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If Others Can, Why Can't I?: Coping Strategies of At-Risk 4P's Beneficiaries in Finishing Senior High School

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Abstract

Finishing senior high school is a challenging task and even more challenging for those students who are at-risk of dropping out. Several literature have pointed to coping strategies as the main ingredient in positively achieving goals and objectives (Park and Adler, 2003; Santrock, 2003). The pivotal role of coping strategies cannot be underestimated. However, literature pertaining to the use of coping strategies among at-risk students in the Philippine context is hard to locate. Hence, this qualitative case study was conducted to capture the coping strategies of at-risk 4P's beneficiaries in finishing senior high school. Five students were identified as at-risk. From the results of this study, it revealed three categories of coping strategies namely: problem-focused strategies, appraisal-focused strategies, and emotion-focused strategies. Through understanding the coping strategies of at-risk students, this study provides insights to develop a program to aid failing students.

Keywords: at-risk, coping strategies, senior high school

Introduction

Secondary education is an important stage of education. This is so true to the newly implemented curriculum of the Philippines. From the point of view of an individual, secondary education determines the future plans of an individual. It is the epiphany where an individual makes career and life choices. For adolescents, it is regarded as the most crucial stage in which when a student intends to continue schooling finds himself equipped with needed academic background. But for those adolescents

which are unable to finish secondary education find themselves unproductive because of fewer opportunities that may come along their way. In the social point of view, youngsters are regarded as the next nation-builders. In this concept, secondary education plays the role of a training ground. At this stage, Education and Development Report marked increasing number of academic challenges like submission of needed requirements, compliance of project outputs, and other academic necessities in order to achieve learning competencies listed in the curriculum. In the senior high school years of the K-12 curriculum, the students are faced with entirely different subjects. These new subjects bring new challenges or even difficulty to students especially those who are regarded as at risks. In the Philippine education system, students are under the control of teachers and school administrators. The teachers provide directions for the students in the achievement of desired learning competencies. For high performing students, this is not a problem. But for those who are failing or low performing, this is a problem. However, due to some reason, these underperforming students still are able to comply and finish needed requirements. Therefore, there is a need to find out the coping strategies of these at-risk students.

Teachers encounter different types of students on a daily basis. There are those who excel academically. Also, there are those who are regarded as at-risks. McCann and Austin (cited in Norris, 2014) defined at-risks students as:

1. Students who, for whatever reason, are at-risk of not achieving the goals of education, of meeting local and state standards for high school graduation, and not acquiring the knowledge, skills and dispositions to become productive members of the society;
2. Students whose behaviors interfere with their education, as well as students who require disciplinary actions, and;
3. Students whose family or community background may place them at-risk, for example, children born to teenage mother. Even when these characteristics have been identified, it is often difficult to describe the typical at-risk students.

Pallas (1989) supported the idea of McCann and Austin that the definition of at-risk students has changed over the years. Meanwhile, Presseisen (1992) derived its meaning from a medical model. Presseisen suggested that the term at-risk implies that there is some of sort of threatening condition that surrounds certain students.

For the purpose of this study, the definition of at-risk is derived from Legters, McDill, and McPartland (1993) which states that at-risk students are either male or female who have the probability of failing academically, or dropping out of school. Some of the factors that contribute to a student being at-risk are: high crime neighborhoods, minority status, living below poverty level, negative contact with police agencies, single parent home, poor performance at school, mother's education, unemployment in the

family, little to no support systems, limited proficiency in English, neglect, abandonment, physical or emotional abuse.

No matter how challenging the situation is in finishing senior high school, these students do employ coping strategies to be able to handle academic pressures. Park and Adler (2003) defined coping as the way of dealing with stress to master conditions of harm, threat, or challenge when a routine or automatic response is not readily available. Meanwhile, Lazarus (1997) emphasized coping as mastering conditions that tax or exceed adaptive resources. Lazarus added that students are constantly self-regulating their emotional reactions in many ways. In this way, he stressed the important role of cognitive process in coping activities, as well as, the importance of coping in determining intensity and quality of emotional reactions. This means that when a man is faced with an unpleasant situation or threatening condition, he performs cognitive process to manipulate own behavior. Arnold (1997) refers to this as coping strategy. Arnold articulated coping strategy as a technique employed in a specific context. Also, Beutler, Moos, and Lane (2003) defined coping strategy as cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage psychological or physiological stress.

There have been numerous researches on coping strategies. In fact, Skinner and Zimmer-Gembeck (2007) have collected more than 400 different category label concerning coping strategies. Some of these classifications include appraisal focused coping strategies which describe a person when he modifies the way he thinks. Another is problem-focused strategies which point to the efforts of an individual to do something to ease the unpleasant situation. In these coping strategies, individuals tend to look closely on the pressing situation, its causes, its whereabouts, and even learning new skills in order to manage the situation and go on with their lives. These problem-focused strategies are supported by the studies of Jarray (2002) and Taylor (1998). Next classification is the emotion focused strategies which involve managing hostile feelings or emotions. In these strategies, individuals are more likely to regulate emotional consequences of unpleasant situations by meditating or using systematic relaxation procedures. These emotion-focused strategies are supported by the studies of MacArthur (1998).

