

The Experiences of VSO Bahaginan Filipino International Volunteers on the Health and Education Programs in Foreign Countries: A Case Study

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Abstract:

This study looked into the experiences of VSO Bahaginan Filipino international volunteers who worked on the health and education programs of VSO in foreign developing countries. Through their experiences, it shed light in knowing the perspective of a Filipino volunteer in an international context. The study used qualitative research approach to learning the experiences of Filipino international volunteers and give depth to the data collected. The researchers used case study in describing and analyzing volunteers' experiences. Moreover, descriptive method was used to give qualitative descriptions of the phenomena. The results include various reasons, enabling factors, activities, challenges, threats encountered; lessons learned and achievements from the experience of international volunteering. The results showed significant information about the topic on being an international volunteer.

Key words: Volunteering, volunteers' experiences, Filipino international volunteers, VSO

Introduction

Volunteers, according to the Philippine Red Cross (n.d.), are individuals from all walks of life who have committed themselves to the service of humanity. There are tales of hundreds of thousands of ordinary people who dedicated their time and resources to help the poorest of the poor. Professionally trained and truly compassionate, these men and women are ready to lend a helping hand to those in need - whoever, whenever and wherever they may be (redcross.org.ph).

Volunteerism does not stop there. One form of this is international volunteering. Viray's (2011) definition of international volunteering means living and working in another country for others without expecting any rewards or compensation. The idea is acceptable to people who have the desire to do something for others outside their comfort zone. International volunteering provides an individual a chance to be involved in a global activity. It offers a promise of improving social reputation or a possible enhancement of future earning capability because of the international work experience and the opportunity to travel overseas at a low cost.

VSO is one organization that advocates international volunteerism. VSO (formerly Voluntary Service Overseas) is an international development charity that works through volunteers living and working as equals alongside local partners. VSO Bahaginan, its chapter in the Philippines, was registered as an independent Filipino foundation in 2004. Together with other international federation members of VSO, they contribute to achieving shared development goals by recruiting volunteers and raising funds to support VSO's global work (www.vsobahaginan.org). Since the year 2007 to 2012, VSO Bahaginan have recruited, matched, trained and sent nearly 500 Filipinos to overseas assignments. These are individuals with diverse backgrounds and from all walks of life, to volunteer where they are most needed, averaging 100 departures per year (www.vsobahaginan.org).

This study focuses on the experiences of Filipino international volunteers, how they make meaning of their experiences and what do the volunteering process offers to the lives of volunteers through VSO Bahaginan. International volunteering is a developing subject of interest, especially that there are little studies on the topic, particularly on the experience of being a volunteer. Moreover, it is important to know that apart from overseas Filipino workers (OFWs), there are also overseas Filipino volunteers (OFVs) or Filipino international volunteers. This study looks at how these individuals give deeper meaning and make sense of their experiences as volunteers through VSO Bahaginan. According to Viray (2011), despite the recognition that there is a significant increase on the development perspective as a result of volunteering, "volunteers claimed that the change on their beliefs and values are the ones that was influenced the most to a great extent."

Principally, this study focuses on the experiences of Filipino international volunteers placed on health and education programs in selected foreign countries where VSO work. According to a review of Memorandum of Agreement between the Philippine National Volunteering Services Coordinating Agency (PNVSCA), VSO Bahaginan and VSO International from 2007-2012, education volunteers comprised of 23%, while health comprised 16% of the professional expertise out of 499.

It aims to identify the profiles of Filipino international volunteers' in the field of health and education. The study also explores the reasons for why they have decided to volunteer for health and education programs, and their volunteering achievements. It also focuses on their usual daily activities, the challenges they have faced, threats encountered and lessons learned while volunteering in those foreign countries. Volunteering experiences shared in this study will be informative, beneficial, and helpful advice for prospective volunteers and international organizations aside from VSO Bahaginan.

The scope of this study is on the Filipino volunteers placed in foreign countries where VSO work. Specifically, these are volunteers who did their volunteer work for health and education program made possible by VSO Bahaginan. This study looks at their volunteering activities before, during and after their work in their specific placements. It include first time volunteers and repeat volunteers (RVs) who did more volunteer work. These are volunteers who got recruited by VSO Bahaginan from the year 2007 up to the year 2012.

