

NOTCHING THE TOP SPOT: STORIES OF GSC LET TOPNOTCHERS

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ABSTRACT The Licensure Examinations for Teachers (LET) in the Philippines is one of the measures of quality education among teacher education. This study explored the success stories of the three topnotchers of Guimaras State College during 2013 to 2015 LET. The purpose of this study was to discover the factors that influenced the success of GSC LET topnotchers through their stories, taking into account their socio-demographic profile, the support given by their families, the assistance of their teachers and friends, as well as their experiences and personal views in life. Additionally, the study intended to outline influences that have impacted the informants' education and delineate the identities they forge for themselves. As students, it revealed that GSC topnotchers were characterized as bookworms, silent type, persistent, happy-go-lucky, eager to learn new things, anxious, disciplined, and God-fearing. When preparing for the LET, they had a light experience like support given by their friends and professors and challenges like difficulties in managing their time, studying several subjects, financial constraints, and dealing with pressure. The factors that characterize their academic journey were family's financial condition, difficult experiences, unique personalities, and support from friends, parents, and teachers. These factors became their motivations and inspiration as they pursue their dream to become topnotchers. Further, they realized that in preparing for the LET, one should persevere, determine, and always ask for God's guidance.

Keywords: licensure, examination, topnotchers, GSC

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Licensure Examination for Teachers (LET) is a national examination regulated by the Professional Regulation Commission (PRC) and administered by the Board of Professional Teachers (BPT). As mandated by RA 7836 or known as Philippine Teachers Professionalization Act, this examination must be taken by every graduate of education courses to be able to have a license to teach in elementary and high school. Note to mention, that the performance in the licensure examination is one of the determining factors of the institution's quality of education being offered to its students. Further, Antiojo (2017) believes that LET intends to distinguish between those capable of entering the teaching profession in terms of skills and competencies measured by the examination from those who are not.

In the Philippines, all who seek to pursue teaching as a career and profession need to take the Licensure Examination for Teachers (LET) and formerly named as Philippine Board Examination for Teachers (PBET). This is a standard evaluation measure administered by the Professional Regulation Commission (PRC). PRC strongly believed that this examination would determine who among the graduates of teacher education courses are technically and academically fit to be considered 'professional teachers' (Diaz, 2013).

The LET was implemented in the Philippines by enacting Republic Act 7836, otherwise known as the "Philippine Teachers Professionalization Act of 1994. This aims to strengthen and improve not just the teachers but also the quality of education and the whole education system in general (Velasco, 2013).

This examination is given twice a year for graduates who will be teaching at the elementary or secondary levels. The examination for secondary levels consists of three (3) parts, namely: general education, professional education, and field of specialization, whereas LET for elementary level covers only the general education and professional education courses. The preparation of future teachers for both elementary and secondary education sectors is a very important function assigned to pre-service educators of Teacher Education Institutions (TEIs).

In addition, symbolic interaction theory is the construct of the "self." The self is the definition people create (through interacting with others) of who they are. It is thus also a social construction, the results of persons perceiving themselves and then developing a definition through the process of interaction (Luttrell, 2010 in de la Rama, 2014).

Guimaras State College envisions itself as the center of excellence in education and green technology generation. This vision motivates not only the people in the academe who are working hard to achieve this goal but also the students. Note to mention that the College of Teacher Education is persistent in exerting all efforts to produce topnotchers.

In 2013, the institution celebrated when Rhealyn F. Crispe got fifth place in the LET. This achievement followed when Raymund Nonato J. Alcubilla and Arlie May G. Espinosa were hailed as seventh and sixth placers respectively. In the succeeding years, the passing rates gradually decreased. Thus, the researchers were interested to study this case to determine the factors and experiences that contribute to topping the Licensure Examination for Teachers.

Objectives of the Study

This study explored the success stories of the three topnotchers of GSC during the 2013 and 2015 Licensure Examination for Teachers. Specifically, this study aimed to: (1) introduce the three LET topnotchers of GSC and delineate their characteristics; (2) discuss the experiences of the three topnotchers of GSC; (3) set out factors and how these characterized their academic journey to LET, and (4) present realizations they had as they journey in becoming topnotchers.