Based on the above premises, Lazarus and Folkman (1984) identified four elements present in these coping strategies. These are: (1) It is an ongoing process of evaluation of the success of strategies; (2) Strategies are learned as situations are encountered; (3) It requires continuous effort; and (4) managing stressors is more efficacious than mastering stress.

While these classifications of coping strategies may have shared commonalities in terms of elements present, several studies identified slight differences because of individual factors like age, gender, economic status, location, and even cultural

backgrounds (Rick, 1997). In this principle, Erikson's developmental stages of life come into play. Erikson (1953) identified eight developmental stages: (1) trust vs. mistrust; (2) autonomy vs. shame; (3) initiative vs. guilt; (4) industry vs. inferiority; (5) identity vs. role confusion; (6) intimacy vs. isolation; (7) generativity vs. self-absorption; and (8) integrity vs. despair.

Although Erikson's theory of development points to the process of reflection as a valuable part of developmental stages, this study concerns more on the first six (6) stages of development and their impact on the seventh stage through coping skills. Coping skills manifest when an individual is faced with an unpleasant situation. So when a student evaluates his completion of secondary education as a challenge, he tends to feel either more motivated or threatened. In this condition, several researches conducted have identified factors explaining the use of different strategies such as coping strategies and gender (Cicognani, 2011); coping strategies and age (Compas et al, 2001); coping strategies and personality (Connor-Smith & Flach, 2007); coping strategies and academic environment (Santrock, 2003); coping strategies and social demands (Frydenberg et al., 2009); coping strategies and parents' expectancy (Cunningham et al., 2002); coping strategies and problem situations (Strong, De Vault, & Cohen, 2008); and coping strategies and individual differences (Carver & Connor-Smith, 2010).

Locally, there are few researches conducted related to coping strategies. These include Coping Strategies of the Bachelor of Science in Information Technology Students in a Philippine University (Mazo, 2015) which determined the stress, causes of stress, and coping strategies of Bachelor of Information Technology students in Leyte Normal University, Tacloban City; coping strategies and academic stressors of college freshmen (Grande (2006); and stress profile and coping strategies of dentistry students (Salvacion, 2004).

Overall, the literature and studies capture the evidences that the coping strategies for academic pressures exist. This is supported by both foreign and local researches conducted. Unfortunately, there have been little to no literature on coping strategies of at-risk students in finishing senior high school in the Philippine setting since senior high school was just recently implemented. Also, the inclusion of the *Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino* Program (4P's) beneficiaries of the government gave rise to unexplored yet researchable topic. Therefore, this qualitative study seeks to describe and capture the coping strategies of at risk students from the lens of selected 4P's beneficiaries. This paper intends to build a growing body of research on coping strategies of underperforming senior high school students in finishing secondary education. At a practical level, this research aims to provide valuable source of information to assist at-risk students which are likely to be encountered in the future.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to contribute to the literature on the coping strategies of at-risk students who are finishing senior high school. Senior high school or the two-year additional schooling for the secondary basic education is in its full implementation this year. Thus, the Philippines will have its first batch of K-12 graduates in March to April 2018. Specifically, this current study used the beneficiaries of the *Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino* Program (4P's) as participants. Because of this recent change in the education landscape and the provisions and conditions of the 4P's, this current study examined the coping strategies of students who were 4P's recipients and at the same time were identified as at-risks. Additionally, the findings shed light on the specific types of coping strategies employed by the students. These identified coping strategies may also be used by other at-risk students who are not 4P's beneficiaries. Also, the findings equip the teachers in identifying other coping strategies which may result in higher academic achievement.

Finally, the purpose of this qualitative study discovered the coping strategies of at-risk 4P's beneficiaries at San Jose National High School. Specifically, the current study answered the following research questions:

1. What coping strategies do at-risk 4P's beneficiaries employ?
2. What coping strategies are seen by the peers?
3. What coping strategies are seen by the family?

Method

Research Design

This qualitative research aims to discover the coping strategies of senior high school 4P's beneficiaries based on respondents' views, peer's views, family's views, and subject teachers' views. Case study is employed. Case study is a research design which is used in deep exploration of complex issues and its role in research suits issues on education, sociology and community-based problems (Zainal, as cited in Mendoza & Melegrito, 2017). The results of qualitative research are important in that they provide an insight into the topic which is social and behavioral in nature. In the present study, semi-structured interview was used to reveal complex personal and emotional problems, allows obtaining the requested information in full and depth, provides an opportunity to give instant feedbacks to responses, has a flexibility to adapt to various and suddenly changeable conditions, offers freedom to change the number and order of questions, and so on (Karasar, 2007).

Participants and Research Site

The participants consist of 10 students attending the senior high school secondary education at San Jose National High School, San Jose, Caba, La Union. Of the 5 respondents, 60% (3 students) are male, 40% (2 students) are female. In qualitative research, sample selection is clearly associated with the characteristic of the research problem and the sources possessed by the researcher. Criterion sampling is employed in the present study. Criterion sampling involves selecting cases that meet some predetermined criterion of importance (Patton, as cited in Cohen, 2006). Meanwhile, access to the research site was obtained from the school principal through letter of permission. Part of the permission letter was granting the researcher an authority to engage the 4P's beneficiaries and their subject teachers as respondents of the study. Also included in the letter was permitting the researcher to conduct the research study at San Jose National High School as research site.