As communicators, this study together with VSO Bahaginan is essential in crafting communication messages on what our countrymen/countrywomen have contributed in improving the harsh situation in other countries. Specifically, it talks more about the inter-racial/cultural interaction between the locals of foreign countries and the Filipino volunteers assigned. This also informs the said non-profit organization on the current niche of Filipino international volunteers. It serves as inputs in enhancing their volunteer recruitment strategy. The study also illustrates and proves the value of volunteering locally and internationally. Moreover, it can help government agencies particularly the Philippine National Volunteer Services Coordinating Agency (PNVSCA) in having additional data about Filipino volunteers abroad.

Methods

Through the main problem and objectives of the study, the researchers used qualitative research approach in gathering data and developed a deep understanding of the study. The study utilized case study as the tradition of inquiry in describing and analyzing the meaning of several individuals of their lived experience. In qualitative research, the focuses of the study are the shared experience among various individuals experiencing shared phenomena and its attempt to locate the essence of the experience.

In selecting the participants, the researchers used purposive sampling and snowball sampling. The researchers selected eight (8) volunteers, four from health and four from education, based on the criteria made that will suffice the information needed for the study. These volunteers selected are referrals from returned volunteers (RVs) given by VSO Bahaginan. The following are the criteria for choosing the participants:

- A Filipino citizen recruited by VSO Bahaginan
- Sent in a foreign developing country where VSO work
- Immersed in a country for more than six months
- Placement is for health or education program of VSO

The study used in-depth interview as a method of gathering the data needed among the participants. The researchers conducted meet-ups with some participants in various locations that agreed. Each interview was fully recorded and transcribed. The researchers also utilized Skype video call sessions to some participants located outside Metro Manila and located in foreign countries because of the nature of their work. Also, due to location from the kind of work and poor internet connection of two participants, the researchers sent questions and follow-ups thru e-mail which then answered by them. The researchers used an interview guide questionnaire as an instrument derived from the objectives of the study.

Results and discussion

Reasons and Enabling Factors of VSO Bahaginan Filipino International Volunteers

People volunteer to learn and develop new skills. The reasons have an impact on how volunteers will perform their tasks, duties, or works. According to Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Theory, for someone to gain knowledge based on experience, the learner must be eager to be actively involved in the experience. The reasons given by the volunteers gave them a purpose or aim at which they are willing to provide their time and effort. In return, as they get near to experiencing volunteering, they can and are able to learn because of their willingness.

Table (1) reasons of Filipino international volunteers

Reason	Statement
Less personal commitment	"...I have no (major) commitment in life" "...I can leave anytime I want..."
Stress on previous employment	"I became stressed, I needed a break, I need to change my environment." "I felt burn out in teaching." "I was bored with my job as a laboratory manager."
Professional	"you will use your profession in an optimum level, higher level. because in VSO, you will work depending on your profession." "I want to practice my profession."
Cultural	"traveling to experience how other people live differently from ours." ".when you get to experience these things, your intellect gets wider, curiosity."
Altruistic	"I wanted to share my skills in order to contribute to change." "I want to answer my desire in a way that it is beneficial not only to myself, but to other people."

According to Dalisay (2004), volunteering involves a choice or a commitment. The decision to volunteer should be a personal choice or commitment by the volunteer. This means the service should be freely given and not forced.

For some, less personal commitment in life made them decide to volunteer so they can spend their time meaningfully. With international volunteering, a person can travel any time without having to mind much burden when they leave their country. People find volunteering an opportunity to make themselves committed on to something that will subsequently benefit them. According to United Nations Volunteer (2011), the ethos of volunteerism is infused with values including solidarity, reciprocity, mutual trust, belonging and empowerment, all of which contribute significantly to quality of life.

