pertierra (2006) also argued that "empirical studies on Philippine society existed, but such studies did not proceed from a national perspective" (p.95). This could be attributed to the similar observations made by several sociologists (Abad &Eviota, 1982; Antolihao, 1999; Bautista, 1998; Pertierra, 2006; Talledo, 1993) on the materialization of social sciences in the Philippines, specifically sociology, not as a product of major change in people's consciousness but as colonial tools. Pertierra (2006) argues that "the impetus for social sciences in the Philippines developed from the administrative needs of the American colonial regime" (p.95). However, Abad &Eviota (1982) saw sociology in the Philippines spinning out of its "colonial cocoon" (p.147) in the late 1970s.

Assessments of Philippine sociology were able to provide the strengths of the discipline. Catapusan (1957) discussed the increasing recognition of sociology in the Philippines in the early 1950s through the incorporation of social science units on the undergraduate curriculum of Liberal Arts, Education and Normal courses both on public and private colleges. "The 1960s ushered in an accelerated interest in sociological teaching and research" (Abad &Eviota, 1982, p.134). 1970s marked the government interest in sociological research (De Guzman, as cited in Abad &Eviota, 1982). In the 1980s, Bautista (1998) saw the increasing support and awareness of most sociologists of the indigenization project taking place in the area of sociology. "By the 1990s, researchers have reaped the benefits of methodological convergence and the development of participatory approaches" (Bautista, 1998, p.71). Although there is a considerable development in the discipline, there is no indigenized sociology, so to speak. This does not only apply to Philippine sociology but the Philippine social sciences as a whole. Pertierra (2006) argues that the insistence on the using nation as a reference in indigenization of social science limits its usefulness. He argues further that "in the present condition, the nation-state is no longer the primary site for knowledge-production or identity-formation" (Pertierra, 2006, p.101). Lanuza (2003) also posited the need for a relevant Filipino sociology in the age of globalization and postmodernism.

However, the evaluations conducted on sociology in the Philippines are not bereft of the weaknesses and problems besetting the discipline. Most studies look at the personal and institutional tribulations in the study and teaching of sociology (Abad &Eviota, 1982; Bautista 1987; Bautista, 1994; Catapusan, 1957). A survey of sociology teachers in the country shows the "relevance of the sociological enterprise to regional and national concerns is undermined by basic problems in the teaching of the discipline" (Bautista, 1987, p.8). As early as 1960s, Catapusan (1957) pointed out that "the continued lack of sociologists means the teaching of sociology by unprepared teachers" (p.55). Abad and Eviota (1982) found out that most sociologists who have doctorate degrees were quick to be chosen as administrators who are persistently tied to administrative work rather than teaching and research. There is also the issue of overloading of teaching units. Instead of having time to develop their courses, sociology teachers are held back having to teach longer hours per week (Abad and Eviota, 1982; Bautista, 1987). However, Porio (2011) argued that the last few decades saw increased recognition of professors who can generate their own research funds or bring huge grants from overseas development agencies. Consequently, "senior faculty members are de-

loaded for research with the younger faculty taking over the former's teaching duties" (Porio, 2011, p.273).

The lack of adequate resources such as book and common syllabi was also pointed out (Abad and Eviota, 1982; Bautista, 1987). Porio (2011) observed:

Like those in other developing countries, institutions of higher learning in the Philippines do not get much resource support from the state. The meager education resources for higher education are primarily devoted to supporting teachers' salaries, teaching facilities, and other needed physical infrastructure. In general, this resource situation holds true both for higher institutions of higher learning in the public and private sector. With the exception of the top 1 percent of the universities in the country, most academics are heavily saddled with teaching duties and have no time and resources left for research and publication (p.270)

However, Bautista (1987) argued that the foremost problem harriving the discipline is the poor quality of students. Abad and Eviota (1987) reported that "the relative unpopularity of sociology vis-à-vis other social science disciplines" (p.136). "On the whole, it is perceived to be a dumping ground for students who do not make the grade in other courses" (Bautista, 1987, p.9). Thus, the project of evolving theories and methods applicable to Philippine social realities are sternly constrained.

What could be observed from the pool of literature above is the absence of studies documenting the plight of sociology undergraduate students as they try to earn a degree in sociology. Thus, this is the gap which this study would like to fill-in.

BRIEF METHODOLOGICAL COMMENTS

This study opted for an interpretive paradigm in understanding the experiences of the third year sociology students. Sparks (1992) opined:

The interpretative paradigm seeks explanation within the realm of individual consciousness and subjectivity, within the frame of reference of the participant as opposed to the observer of action' (p.26).