Instrumentation and Data Collection

In the process of constructing a data gathering tool, literature was reviewed first to provide the researcher a theoretical and conceptual framework. Then, the researcher created a semi-structured interview form (see *Appendix A-C*) for data collection. Semi-structured interview is a high quality approach that makes use of the advantages of structured and unstructured interviews and eliminates their disadvantages. In this kind of interview, the interviewer asks the question he has prepared about the topic participants systematically, but gives them enough freedom to enter into the details of the issue (Turnuklu, 2000). The researcher presented the prepared interview forms to the experts to evaluate its suitability and adequacy for the topic. Based on the feedbacks from the expert, the researcher reviewed and re-arranged the interview questions. After that, the researcher piloted the interview questions to two students. To check whether the interview questions were clear and understandable, the researcher asked an expert to evaluate the answers of the two students. After that, an attempt was made to determine the validity of the question items. As is known, internal validity in qualitative research is about whether or not the researcher can really measure the data he intends to measure through the tool or method he is using (Yildirim & Simsek, 2005). After the validity of the question items was ensured, the interview forms were administered to the respondents within the scope of the main study. The same interview forms were used to gather data from family, peers, and subject teachers. But before collecting data directly from the concerned individuals, permission from the school principal was sought to ensure that protocol was observed. On the part of the respondents', their peers', family's, and subject teachers' willingness to submit to the study, an informed consent form was given to them stipulating that the information to be gathered would be treated with high confidentiality and such information and evidences would be destroyed upon completion of the research study. Also stated, in case of paper presentations, all names used in the study and other

information which identified the respondents would be concealed. Included in the consent form was their awareness that during the interview, the whole process would be recorded.

Analysis of Data

To ensure research validity, the validity of data collection, and the meaningfulness and coherence of the data, the researcher sought expert options.

In the data analysis, the researcher followed four-way steps: data preparation, data exploration, reduction of data, and interpretation. In the data preparation, the recorded interviews were imported, entered, and transcribed using HyperTRANSCRIBE (www.researchware.com), a transcription software. In the data exploration, the transcribed interviews were examined by the researcher for the information of theme and category lists. This was done in the form of memoing and coding. Coding is the process of labeling and segmenting text to form descriptions and themes in the data (Creswell, 2007). Then, collected codes were summarized. In the reduction of data, the researcher subjected the collected codes into categorical aggregation. Categorical aggregation (cool analysis) aims to identify issue-relevant meanings through collecting of instances from the data (Stake, as cited in Creswell, 2007). Inductive and deductive methods were employed to ensure appropriate placements of codes (Hardy, Gammage, & Hall, as cited in de Guzman, 2015). In the interpretation stage, the researcher examines the aggregated codes for important patterns or themes (thematization). In thematization (warm analysis), the identified patterns or themes were subjected to description. Description refers to forming an in-depth understanding of the reality of the subjects. All analyses were subjected to member checking procedures to ensure the truthfulness and trustworthiness of the data (de Guzman, 2015).

Results

This research study was conducted at a rural high school in the mountainous area of Caba, La Union. The student participants at this school site met specific criteria for selection that was indicated by the researcher.

Meanwhile, through the responses from the participants, three interesting themes emerged relative to the coping strategies employed by at-risk students when faced with academic pressures. Hence, the researcher adapted the *Wheel of Coping Strategies* (see Fig. 1), a conceptual model which characterizes the behavioral pattern of at-risk 4P's beneficiaries in terms of employing coping strategies in order to complete basic secondary education. This includes: (1) appraisal-focused strategies; (2) problem-focused strategies; and (3) emotion-focused strategies.