Stress on previous employment is the reason for some Filipino international volunteers. Through international volunteering, an individual can either take their break or transformation the environment of their current job. It is wanting to experience other involvement apart from the usual involvement some find boring and exhausting. Subsequently, professional is also a reason

stressed by an international volunteer. Through VSO, an international volunteer’s placement depends on his/her background educational experience or expertise through previous employment. For a Filipino international volunteer, practicing the work they know about and love doing makes hem fulfilled and satisfied.

The fourth reason found was the interest in other culture. Since international volunteering offers an individual to be placed in a foreign setting, people find it interesting. An individual can get to know and the differences of other people’s culture through firsthand experience and comparison. Thoroughly, an individual's intellect and curiosity gets wider resulting to open mindedness in encountering culture and dealing with other people.

Lastly, Filipino international volunteer’s desire to embark on such commitment drew from their altruism or selflessness. They want to be able to contribute to change and see people’s lives develop through sharing their skills. According to Carpenter and Myers’ (2007) study, altruism “plays a crucial role in the real-life decision to volunteer. (p.20)” Subsequently, according to Ridley and Barr (2006), those who aspire to give back to their communities and to help organizations they care about, accomplish their tasks. More on the report by United Nations Volunteer (2011), volunteerism is about people’s need to contribute in their societies and to sense they matter to others.

Suh (2009) noted on her study that volunteers' interests stem from their desire to experience first-hand what they had heard and learned about international volunteerism from their external surroundings. This is comparable to the reasons of this study’s participants as to what reasons they had in volunteering overseas. It is important to know the explanations of these Filipino volunteers as to what motivates them in volunteering shown from their reasons.

The last part discusses the factors enabled the volunteers in doing their work to the foreign community they were placed.

Table (2) enabling factors of Filipino international volunteers

Enabling factors	Statements
situation of people in developing countries	. .If you see the situation of people in Africa...” “...if we are deprived, same goes to them, the only lacking from them is very good education.” “As I start reading on the situation of these young children.”
broad experience	“...I accepted it because of my broad experiences...” “My educational qualifications “...they know how to appreciate”
appreciativeness of the people	“...they know how to appreciate”
Volunteers sensational benefit of serving people	“Serving people makes me happy.” “my resilience too, being a Filipino.
Flexibility in volunteering	“adaptable/flexibility”

Enabling factors in volunteering

Enabling factors, according the study, are the aspects that facilitate the volunteers in doing their volunteering service or work internationally. Volunteers who participated in this study informed

different factors enabling on each of their placement.

The situation of people in developing countries is a factor for Filipino international volunteers in their placement. Starting from reading about the children in countries experiencing harsh conditions and even he saw videos and documentaries about volunteering and the tough conditions in developing countries apart from the Philippines empower their work as a volunteer. Through these simple assessments, it can make an individual do their share and facilitate the task of being a volunteer for development. Viray's (2011) study affirms that the change on a volunteer's beliefs and values include "the development of a better understanding of the situation of local people in the country of placement." It facilitates them on "what else" they can do and extend more of their effort and work apart from their specific job descriptions.

For an international volunteer, having been able to obtain broad experience is an enabling factor. An individual's full range of experience can help in gaining the confidence of facing people from other countries and the ordeals of being an international volunteer. Additionally, a volunteer can surely do his work with ease as he or she has the qualifications and work experience.

Seeing the appreciativeness or gratefulness of the people in developing countries drives a Filipino international volunteer in doing volunteer works. The feeling of being grateful helped empower an individual's work in the community he was placed.

Another factor is the influence of VSO Bahaginan staff and volunteers. Support for a Filipino international volunteer is a significant factor for him or her in doing his placement as it gives motivations, tips, and advice.

The sensational benefit of serving people enables a volunteer. As an enabling factor, seeing the developments for a volunteer makes him happy and full of gratitude. Through this, finding what else he can do poses a challenge to add more work.

Lastly, through flexibility, work and activities assigned to a Filipino international volunteer can be attained and can capacitate what else he or she can do. This is rooted from the traits of being a Filipino. Being adaptable to any situations and being resilient to any circumstances empowers the goals of an international volunteer.