Using a case research technique, within an interpretive framework, this study sought to understand the experiences of third year sociology students as they try to earn a degree in sociology. Using interviews and observation, the research was carried out continuously over a period of full fourteen days (September 7-21). Also, the researcher's observation as the students' instructor in several major subjects spanning three years was also taken into consideration. The structure of each day was determined by the schedule of the class. During general observations in the class, any actions, behaviors or incidents that were deemed to be connected with their being sociology students were noted. Part of the observation process is the researcher's revisit to several papers submitted by the students as part of their course requirements. At the end of each class, the researcher completes field notes. Every after an interview, categorization of interview tapes were done. The data, in the form of field notes and interview transcripts, were analyzed in several methodical stages as suggested by Creswell, 2004. After themes and categories were established, an analysis using the Bourdeusian theory of capital, habitus, and field was undertaken.

THE RESEARCH SETTING

The Polytechnic University of the Philippines (PUP) is a government educational institution located in Anonas street, Sta. Mesa, Manila. It is the largest state university in the Philippines in terms of student population. Most of its students belong to the economically challenged

level of Philippine society (“About PUP”, n.d.). As a state university, PUP is highly dependent upon the subsidy coming from the government. However, year after year it is being threatened by budget cuts. According to Kabataan Partylist Rep. Terry Ridon, PUP shall suffer a 10.1` million cut in 2014 on its Personnel Services or the fund for salaries and benefits of employees. Furthermore, no fund will be given for the capital outlay of the University in 2014. The capital outlay component of is the budget for construction of new facilities and equipment.

For the past four years of teaching in PUP, the researcher has been handling an average class size of 50 students which is way beyond its capacity of 35 students. “Of the 112 state universities and colleges (SUCs), the Polytechnic University of the Philippines (PUP) had the highest number of enrollees and graduates in 2011” (PCIJ, 2013). The number of students and the physical capacity of the University do not coincide. Thus, expect extreme noise and heat during classes. Not to mention, the proximity of the University to the Pasig River and Pandacan Oil Depot, you will often hear barges and sirens while conducting class.

The third year sociology students has only one block composing of 24 students, which is way below the average size of the more popular courses¹ in PUP. Of the 24 students, 17 are female and 7 are male. For most of them, the BS Sociology course was not their first choice. They consider the west side of the main building as their bailiwick, specifically room W615 and W617.

DISCUSSION OF THEMES

Choice of Sociology as a Course

For most third year sociology students, sociology was not their first choice. Two of the informants intimated that they were really into psychology but then all slots were filled-up so they decided to go to sociology instead. At first, they planned on shifting after the first semester however, they decided to stay. This was already seen by Abad and Eviota (1987) when they reported “the relative unpopularity of sociology vis-à-vis other social science disciplines” (p.136). Bautista (1987) also observed that “on the whole, it is perceived to be a dumping ground for students who do not make the grade in other courses” (p.9). Asked why sociology was not a first choice for them, an informant was quick to retort that in high school not once was it mentioned by their teachers. One informant intimated that up until now her parents are still coaxing her to shift to a business course which for them is more lucrative. In general, sociology is seen not as a lucrative course for these students. However, one informant said that he knew of sociology because of a professor who was a friend. Thus, it led him to pursue the course in college. This shows that once given information on the discipline of sociology, it would lead one to pursue the course. According to Bourdieu (2006) “it is in fact impossible to account for the structure and functioning of the social world unless one reintroduces capital in all its forms and not solely in the one form recognized by economic theory” (p.105). Bourdieu distinguished between economic capital and symbolic capital. The latter has several sub-types such as cultural capital, linguistic capital, scientific and literary capital depending on the field in which they are located (Moore, 2008). According to Moore (2008), ‘cultural capital is to all intents and purposes a synonym for “status” or habitus for “socialization”’ (p.105). Habitus is a “system of lasting, transposable dispositions which, integrating past experiences, functions at every moment as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations, and actions” (Bourdieu, 1971, p. 83). “Although **choices** may be somewhat reflective of financial resources, they may be more indicative of cultural capital, or the system of attributes (e.g., cultural knowledge, values, behavioral practices, and

¹ In PUP’s BS Accountancy course, there is an average of twenty sections per year with a class size of 45 students.

mannerisms) that are derived from one's parents and family and are often strongly related to class status" (Griffin, del Pilar, McIntosh, and Griffin, 2012,p.97). Part also of the consideration in choosing sociology as a course comes from the relative disadvantages position of sociology in the hierarchy of courses maintained by the education field. Moore (2008) argued:

Symbolic fields, on the bases of their specific principles, establish hierarchies of discrimination (some things are better or more worthy than others)... and their hierarchies of value are in reality purely arbitrary rather than being grounded in intrinsically worthwhile and superior principles radically detached from the this-worldly instrumentalism and materialism of mercantile exchange. (p.104)

As a result, it is not hard to imagine at among the third year students sociology was not a popular course.