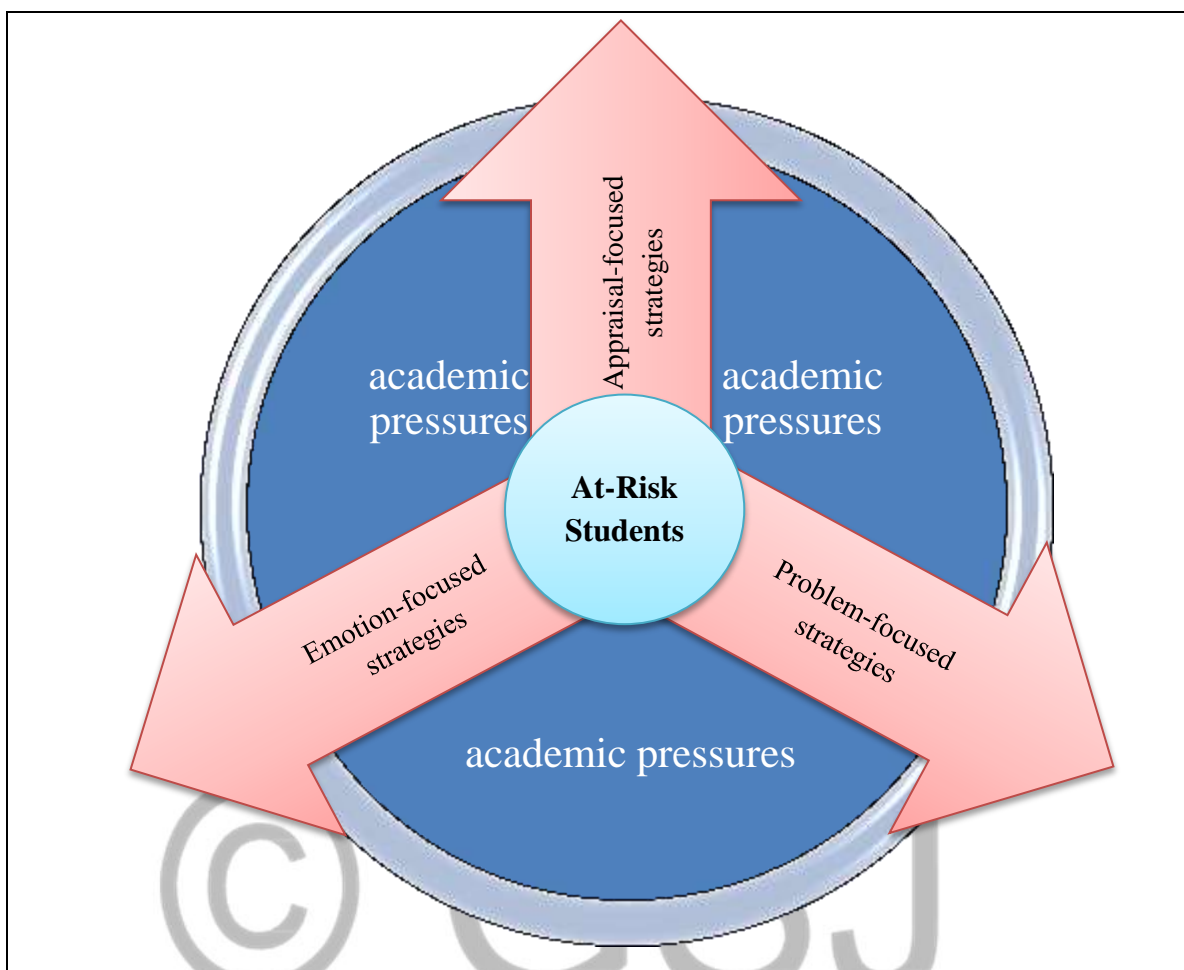


Fig. 1. Adapted Wheel of Coping Strategies

As shown, at-risk students employ different coping strategies in order to overcome academic pressures, thus enabling themselves to finish senior high school. It should be noted, however; that these coping strategies are carried out to ensure meaningful outcomes which would result to positive outlook in life. Additionally, instances when at-risk students encounter extreme difficulty, experience of lack of confidence, and family problems may trigger negative impacts resulting to students' inability to employ coping strategies.

Problem-Focused Strategies

Meichenbaum (1985) relates key elements to problem-focused coping. The first looks at changing the situation it is also known as direct action or problem confrontation. Through this method, the individual looks at and assesses the stressor. After defining the situation possible alternative solutions are explored. Then there is evaluation of the alternative solutions. Last is the implementation of the best solution. Each of these points

relate to the original four elements. These strategies focus on the cognitive domain. In this category of strategies, students are expected to manifest characteristics like 'knowing what has to be done, so doubling the efforts and trying harder to make things work', 'analyzing the problem bit by bit', 'seeking reassurance and emotional support from family members', and 'coming up with different solutions to the problem' (Ramya & Parthasarathy, 2009). This is expressed in the following verbalizations from the students:

Ang mga ginagawa ko para matapos ang mga mahihirap na requirements sa iba't ibang subjects ko ay pinag-aaralan ko at iniintindi ko ito ng maayos para matapos ko ng maaga.

Ang ginagawa ko o paano ko ginagawa ang mga requirements ko ay iniintindi ko muna at kung hindi ko kayang sagutan eh nagpapaturo ako sa mga kaibigan ko kung papaano gagawin ito.

Ang kadalasang ginagawa ko para matapos ang aking mga requirements ay nagpapatulong o di-kaya ay nagco-cope up sa aking mga gawain. At kung paano koi to tinatapos ay ginagawa ko ito hanggang gabi at hindi matututlog hanggang hinti ito natatapos.

Friends are regarded by many as much more than brothers and sisters. In this notion, friends are more likely to be more open in what is going on in one's life. With this, close friends tend to know more about each one. They observe many things which sometimes are unconsciously done. Most often, they know all about one's experiences especially so when they are together most of the time. Therefore, from the perspectives of the peers of at-risk students, these are what they shared regarding coping strategies of their at-risk friends:

Kung mayroong mga bagay na binigay ng guro ay ginagawa niya ito agad kung may bakanteng oras o kaya wala siyang ginagawa doon niya ito gagawin.

Minsan sinasabi niya na pagod na siyang mag-aral o di-kaya'y tinatamad na siyang mag-aral pero alam ko na ginagawa niya ang lahat upang makapagtapos siya.

Ang ginagawa ng aking kaibigan upang matapos ang kanyang mga requirements ay ginagawa niya ito agad, pinagkakaabalahan niya ito upang hindi siya mahuli na magpasa ng mga kanyang activities.

Ang kadalasang ginagawa ng aking kaibigan upang matapos o ma-comply ang kanyang requirements ay nagpapatulong siya sa aming mga kaibigan at tinatapos niya ito hanggang sa kaya niyang tapusin ito kahit na gabing-gabi na.