Dalisay (2004) affirmed "the helping behavior of a Filipino volunteer may also be derived from the fundamentality of the relationship of kaluluwa(essence/soul) and ginhawa (inner-comfort, well-being) to the inner being or inner self of the volunteer."

Activities of VSO Bahaginan Filipino International Volunteers

Gained experiences of Filipino international volunteers have been met by making move and doing their part. According to Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning theory, concrete experiences are "tangible, felt qualities of the world, relying on our senses and immersing ourselves in concrete reality." These experiences of volunteers on the health and education program are presented according to their work or activities and contributions to their placement area or community.

Activities

Health

Statements

"I gave practical exams..."

Education

“...workshops on origin of HIV, and basic methods of Sexually Transmitted Infections...”
“...motivated them through individual work...”

“...trained their doctors, nurses.”
“...to teach in a college.”
“...came up with a poster for maternal and child.”
“...network with other NGO, with other international volunteer.”

“...teach aside from our profession we have to share them.”
“...meet with the executives. I’m part of the head, sort of management.”
“...we also have community service.”
“...creating an internet network for Ethiopian Educational Institution. So I lead, created internet network in my placement area.”
“...I went to universities giving technical advice on how to improve their internet services and fully utilize technology.”
“...Sustainability planning.”
“...first there is a reflective teaching...”

“...I designed trainings, I conduct observations and coaching with mostly teachers who are teaching in the classroom.”
“...taught science and gave tutorials in Math and reinforced the use of the English Language, adding vocabularies.. .spelling tests every day.”
“...Work with the college maths teacher to improve delivery of quality teaching in maths.”

Volunteer Work/Activities

For VSO’s health program, four Filipino international volunteers interviewed by the researchers were placed in developing countries in different parts of the world. They did an extensive range of health works and various activities in contributing the development of the community. According to Laleman, et. al’s (2006) study on international health volunteers in sub-Saharan Africa, between 50 to 60% of volunteers carry out medical work; the others are engaged in a diversity of other tasks, ranging from management or training to policy work. Others came up with posters to educate particular health problems that need to be addressed.

As an international health volunteer, activities involved were the introduction of Sexually Transmitted Infection-HIV, workshops with demonstrations and practicum to the medical workers, a short lecture on AFB Microscopy. Being a professional, Filipino international volunteers were able to train doctors and discussed some medical cases. Apart from those, they travel to follow some patients to give some supplies and to make sure those patients were doing the right exercise. Aside from sharing skills, Filipinos were able to gain good impression on the country of their placement making them send other local staffs for training.

Apart from doing health related work, one international volunteer had an experience in teaching in a university during summertime. One health volunteer became the head of the department where they made plans for work and met with executives.

For the education program, four Filipino international volunteers who worked in developing countries through VSO were interviewed by the researchers. Lough, et. al's (2009) study on international volunteering on activities in education included tutoring or teaching children, youth, or adults; assisting community members obtain to read, speak, write, or comprehend the English language; and upholding cross-cultural exchange. Filipino international volunteers, on the other hand, did a wide range of works and various activities in contributing the development of education in the community of their placement.

One volunteer was concerned in creating internet network for the Ethiopian Educational Institution. He went to universities to give technical advice on how to improve and fully utilize their Internet services. They provided free wireless connection for people to be connected to the internet. Moreover, he taught people on computer literacy and did sustainability plans for his placement organization so the technological advances will still continue when his volunteering term ended.

Filipino international volunteers also design and give trainings to the teachers of these schools, conducts observations and coaching in teaching skills and organizations with the teachers. One of the successful trainings conducted is the "Child-Friendly" - this is a crucial training about how teachers and the head of the school will make the school itself child friendly to the pupils. Moreover, she had pedagogy in teaching the different teaching styles and conducted several trainings, one of which is the classroom management.

Another Filipino international volunteer was supposed to assist a team of teachers. However, when he got to the university, there was no team, there were no office, no equipment and he is the one who will conduct the trainings. What he did were trainings about being a reflective teacher on master's students and other professionals. Aside from the health or education related activities, Medina (2012) affirmed that "aside from the primary responsibilities assigned to them through their commitment to the organized volunteering program, (volunteers) find ways to respond to concrete and practical needs they encounter in the communities (p. 194)."