METHODOLOGY

This qualitative research which has taken the form of narrative inquiry, dealt primarily with the three topnotchers of GSC during the 2013 and 2015 Licensure Examination for Teachers. The purpose of this study was to discover the factors that influenced the success of GSC LET topnotchers through their stories, taking into account their socio-demographic profile, the support given by their families, the assistance of their teachers and friends, as well as their experiences and personal views in life. Additionally, the study intended to outline influences that have made an impact on the informants' education. Lastly, it is intended to delineate the identities they forge for themselves. This study involved the three (3) Licensure Examination for Teachers topnotchers: Rhealyn F. Crispe (5th Placer, 2013 LET), Raymund Nonato J. Alcubilla (7th Placer, 2015 LET), and Arlie May G. Espinosa (6th Placer, 2015 LET). The data gathered from the in-depth interview were used for the sole purpose of this research endeavor and will not be used for any other purposes. Objectivity on the part of the researcher was observed throughout this research study. The researcher initially met the informants and discussed the entire process of this research endeavor. Confidentiality of data and limitations set by the informants were agreed upon and taken into consideration. The instrument was formulated as soon as the chosen informants agreed to be a part of this research. When everything was set, the researcher scheduled a one-on-one interview with each informant to gather the desired data. The duration of this process was based on the spontaneity and responsiveness of the informants in disclosing themselves and the alertness of the researcher to derive supplementary questions to enrich the interview. As a guide to the kind of questions to be asked by the researcher regarding the areas of concern during the in-depth interview, a researcher-made interview schedule was organized. This instrument was validated by experts in the qualitative research design to assure that nothing had been omitted or altered during the conduct of the interview, a digital recorder was used upon the approval of the informants. This was also the source of the transcriptions of the narratives, which were essential for the reliability and credibility of the results of this study. The data gathered were not subjected to any computer processing. Analysis was not attempted to reduce the data to the numerical symbol but to portray what was recorded, studied, and analyzed. The recorded in-depth interview of the informants was transcribed in the actual language used. As soon as all the recorded data were transcribed, a line-by-line analysis of informants' interviews was made. To make sense of these, codes were identified to form the needed themes. However, throughout the analysis, the formed themes were reformed; some were rejected and reassessed until a set of themes emerged that could best describe the concepts that were needed for the study. *Figure 1* shows the process of data analysis.

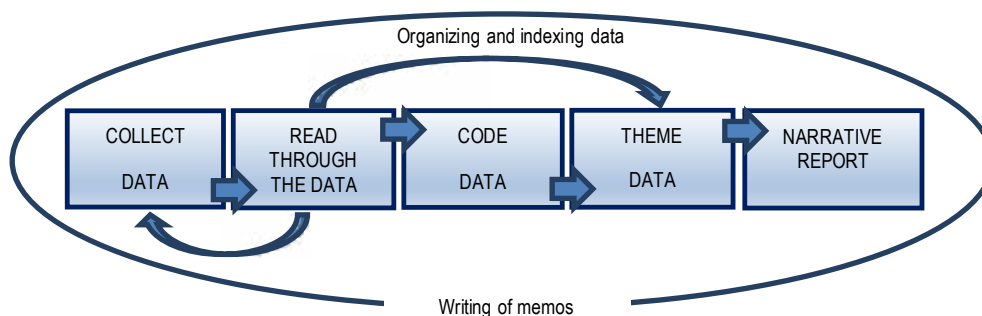


Figure 1. The procedure is undertaken in the data analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Who They Think They Are. This section introduces the three GSC LET topnotchers and delineates their characteristics as students and as teachers. As students, the GSC topnotchers revealed their characteristics, and these were validated by their classmates and professors. They defined themselves as bookworms, silent-type, and persistent persons. On the other hand, being happy-go-lucky, eager to learn new things, anxious, disciplined, and God-fearing are the other characteristics they think they possess.

The general idea of this unit is supported by the narrations:

"I always spend time reading books aside from the books being used in our class. Literature, history, and general reference are my favorite books to read." (RNA).

"I always spend time reading books in the library, especially general reference." (RFC)

"It does not mean that "more talk makes you brilliant and less talk no utok" I am a student who observed first before I talk." (RNA).

"I am a silent type of person. I am more on listening and observing rather than talking." (RFC)

"If they can do it, so do I. What our mind can conceive, our body can achieve. For me, goals can be achieved if you focus and be persistent even how hard it is." (RNA)

"As a student, I was disciplined, persevered and of course God-fearing." (AME)

Yearning for knowledge through reading is in consonance with the attributes set by the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers (PPST), particularly in regards to having the ability to recognize the importance of content knowledge and interconnectedness within and across curriculum areas (D.O. No. 42, 2017).