Home is where your heart is. That is a quote which explains that an individual is very comfortable when he is home. What makes it comfortable are what makes it a home – family. Mother and father have watched how their children grew. They could feel emotions even if they are not spoken. They could tell if their children are having hard time without their children telling them they are indeed having hard time. Parents are so engrossed with the activities of their children especially so in their schooling. In this notion, parents play a pivotal role in observing the experiences of their children. They could observe how their children work on school-related activities. As 4P's members, the parents shared their observations about their children as stated below:

Talagang hindi siya natutulog kapag hindi siya natatapos sa kanyang ginagawa.

Palaging abala sa mga requirements, araw-araw nagse-search sila. Halos gabi na kung matulog sila.

Kadalasan, hindi na siya lumalabas ng bahay. Nasa loob ng bahay na lang siya, nag-aaral o kaya ay gumagawa ng assignment o di-kaya'y gumagawa ng project at mga research niya.

Minsan ino-overtime niya ito hanggang sa matapos. Hindi niya ito tinitigilan.

Appraisal-Focused Strategies

In these form of strategies, an individual employing appraisal-focused strategies exhibit characteristics such as 'going over the problem again and again', 'trying to understand it', 'to make the situation light', and 'refuse to get too serious about it'. Also, students are likely to use appraisal-focused coping strategies such as, "analyzing the situation", "cognitively redefining", and "cognitively avoiding the situation". These coping strategies which students may use in may indicate that they are still confused and are not able to choose those coping strategies which are of positive approach to encounter any stress. So when an at-risk student employs appraisal-focused strategies, the student tends to concentrate more on the problem. The student is likely to look closely on the matter rather than seeking other people's help in order to solve existing academic pressure. This is expressed in the following verbalizations from the students:

Ipinagpapatuloy ko ang aking naumpisahan. Dahil dito nakasalalay ang aking kinabukasan.

Ang aking naiisip sa tuwing ako ay nahihirapan ay sinasabi ko sa aking sarili ay kaya ko ito. Kahit mahirap ay kakayanin ko.

As one of the first batch of senior high school, there are a lot of experiences that I have encountered. One is, on dealing with those subjects which are really different with the subjects that I have taken during my junior high school. It is

more difficult than before. Also, the requirements for the subjects are more difficult. But, those are good experiences for me. Especially, I have experienced first time in my life on studying like first time doing public speech act in front of many people.

Friends can observe their other friends more than how the teachers observe them. Friends can identify when you are more focused on something. They, too, can tell when you are having hard time. Also, they understand situations you are in. In the following verbalizations, peers of at-risk students shared their observations about their at-risk friends.

Sinasabi ko sa kaibigan ko na kailangan niyang matapos ang pag-aaral upang makapag-apon para sa kinabukasan. Mas mainam na may natapos o kaya ay ipagpatuloy pa ang pag-aaral hanggang sa kolehiyo. Dahil kung graduate ka sa kolehiyo ay mas maraming magandang trabaho at mas mataas na sweldo ang darating sa iyo.

Kung nakikitang kong nahihirapan siya ay sinasabi naman niya sa akin na 'if there's a will, there's a way'. Kaya pilit niyang tinatapos ang mga projects naming sa school. Sinasabi niya din minsan sa akin na 'kaya ko ito'!

Minsan naririnig ko sa kaibigan ko na kailangang niyang matapos ang mga requirements niya para makapagtapos siya kahit high school at makahanap ng trabaho para makatulong sa kanyang mga magulang.

For parents, they know when their children need help. They know when their children are focused on something. They could even feel when their children are in the verge of breaking down. This is expressed in the following verbalizations from the parents:

Huwag masyadong seryoso anak. Hindi bale, para sa'yo din naman ang mga ginagawa mo.

Sinasabi kko sa anak ko na ibibilhan ko siya ng bagay na gusto niya kapag mag-aaral siya ng mabuti para makatapos sa pag-aaral. Minsan nakikita ko siya na nakatutok siya sa paggawa ng mga requirements.

Emotion-Focused Strategies

It is used when an individual feels that a situation must be endured. The characteristics of emotion-focused coping involve attempts to control and possibly change an event. There are also tendencies to avoid or minimize the event. The goal of the individual is to reduce emotional distress. Folkman and Lazarus (1980) state that emotion-focused coping involves thoughts, actions, and strategies that are aimed at

reducing emotional pain associated with a traumatic or threatening event. This is expressed in the following verbalizations from the students:

Bilang estudyante, kailangang mag-aral ng mabuti, hindi lumiliban sa klase, at may maganda, mataas at walang bagsak na marka upang siguruhing ang mga benefits o perang binibigay ng gobyerno ay mapunta sa pag-aaral naming.

Bilang isang estudyante ng senior high school, natuto akong tumayo sa aking sariling mga paa upang mag-aral ng mabuti at kung wala kang sikap hindi mo makakamit lahat ng iyong gusting maasam sa buhay.

Bilang isang magtatapos sa senior high school, kinakailangan mag-aral ako ng mabuti. Huwag palaging lumiban sa klase para makapagtapos ako at maging maganda ang aking buhay sa hinaharap.

Sometimes, friends are the go-to persons of most students. They tell what they feel. They expressed their emotions to them. They pour out everything to them. These are what the at-risk students' peers shared:

Huwag kang sumuko. Makakaya mo lahat ng 'yan dahil walang ibinibigay na pagsubok ang Panginoon na hindi natin kayang lagpasan. Tiwala lang.

Minsan sinasabi niya na pagod na siyang mag-aral o di-kaya'y tinatamad na siyang mag-aral pero alam ko na ginagawa niya ang lahat upang makapagtapos siya.