Contributions as a Volunteer

According to Biomed Central (2007), though international volunteers make small contributions, these have a significant impact on the development including capacity building and resource allocation. Through the activities done by Filipino international volunteers, their contributions were highlighted by the change and development they were able to implement.

One volunteer made him a benchmark in the health situation and the hospital laboratory he worked in because of the visible changes before he left the country. Medical practitioners gained knowledge and skills from him in dealing with different diseases and infections. He was able to help in the advancement of health situation in the hospital by teaching personnel in the detection of diseases and infections. Through him, the hospital was able to have its regular medical technologist and blood bank regulator to ease their work. Hotchkiss' (2009) study indicates that

the use of volunteers bids significant budget savings to hospitals and enhances patient gratification scores.

Another expressed that the change is evident because of the improvements in health situation, even their education and livelihood through VSO's volunteers. She left footsteps by being able to leave a means of education to the people of their health. Also, locals from the foreign country he worked in learned how to think more critically and the way how they address people appropriately. Also, he was able to help the hospital in having wider road for a better access to persons with disabilities.

On the other hand, one Filipino international volunteer for education contributions include the leading and creation of internet network in his placement area. Apart from the technological advancement, through his contributions, he was able to open the awareness of people to the "outside world" and they got connected to their loved ones abroad.

They have innovated strategies on how to improve the educational system of the schools. Aside from that, she was able to contribute in putting up the health and hygienic needs of the children in the school where she served.

While, another volunteer, also saw improvements on his area of placement by fulfilling his objectives and being able to train university personnel on different educational strategies and have shared his skills and knowledge even if it's not the particular task given to him by VSO.

Another thinks that VSO's education program they have contributed a lot in improving the education through sharing the volunteers' expertise in methodology and subject contents, adult literacy and other relevant aspects of education.

In Lough's (2009) study, international volunteers perceived they were highly effective in encouraging cross-cultural exchange and tutoring or teaching children, youth, and adults. Overall, these activities and experiences of Filipino international volunteers showed the "what" and "how" they've work for development through volunteering.

Challenges of VSO Bahaginan Filipino International Volunteers

While Filipino international volunteers engage in their placement's work, challenges arise. These include various personal and professional challenges as they stay in a foreign country for several months. From these, it showed how they overcome those for achieving their goals and mission. According to Ridley and Barr (2006), despite facing many challenges, volunteers are driven to accomplish both personal and organizational goals while building effective leadership teams and strengthening their respective organizations. Filipino international volunteers have faced challenges from various timeframe of their volunteering work. These are before, during and after their placement.

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Themes	Statement(s)
Financial Challenges	<p>“The thought that I will be jobless and unemployed, because even if I work overseas I don’t have big income.” It is very impractical to open a project without a budget.” “The volunteer allowance is way too low for city living standards.”</p> <p>“..if it’s not free, they will back out.”</p> <p>“..when you are going to eat, there are no resources.” “Lack of resources.”</p> <p>“For me professionally, how will I finish the training all by myself?”</p>
Expectations on their placement	<p>“Our trainer told us to expect the unexpected.”</p>
Language Barrier	<p>“The challenge is that there is language barrier.”</p>
Homesickness	<p>“The challenge there is homesickness.”</p>
Trust Issues	<p>“How will I get their support. their cooperation, how will I motivate”</p> <p>“My coworkers would always say to me “We already know that!”.</p>
Professional difficulties	<p>“How am I going to simplify my profession so that they can easily understand?”</p> <p>“Technical capabilities of the technical staff that I will teach.”</p> <p>“Giving the best of myself especially when delivering seminars”</p>
Patience	<p>“My patience, I was challenged with my patience.”</p>
Gender Inequality	<p>“Being a female professional makes me a threat in the workplace.”</p>
Jobless	<p>“And professionally, it's so hard to get a work. People sometimes think that we are over qualified ...</p>
Re-integration on the mainstream	<p>“One of the challenges that you face when you go back to the Philippines is the re-integration with the mainstream you become backward so you don’t know if you can look for a job.”</p>

Before their departure, the participants recognized some challenges they faced before they went to their corresponding placement. The participants indicated that financial stability is the biggest factor that they gave up as soon as they were accepted as an overseas volunteer.