Reasons for Staying in Sociology

While it was not their first choice, the 24 students comprising the class have decided to stay in sociology. All informants echoed the same reason for staying – the subject matter of sociology. They have come to accept the discipline because of the perspective it offers. Most of them felt a sense of superiority over students from other courses, not because they knew of the financial opportunities available to sociology majors but because of their ability to analyze what is happening around them. They believe that there is less chance of social mobility if you are a sociology graduate but it is a discipline where intellectual development is present. An informant also said that the advantage was more on the raising of the level of consciousness. Although one informant said that the sense of superiority might not be intended, there is still a subjective feeling that they know more than students from other discipline. An informant shared that with use of sociological jargons people tend to regard them as intelligent. Seen here is the ambiguous status granted to sociology as a discipline. Though not a financially rewarding endeavor, the students regard it as necessary for consciousness building. This view is a product of the students' individual habitus. Mendoza, Kuntz, and Berger (2012) maintained:

As such, people who live similar lifestyles because of their common level of access to capital develop a shared worldview as a result of common experiences and interaction. This habitus fosters a taken-for-granted common representation of the world in a class-specific manner at a cognitive level. Thus, certain preferences and tendencies become routinized as part of an individual's worldview. Therefore, people unconsciously classify themselves with others based on common preferences and expectations. This also serves as a mechanism for marginalizing others who have access to different amounts and types of capital (p.560).

The acquisition of sociological jargons is clearly a type of capital which these students secure as sociology students. At their standpoint, their ability to analyze and explain the social world creates advantage over non-sociology students.

Importance of Resources in the Study of Sociology

Judging by the papers submitted by the student as part of the course requirement for the past three years, there are limited resources they could access. Most citations came from online sources which are accessible to everyone. But the quality of these resources is questionable. Sometimes they even cite personal blogs as their source. One of the informants said that even library books are not accessible to them; or if they have access to it, most of the books were outdated. Thus, the quality of their output suffers. When the researcher allowed the students to use her personal access to online peer-reviewed journals, their papers have considerably

improved. But these students do not let this kind of limitation hamper them. An informant said that they look online for free e-books or borrow a teacher's personal copy if they need one. Consequently, photocopying of books is widespread. The study of sociology cannot be detached from the overall atmosphere of the university. With its dwindling budget, students cannot expect academic resources at par with other private universities.² The poor quality of students is a mere symptom of the deteriorating quality of state universities. It is essential to inspect the social space in which interactions, transactions and events transpired (Bourdieu, 2005). The University as a field nurtures specific stakes and forms of struggle internal to it. To which the students are subjected to.

Role Played By Teachers in the Study of Sociology

One informant said that she was still having doubts after the first semester because the teacher who handled their first major subject was not able to introduce the subject well. But it was also their subsequent teachers who were able to erase the doubts because of the way they taught the subjects assigned to them. For these students, the starting point of learning is the teacher. Without the teacher, no one will facilitate learning. During one of the classes, the students kept on complaining about their teacher who handles a major subject who seldom comes in. Whenever asked about concepts related to that subject, they would not be able to answer citing the habitual absence of the teacher. One informant opined that the department chairperson should not assign major subjects to those who cannot always make it to class. However, an informant said that even if there are teachers who seldom come in to class, they are well-versed on the subject matter they handle. But the absences outweigh their proficiencies.

Aside from habitual absences of teachers, there is also the problem of disjunction between the subject matter and the department where a teacher comes from. An example given was their Social Statistics class handled by a teacher from the Department of Mathematics and Statistics. Thus, the necessary stress to the social is non-existent. This is different from the practice of several universities offering sociology courses.³

What some Filipino sociologists considered a problem in the discipline during the 1970s and 1980s still holds true in the case of the sociology department in PUP (Abad and Eviota, 1982; Bautista, 1987). Teachers are still overloaded with teaching units. The researcher currently has 27 teaching units which is equivalent to 9 classes. On top of it, they are required to pursue their masteral studies without the benefit of a reduced load. Thus, absences are a common occurrence. Mendoza et al. (2012) argued that:

The way in which habitus shapes and is shaped by access to capital influences how individuals make strategic choices to advance their positions within society. Thus, strategy is also a key construct to consider within the interaction of capital, habitus, and field" (p.560).