Nalalagpasan ng aking kaibigan ang mga hamon sa senior high school dahil nagsisikap siya na mag-aral at ginagawa niya ang lahat ng mga kanyang requirements dahil gusto niyang makatapos sa pag-aaral at upang makamit niya ang kanyang pangarap sa buhay.

Family is where the students first felt love, care, concern, even anger, fear, and sadness. Parents observed most of their children's emotional experiences. One of which is their children's hardships in schooling. This is expressed in the following verbalizations from the parents of at-risk students:

Kahit minsang kulang ang baon, pumapasok pa rin siya para makatapos ng kanyang pag-aaral.

Sinasabi ko sa aking anak na sa tuwing nahihirapan na siya sap ag-aaral ay magtiis lamang siya at huwag sumuko dahil lahat ng mg bagay na ginagawa niya ngayon ay parte lamang ng lahat ng mga bagay na nais niyang makamit gaya na lamang ng kanyang mga panagarap. Sinasabi ko rin sa kanya na gawin niya

lahat ng kanyang makakaya para matapos ito. Dahil kung magagawa niya ito ng mabuti, mayroon naman itong maidudulot na maganda.

Ang pinapayo ko sa aking anak sa tuwing nahihirapan ay kakayanin mo yan. Sinasabi ko na ang lahat bagay ay may hangganan. Hindi lahat ay puro pasakit at paghihirap. Hindi tayo binibigyan ng Diyos ng mga bagay o problema na hindi natin makakaya. At sinasabi ko rin sa kanya na lahat ng bagay ay may katumbas. Ang paghihirap ay may katumbas na ginhawa.

Discussion

This qualitative case study brought forth the Wheel of Coping Strategies, which describes the experiences of at-risk students in employing different coping strategies in finishing senior high school. Although the findings may not necessarily reflect coping strategies representative of a more population of at-risk students, the description of the Wheel of Coping Strategies provides a valuable starting point for understanding the coping strategies that reflects the academic achievement of at-risk students in the senior high school in the Philippine context. This understanding in turn could serve as a framework in designing more relevant and meaningful program in catering the needs of the learners with a view of finishing senior high school education and becoming effective and productive citizen in the future.

From the comparison of the analyzed data and literature, it was shown that most of the coping strategies uncovered in this study were closely related to the ones in Beutler, Moos, and Lane (2003), Skinner and Zimmer-Gembeck (2007), Lazarus and Folkman (1984), Jarray (2002), and Taylor (1998).

One factor that has contributed to the students' use of coping strategies is the motivation to be successful in the future. All the student participants see the importance of finishing senior high school as a platform for greener pasture. Also, all the student participants believe that in order to be successful, they needed to behave in class, attend classes regularly, and do and finish school work on time. All of them exhibited positive attitude toward finishing senior high school by taking active part in all their subjects. Also, all student participants shared that focus is an important key in overcoming odds.

Another evident factor surfaced is that all student participants had specific goals and aspirations. They appeared to have concrete plans after finishing senior high school which makes them overcome any academic pressures. Coping strategies seem to have played a role in achieving their specific goals and aspirations. All the student participants realized that in order to achieve their goals, they must finish senior high school. In order to finish senior high school, they must acquire passing grades in all subjects. In order to

get passing grades in all subjects, they must comply with all the requirements. In short, they have to do well in school. Meanwhile, their parents showed interest in helping their children in any way possible for their children to be able to finish senior high school. Though some parents admitted difficulty in their financial matters, they confessed that still they would do everything they can in order to be able to send their children in school. Also, their peers demonstrate a helping hand in time of need. They extend their help to their friend in need. This notion supports the dictum, 'a friend in need is a friend, indeed'.

Clearly, findings generated in the study affirm the vital role of coping strategies in finishing senior high school. Hence, the school particularly the senior high school department is challenged to initiate a program by which at-risk students are monitored, and assessed. At the same time, the senior high school department is challenged to design a development program that put premium to assessing at-risk students, giving academic guidance, and providing necessary aid in order to complete secondary basic education. Finally, the varying level of coping strategies employed by the students may have an adverse effect to other students. Hence, individual treatment of at-risk students should be encouraged. Ultimately, education should be geared toward supporting all learners in the fulfillment of their dreams, goals, aspirations, and objectives in life.

Conclusion

Many researchers have focused on the coping strategies of college students on academic pressures in school. Locally speaking, however, there is not much researches conducted in the senior high school because of the recency of the K-12 curriculum. Thus, the results of this study clearly contribute to literature on coping strategies of at-risk students in finishing senior high school.

This qualitative study successfully surfaced the coping strategies of at-risk 4P's beneficiaries at San Jose National High School as observed and evidenced by the responses coming from their peers, family, and subject teachers. These coping strategies of the at-risk students are categorized into three namely: appraisal-focused strategies, problem-focused strategies, and emotion-focused strategies. The study also revealed that peers and parents observed the same coping strategies employed by the at-risk 4P's beneficiaries.