Another stated challenge from the participants is the expectations on their placement. As an international volunteer, one should not expect much on the community they will be placed in. Expect the unexpected. Adjustment is first step to survive in foreign countries. According to Ayling (2012), “initially I was really nervous. I didn't know what to expect. I was out of my comfort zone. But that is what this program is all about - being away from home, throwing yourself into a new culture and living in a host home.” Filipino international volunteers are

trained to be conscious on their environment.” To remain a volunteer and live out of one’s comfort zone outside one’s country is a challenge in itself (Viray, 2012).

During their placement, the participants specified many challenges they encountered. They pointed out language barrier as the most common challenge they encountered during their placement. Being away in their home, the participants’ are battling homesickness. The participants also stated that locals’ have trust issues on them because they are foreigners in their country. They have to get along first with them in order to get their trust and get their cooperation. According to UNV (2011) report, volunteerism is a powerful means of engaging people in tackling development challenges, and it can transform the pace and nature of development. Volunteerism benefits both society at large and the individual volunteer by strengthening trust, solidarity and reciprocity among citizens, and by purposefully creating opportunities for participation. And testing of the participant’s patience is parallel being a volunteer. Volunteers also indicated that they faced technical difficulties during their volunteer work. Another stated challenge by the participants is the lack of program fund by the organization. There are instances that some program don’t have allotted budget in the first place. According to Hager & Brudney (2004), other common challenges pertain to organizational capacity to accommodate volunteers is the lack of funds to support volunteer administration. Another pointed issue by the participants is the low allowance they get which is not matched with the living standard on their placement area. The participants also addressed the lack of resources as one of the main challenges the volunteers faced. Being placed in a developing country with different culture and beliefs the participants also stated gender inequality as one of the challenges they encountered. According to Ridley & Barr (2006), volunteers are diverse people in terms of age, occupation and volunteer activity, but they share a desire to give back to their communities and to help organizations they care about to achieve their missions. Despite facing many challenges, board volunteers are driven to accomplish both personal and organizational goals, while building effective leadership teams and strengthening their respective organizations. After their placement, the participants addressed common challenges they faced when they go back to their country. The participants also indicated that re-integration on the mainstream after their placement was also encountered. They specified being jobless as mutual problem they come across to. Being a volunteer sets a benchmark on their professional outlook. The participants said that they are being classified as over qualified applicants that lead them on having a problem finding a job. According to VSO Bahaginan, returned volunteers are accepted to come back to service to accept the offer and ‘give it a go’ of becoming a volunteer again.

All of these challenges were successfully overcome by the participants. It does not affect the participant’s performance in their volunteer work and does not have an impact on their personal lives. Volunteers in their respective services would always have its benefits and challenges as their volunteering takes in action. Perhaps the first and biggest benefit people get from volunteering is the satisfaction of incorporating service into their lives and making a difference in their community and country. The intangible benefits alone—such as pride, satisfaction, and accomplishment—are worthwhile reasons to serve. In addition, when we share our time and talents we solve problems, strengthen communities, improve lives, connect to others and able to transform our own lives (www.nationalservice.gov).

Threats Encountered by VSO Bahaginan Filipino International Volunteers

Engaging into volunteering doesn't always guarantee people to enjoy all the experiences on other countries. It may possibly make them feel lucky they were able to travel outside the country for free but sooner or later, threats will always arise. Threats had been part of volunteers' life. Threat is the possibility something bad or harmful could happen. It normally arises especially when one is engaged into something not ordinary. The life of a Filipino international volunteer is always at risk. They don't know what threat they will face in their day to day lives but despite that, they always come up on how to survive. They can conquer whatever situation it is.