Accordingly, the teachers' habitual absences could be considered as a strategy. They improvise within the habitus-defined norms to make best use of their capital resources in order to further their own interests (Swartz, as cited in Mendoza et al., 2012). The sociology teachers in PUP is at a disadvantaged position as opposed to their counterparts in UP and other private universities in the Philippines. Therefore, they cannot give the students what they do not have – time.

² To date, PUP has no EBSCO access unlike in other private universities such as Ateneo de Manila and the University of Santo Thomas.

³ At the University of the Philippines and the Ateneo De Manila University, Social Statistics is taught by a teacher from the sociology department.

Importance of Collective Learning

The students stressed the importance of collective learning in the study of sociology. One informant said that it is important that they have someone who they can discuss the concepts in sociology in order to understand them. Although there is a clear division based on cliques inside the classroom, with one group sitting on the left side and the other on the right, an informant noted that when it comes to theories other groups are open to discussion with other groups. They even share resources with each other. Students also debate on certain theories even if they are on a drinking session; an informant said that it is inevitable that they will on touch the subject. Customary chat on their way home will also include analysis of current events using sociological perspectives.

Majority of the students are members of an organization which regularly conducts educational discussions on theories and methods in sociology. The researcher observed that most of these students are the ones with greater acumen in using theories when they write papers. One informant suggested that their organization actually supplements the discussion in class. They read books beyond what is required. However, they still stress the importance of the teacher in facilitating a collective learning inside the class.

Students' Theoretical and Methodological Preferences

The students' use of sociological theories is on an ad hoc basis. They refer to theories whenever they are writing papers which require analysis using a certain framework. Their choice depends upon two considerations: 1) their application on the subject matter of the paper; and 2) what they consider as their professors preference. An informant said that sometimes in the middle of cramming for a paper, she will chose a theory which she considers easiest to apply. There are also instances that they mimic the professor's theoretical leaning. But there is an observed sporadic use of theories on their papers. Among the papers submitted to the researcher, there are only few who use theories on their paper unless required to do so. But whenever they are required to do so, most papers use the Structural Functionalist tradition. However, they would not agree that they are functionalist; they said that it is only for academic purposes. One informant reasoned that he uses the Functionalist perspective inside the classroom but outside when it comes to political leanings he is somewhat a Marxist. What can be seen is the dichotomy between a theory's applicability in the academe and out. Most of the students do not have one theoretical tradition that they automatically subscribe to. Thus, there is no clear theoretical identity among the students.

Regarding their methodological preference, there is a consensus towards the qualitative paradigm. For them, it is easier. They still subscribe to the quantitative-qualitative divide. Most informants will use the qualitative paradigm on their thesis. When asked why they think it's easier, the sole reason was because they have aversion over numbers and mathematics. An informant said that she did not learn anything on her social statistics class which is important when using the quantitative methods.

A look upon the theoretical and methodological preferences of the students, one sees an operation of what Bourdieu (1990) called as strategies of practical sense. The scientific research enterprise is a social game and one has to have a certain feel for the game. The mastery of theories and methodologies is the product of practical sense as the feel for the game (Bourdieu, 1990), a feel which is acquired when one sits in a class or when one finally becomes acquainted to certain regularities in the field of research. Just like any other field, scientific research has a relative autonomy. This means that there are stakes and forms of struggles internal to that field. This is demonstrated by the choice between quantitative or qualitative methods because the choice made functions as symbolic strategies in struggles for

symbolic domination, that is, for control over a particular category of signs and, thereby, over the way the natural and social world is envisaged (Bourdieu, 1990).

CONCLUSION

In spite of sociology not being their first choice, it appears that the third year students consider sociology as a good course. But they face many limitations along the way such as lack of resources and habitual absences of teachers. They stress the importance of collective learning in facilitating a better understanding of sociology. The choice of theory for them is on a case-to-case basis. However, when it comes to methodologies there is a clear bias towards qualitative approach.

To understand the experiences of the third year students, one must locate it within the larger context of the field of sociology in the Philippines. One must understand the interplay of habitus and capitals involved within the field to understand the logic of the students' practice. The experiences of the third year sociology students are not isolated from the larger social context where they are located; their experiences are "minute points of intersections of biography and history within society" (Mills, 1959, p.1). But sociology is only one of the many academic disciplines situated within the larger structure of Philippine education. What could be gleaned from the experiences of the third year students are the structural inadequacies of Philippine education in general. Thus, to undertake a project of improving the quality of the students of sociology, an assessment of the Philippine education system is a must.

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