Findings of this study affirm one cultural value of Filipinos. That is resiliency. Filipinos have been regarded as resilient as bamboos. Resiliency is deemed by Filipinos as positive value. Such resiliency is characterized by positive attitudes towards unpleasant situations, portraying positive responses in order to overcome hardships and adversities resulting to meaningful lives and become successful in the end. In addition, the students' subject teachers, peers, and family brought into surface the same categories of coping strategies. The observations of the people surrounding these at-risk students

brought forth a consistent pattern of exhibited behavior in dealing with academic pressures at school. Also, these people have positively contributed to the academic achievement of the at-risk 4P's beneficiaries. Indeed, it portrayed another Filipino value. That is solicitude or having concern for others.

Finally, this research advances the literature by illuminating areas of coping strategies previously not cited as well as agreeing with previous investigations. However, this study has certain limitations. Given the participants and research site, the findings may not reflect the experiences of all at-risk students locally and internationally. Nevertheless, this study surfaced trends and patterns worthy for further investigations.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of this research study, the following humble recommendations are framed:

1. At-risk students are identified as failing students. At San Jose National High School, there are identified at-risk students. These at-risk students, though exhibited different coping strategies, still need intervention program to be provided by the school in order for them to be able to finish senior high school. Hence, San Jose National High School is humbly encouraged to devise a program which would specifically cater to the needs of at-risk students.
2. Friends are the go-to persons of many. Thus, peers are continually encouraged to show and provide support to their friends who need help especially those who are failing. Support may be in terms of friendly talks, academic advice, and even assistance in the compliance of subject requirements.
3. Meanwhile, parents are humbly encouraged to support their children in their academic requirements especially so when their children manifest hardships in doing school-related documents. Also, parents are encouraged to show moral support by giving advice and encouragement to pursue schooling and finish senior high school.
4. The findings of this study may not generalize and reflect the experiences of all at-risk students locally and internationally. In this manner, further research is encouraged to be conducted by research enthusiasts specifically in the field of student development.

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Appendix A

Interview Guide for Students

1. [*Ano ang pagkakaintindi o pagkakaalam mo sa 4P's program ng pamahalaan?*]
What do you know about the 4P's program of the government?
2. [*Bilang isang miyembro ng programa, anu-ano ang mga bagay na inaasahan sa iyo sa iyong pag-aaral?Bakit?*]
As one of the 4P's beneficiaries, what are expected of you in terms of schooling?
3. [*Bilang kauna-unahang grupo ng mga senior high school, anu-ano na naging karanasan mo sa pag-aaral?*]
As one of the first batch of senior high school students, what have been your experiences in studying?
4. [*Ano kadalasan ang mga ginagawa mo para matapos ang mga requirements mo? Paano mo tinatapos ang mga requirements mo?*]
What do you usually do to finish your subject requirements? or
How do you accomplishment subject requirements?
5. [*Anu-ano ang mga planong ginagawa mo para matapos ang senior high school lalong-lalo na sa mga subjects na bago lamang?*]
How do you plan to cope with your new subjects which are entirely different with the subjects you have taken in the junior high school?

Appendix B

Interview Guide for Peers

1. [*Anu-ano ang mga naging karanasan mo kay _____ bilang kagrupa?*]
What are your experiences working together with _____ (4P's beneficiaries)?
2. [*Kung mayroong mga bagay na binigay ng guro, paano ito ginagawa ng iyong kaibigan para matapos ang nasabing requirements?*]
If there are difficult tasks given to you, how does your friend, _____, try to complete and finish your subject requirements?
3. [*Kung ang iyong kaibigan ay hindi naka comply sa mga requirements sa mga subjects ninyo, anu-ano ang kadalasang ginagawa niya?*]
If your friend, _____, is unable to comply with your subject requirements, what does he/she usually do?
4. [*Paano nalalampasan ng iyong kaibigan ang mga hamon sa kanyang pagtatapos sa senior high school?*]
How does your friend cope with his/her studies?

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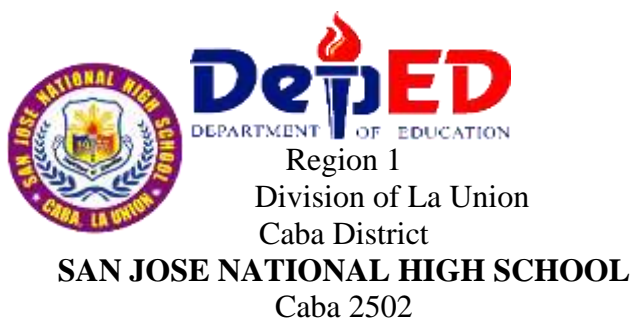
Appendix C

Interview Guide for Parents

1. [*Kumusta po ang pag-aaral ng inyong anak ngayong siya ay nasa Senior High School na?*] How is your child doing in his schooling especially now that he/she is in the senior high school?
2. [*Anu-ano po ang mga naobserbahan o napapansin ninyo sa anaka ninyo kapag nandiyang sila sa bahay ninyo?*] What do you observe of him/her while he/she is at home?
3. [*Anu-ano po ang inyong mga karanasan sa inyong anak patungkol sa mga requirements ng paaralan?*] What are your experiences with your child in terms of subject requirements?
4. [*Kapag gumagawa ng mga proyekto ang inyong anak, paano niya poi to ginagawa at tinatapos?*] How does your child do his/her subject requirements?
5. [*Sa inyo pong mga karanasan o obserbasyon, anu-ano pong efforts ang ginagawa ng inyong anak para makatapos sa pag-aaral?*] In your experiences/observation, how does your child try to finish his senior high school studies?