Table (5) threats encountered by Filipino international volunteers

Threats	Statement(s)
Sexual Discrimination	<p>"There's a case there wherein they burn the house of one person due to his countless relationship with other men. In Africa, gays with relationship with other men are not accepted. There's really discrimination."</p> <p>"All of my male co-workers don't believe in my competence just because I'm not a male."</p>
Security	<p>"Security in times of political turmoil in the country or the presence of militants. VSO was always monitoring these threats and my stay in that country was cut short by one year because of this."</p> <p>"Bomb threats are everywhere."</p> <p>"Local's notion about volunteers is that they can get money from us."</p> <p>"..prone to pickpockets, to robbery especially inside a taxi, prone to be harassed while walking."</p> <p>"locals block public transports so that they can ask money from you."</p> <p>"Threat is when you're assigned to an isolated place; you have to manage your life alone."</p>
Health	<p>"Hospitals are very dirty. HIV and AIDS are very rampant. "</p> <p>"Water has amoeba... I was dehydrated and tired." "There are a lot of mosquitoes..."</p> <p>"In Cambodia, threat there is Malaria."</p> <p>"My breast got hurt; it bothers me a lot."</p>

Considering the volunteer's encountered threat, it illustrates that it can still be categorized into themes. These threats encountered were sexuality, security, and health threats.

The participant stressed that being in an African country is considered a threat. The African community does not accept gays and bisexuals. According to the participant; Africans burned the house of one foreigner who used to bring different men on his house. Due to that incident he became careful in his actions. He even locks up his things carefully to avoid

discrimination from the Africans. According to the International Gay and Lesbian Association (2008), homosexuality was outlawed in 38 African countries. On the other hand, homosexuality is punishable by death in Mauritania, Sudan, and northern Nigeria.

Another threat to sexuality received by the participant is discrimination due to her gender. According to Chikumbutso (2013) gender is an issue for both men and women. Moreover, the principal secretary in the Ministry of Gender in Malawi said that when women are sidelined in decision-making process it means that almost half of the population is not fully participating in developmental activities. That is why one informant found it hard to prove her competency and ability to his co-worker who are all male during her first few months working at a laboratory.

Threat to most of the international volunteers is security. Although volunteers have gains and triumphs in volunteerism, difficulties and sacrifices always arise (Dalisay, 2004). Volunteers are prone to pickpockets, to robbery, to different kinds of diseases epidemics, to be harassed while walking or wandering around and prone to be fooled.

Countless stealing and filching is something unavoidable in various countries. Volunteers, who are foreigner to different countries, are prone to it and are a threat to their daily lives. Their security is always at risk especially those that were assigned in a war zone country like Pakistan. A participant encountered security threat because of the presence of militants wherein bomb threats were everywhere. Although the security was unstable, VSO monitors their safety but because of the war, her term was shortened by one year.

Local people find volunteers as a source of money so they are mostly the target of thieves. Participants used to explain that they were just volunteers, nothing less nothing more whenever locals asks money to him.

The mode of transportation is also a threat to the participants. A participant said that sometimes she does not have much confidence to cycle alone as she considers cycling as her mode of transportation.

Health threats, too arises as what participants experienced. Diseases and infections are another threat to volunteers especially to those who worked in a hospital. Malaria, yellow fever, and other mosquito related diseases are rampant in many countries and is a threat to everyone's health. A participant also added that working in a dirty hospital and dirty environment is also a threat to health especially that most of the hospitals are disgusting.

Meanwhile, one experienced being scared to death due to the extreme pain of her breast. Assuming it might be cancer, the participant then prayed hard for her condition as the day goes by. Fortunately, it was not cancer and is the aftermath of her daily cycling. This is an experience for MJ she was not able to tell VSO Bahaginan. Though it did not affect her work as a volunteer, and her condition is better, it is still important to know the day to day conditions of a volunteer.

Water infection too is another threat to volunteer's health especially in isolated area. A participant, assigned at Ethiopia experienced this wherein he experienced diarrhea due to amoeba. Although dehydrated, he walked alone at the heat of the desert just to go to a clinic. According to him, being in an isolated area means one must take care of himself.