Table 1. Characteristics of GSC LET Topnotchers

Raymund Nonato J. Alcubilla	Realyn F. Crispe	Realyn F. Crispe
Booklover/reader, Adventurous, Silent-Type, Confident and Persistent, and Happy-go-lucky	Silent-Type, Bookworm, Persistent, and Anxious	Disciplined, Persevered and God-Fearing

A Journey Worth Taking. This section outlines the experiences of the GSC topnotchers as education students and when they were preparing for the LET. These experiences are delineated as light and difficult moments. The informants' academic experiences were known to be one of the influences which equipped and motivated them to notch the top spot in the Licensure Examination for Teachers.

As students, the informants considered having opportunities to lead and gain more friends, accomplish the task, and attend the classes regularly and pass the examinations were considered as their light experiences. Likewise, the informants also experienced difficult moments like financial problems and time management.

When preparing for the LET, the informants had light experiences like support given by their friends and professors. While on this journey, they experienced challenges like difficulties in managing their time, studying several subjects, financial constraints, and dealing with pressure.

The narrations below will supplement the aforementioned ideas.

"Working and doing things/tasks as an ROTC Officer where I was trained to handle tasks and even more pressure." (RNA)

"Making and delivering my reports and doing assignments." (RFC)

"Delivering my lessons during practice teaching since I have my sister who is also a teacher who mentors me."(RFC)

"Those times when I had to attend my classes every day and pass my examinations are considered as my light moments." (AME)

"Gaining new friends. Being resourceful by borrowing reviewer to some LET passers." (RNA) and supportive instructors who gave us enjoyable review sessions make us lessen the pressure of LET." (RNA)

"I have to go back to our school library even though I am already an alumna just to read more books and do research works." (RFC)

Table 2. Academic Experiences of GS LET Topnotchers

Light Experiences	Difficult Experiences
<p><i>As Student</i></p> <p>Having opportunities to lead and gain more friends, accomplish the task, and attending classes regularly, and pass the examinations.</p> <p><i>When Preparing for LET</i></p> <p>Support given by their friends and professors.</p>	<p>Having financial problems and time management.</p> <p>Difficulties in managing their time, studying several subjects, financial constraints, and dealing with pressure.</p>

Agents of Academic Excellence. This section enumerates the factors that characterize the academic journey of the GSC topnotchers and how these factors influence their journey to LET. The informants identified that their family's financial condition, difficult experiences, unique personalities, and support from friends, parents, and teachers characterized their academic journey. These served as their motivations as they pursue their dream to become topnotchers.

The following narrations present us with insights of each informant about the above idea.

"I came from a family raised by a single mother. This motivated me even though how hard it is to finish my studies." (RNA)

"I don't want to see my parents doing hard labor just to buy our needs. I also don't want to be a helper for the rest of my life." (RFC)

"That is the reason why I try my best during the LET because I promise to myself that someday I will be a product that this college can be proud of." (RNA)

"My parents had inculcated in me the importance of education." (RFC)

"My personality is one of the factors that contributed to my journey as a student and as I prepare for the LET." (AME)

"It reached the point that my adviser, guidance and principal went to my house to convince me to go ba
"When the opportunity came to me, I took the ALS exam without any hesitation and luckily I passed. They said the opportunity came only once so you must grab it."(RNA)

"The time I stopped schooling, I envy those who can go to college. I said to myself "If I've given a chance to enroll in college, I will do my best to graduate with honors." I do believe that intrinsic motivation is stronger than any other form of motivation. These factors motivated me to perform better in school as in preparing for LET."(RFC)

"Experiences also helped me because from those happy and hard experiences I was able to gain realizations and these realizations made me a better student and a better LET passer." (AME)

bakcck to school, but I dropped out. That is the reason why I try my best during the LET." (RNA)

"I want my teachers to be proud of me someday. My favorite teachers served as my inspiration." (RFC)

"Aside from my personality, my parents, friends, my Alma matter (GSC), and of course, my teachers had influenced me a lot. They never failed to remind me of the importance of education, and their expectations pushed me to do my best and reached my goal." (AME)

The summary of the codes is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Factors that Characterize the Academic Journey of the GSC Topnotchers

Family's financial condition, difficult experiences, unique personalities, and support from friends, parents, and teachers

Life's Academic Dogma. This unit acquaints us with the realizations the informants had as they journey in becoming LET topnotchers. These realizations were the products of their experiences as students and when they are preparing for the LET.