Appendix D
Letter to the Principal



November 8, 2017

MRS. PRECILA M. CARREON

Principal,
San Jose National High School
Caba, La Union

Madam:

My name is Regie F. Navor. I am presently studying Doctor of Philosophy major in Language Education, minor in Educational Administration under the supervision of Don Mariano Marcos Memorial State University, South La Union Campus, Agoo, La Union.

I am currently undertaking research study as a requirement of the degree. In this connection, I would like to ask your permission from your good office to conduct a study in your school. This is to use San Jose National High School as the locale of my study.

Attached in this letter is the instrument which the researcher will be using in gathering data.

Rest assured that the findings of my study will be kept secret and confidential.

Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

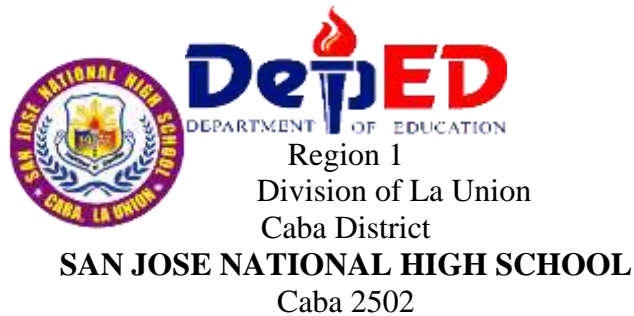
REGIE F. NAVOR
Grade 12 Teacher

Approved by:

MRS. PRECILA M. CARREON
SS Principal I

Appendix E

Letter to the Respondents (Students)



November 8, 2017

Dear Respondent,

My name is Regie F. Navor. I am presently studying Doctor of Philosophy major in Language Education, minor in Educational Administration under the supervision of Don Mariano Marcos Memorial State University, South La Union Campus, Agoo, La Union.

I am currently undertaking research study as a requirement of the degree. In this connection, I would like to ask your permission to become a participant of this study in your school.

Attached in this letter is the instrument which the researcher will be using in gathering data.

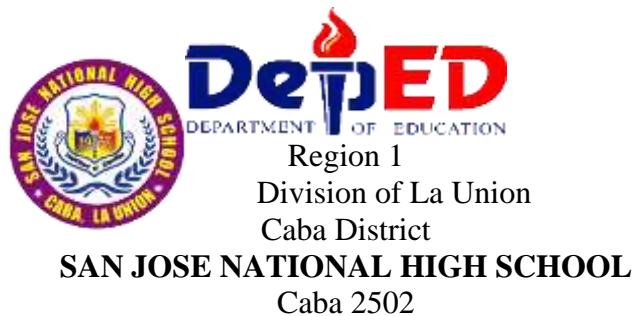
Rest assured that the findings of my study will be kept secret and confidential.

Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

REGIE F. NAVOR
Grade 12 Teacher

Appendix F
Letter to the Respondents (Peers)



November 8, 2017

Dear Respondent,

My name is Regie F. Navor. I am presently studying Doctor of Philosophy major in Language Education, minor in Educational Administration under the supervision of Don Mariano Marcos Memorial State University, South La Union Campus, Agoo, La Union.

I am currently undertaking research study as a requirement of the degree. In this connection, I would like to ask your permission to become a participant of this study in your school.

Attached in this letter is the instrument which the researcher will be using in gathering data.

Rest assured that the findings of my study will be kept secret and confidential.

Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

REGIE F. NAVOR
Grade 12 Teacher

Appendix G

Letter to the Parents

Dear Parent:

I am from San Jose National High School, San Jose, Caba, La Union, and I would like to include your child, along with other 4 of his classmates, in a research project on coping strategies. This study will identify the coping strategies of at-risk students who also 4P's beneficiaries.

If your child participates in this research project, I will interview him for several times if necessary. The schedule of the interview will be at his most convenient time at his most convenient place. The research will start during the second semester of school year 2017 – 2018 and it will continue until the first week of December 2018.

The data gathered during the interview process will be kept confidential and will be used to improve educational outcomes for other children in similar academic situations. Your child's participation in this research project is completely voluntary. In addition to your permission, your child will also be asked if he or she would like to take part in this research project. Only those who have parental consent and who want to participate will do so, and any child may stop taking part at any time. You are free to withdraw your permission for your child's participation at any time and for any reason without penalty. These decisions will have no effect on your future relationship with the school or your child's grades or status.

The information obtained during this research project will be kept strictly confidential and will not become a part of your child's school record. The data will be locked in a file cabinet in the researcher's home, and any identifying information will be coded to protect the participants. Any sharing or publications of the research results will not identify any of the participants by name.

Please note that if you provide permission for your child to participate in this study, it does not guarantee that he or she will be selected. Once all of the parent permission forms have been received, the researcher will randomly select 5 students to participate in this study.

The benefits are for the researcher to be able to identify the coping strategies of your child that may foster or create atmosphere of success in and out of the school. Snacks will be provided after interview session.

I will be working with DMMMSU-SLUC, Agoo, La Union under the direction of Dr. Emmanuel Songcuan. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in research involving human subjects, please feel free to contact the research at

09776584286. You are free to call this number if you identify yourself as a research participant.

Please keep this letter for your records.

Sincerely,

REGIE F. NAVOR

Researcher/Doctorate Student

099776584286

regienavor_21@yahoo.com

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