As a student, the informants realized that a student should be ready and work hard in every challenge, opportunity, and education.

The narrations below will supplement the aforementioned ideas.

"Learning cannot only be found inside the classroom. Always do your best in every opportunity which came into your life. Lastly, be ready to face the challenges and never give up." (RNA)

"Education is expensive. Your lack of preparation will surely constitute an emergency on your part. Nothing in this world worth comes easy, so you have to work hard to get what you want." (RFC)

"When I was a student, it was my realization already that in order for me to finish my studies, I must bear all the unexpected circumstances that may come my way and that there is no easy way to get what you want. You really must work hard for it." (AME)

Preparing for the LET. The GSC topnotchers realized that in preparing for the LET, one should be persevere, determine, and always ask for God's guidance.

The narrations below supplement the aforementioned ideas:

"Do your best and ask for God's guidance. Triumph goes to the one who is persevered and determined." (RNA)

"Graduating with honors is not an assurance for passing the LET. If you want to pass, work for it. Your stored knowledge is very important in preparation for LET." (RFC)

"As when I prepare for the LET, I had put in my mind that in order for me to pass the LET, I must take each review session seriously, find time to review my notes, and always ask for the Lord's guidance," (AME).

Table 4 summarizes the codes.

This was similar to the finding of Albite (2019) that faith contributed to the success of the LET passers. Also, Abulon (2014) revealed that being spiritual is one of the inherent characteristics that could facilitate effective teaching in basic education.

Table 4. Informants' Realizations in Becoming LET Topnotchers

Realization in becoming LET Topnotchers

As student

A student should be ready and work hard in every challenge and opportunity and so as in education.

When Preparing for LET

One should be persevered, determined, and always ask for God's guidance.

CONCLUSIONS

The informants were known for their distinct characteristics that set them apart from the rest of the students. It could be inferred that these distinct traits were the products of developing themselves through their academic experiences. They may have realized that these characteristics are the main ingredients in their academic journey of what they want. The GSC LET topnotchers experienced light and difficult moments which makes them now one of the province's notable teachers. It could be delineated that along the way, they have acquired significant lessons that are essential in the practice of their craft. Quitting never entered their minds, despite all the adversities they have encountered, for they strongly believe that these experiences are very significant in the field of teaching. Therefore, regardless of what their experiences are, they embraced and learned from them. The informants' strong passion for teaching and their motivations could have been a great factor. With the various experiences, the informants could identify life goals and persist in their respective academic journeys. Their unique personalities and the support from their friends, parents, and teachers further motivated them and successfully made them topnotchers. The opportunities they had may have facilitated the informants to strive for academic excellence. These influences could be part and parcel of their lives, being topnotchers and good teachers. GSC LET topnotchers exhibited strong and unique identities that were honed by the varied factors that contributed to their academic journey. These ranged from their academic experiences, characteristics, personal views, and influences of the people around them. It could be inferred that these factors have directed the informants in passing the LET and eventually notch the top spot.

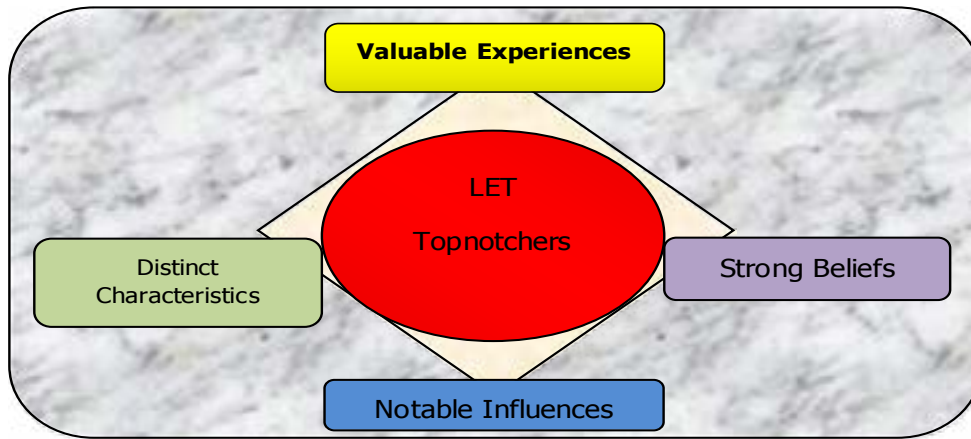


Fig. 2. Conclusions based on the findings

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