Lessons Learned by VSO Bahaginan Filipino International Volunteers

The importance of volunteerism is shown on the experiences of volunteers and how they acquired the values and learning from volunteering (Milanovic, 2012). The foreign environment of their placement helped them in knowing what they can derive from themselves that they haven't discovered prior to their trips.

Table (6) lessons learned by Filipino international volunteers

Lessons Learned	Statement(s)
Pride for the country and of being a Filipino	"...I really appreciate being a Filipino. I'm very thankful being a Filipino" "...that there are countries poorer than us." "... knowledge-wise, education-wise we are more fortunate because they are asking help from us"
Poverty is lack of education	"...poverty, when you volunteer is lack of education"
Collaboration and Unity	"...building capacity...building capacity... how to collaborate with other organizations." "if the community is your friend , it will be the one to secure you" "...it is also in the part of the volunteers, you also gain" "you have to be very good in establishing good working relationship to everyone"
Understanding the people and their culture	"because volunteering is not just giving what you want its understanding the people you work with" "I have learned from how to understand culture and their way of life..." "Better understanding of people and how to make them rally behind your goals"
Patience	"...you are going to be really, really patient..." "If you learn how to wait, you'll learn how to be patient," "It taught me to become more patient" "A lot of things may happen if there is no patience" "I learned to become more patient and be considerate of other people"
Adaptability and Flexibility	"...and you have to adapt to their culture, their

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	beliefs” “it taught me to become more adaptable and more flexible when you serve” “I learned to adapt their attitude, and it is not good.” “I have learned a great deal on how to adjust to difficult life situations”
Open-mindedness and Lowering of Expectations	“you have to be open-minded and you have to be, ah, like your expectations must be a little lower”
Appreciation of the profession	“...you will see what else you can do aside from your profession. “ “...I can do somewhat near impossible” “I learned to appreciate my profession”
Bringing Change	“... understand and accept things I cannot change and realized that change is so hard to impose” “for myself, international volunteering should be confined, so you can really create an impact” “Yes, it has changed my perspectives in life”

First, they have learned that the Philippines is not the poorest country. The volunteers realized that many countries in Africa are more indigent than the Philippines. They stated that as a Filipino, they are still lucky because other countries still need help in education and health from people who belong to a third world country.

The volunteers truly appreciate being a Filipino when they realized that there’s a lot more on the poverty that is happening in other countries than in the Philippines. It is indeed true that appreciation of the country and of being a Filipino is one of the main lessons being learned by a Filipino volunteer. (Viray, 2012, p. 60)

Added to that matter of poverty, UNV (2011) noted that “poor health and lack of education are core dimensions of poverty” (p. 42). As one participant uttered, poverty is more on the lack of education of a country than the lack of money.

The volunteers also learned about “Capacity building” where as a volunteer you should also learn to collaborate with other organizations for better result. While one of the participants stated that volunteering is mutualism whereas volunteers are also gaining a lot from the people they are serving with. Added to that, asking and listening to what the community wants to accomplish, soliciting ideas how to implement things, and helping how their ideas could be materialized were also important things learned by the volunteers.

Another lesson learned by the volunteers is “unity with fellow Filipinos and the community is one form of security and protection”. According to the participants, it is very

important to build good working relationships with the people you are working with. They believe that if the community is your friend it will be the one to secure you. Having threats to their security and facing difficult situations helped them realize the importance of unity in a certain placement.

In relation to that, according to the 2000 National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating (NSGVP), more than three-quarters (79%) of volunteers said that their volunteering activities helped them with their interpersonal skills, such as understanding people better, motivating others, and dealing with difficult situations. It is indeed seen on how the volunteers were able to learn good things from the challenges they are facing in their placement. Furthermore, the way of dealing with other people is also a good thing taught by the volunteers. Having said that, one of the participants uttered that listening is a good way of dealing well with people.

For most of the volunteers, patience is a virtue indeed. One of them stated that she developed patience and understood the importance of it in all things, especially in volunteering. While other volunteers learned to become more patient and be considerate of other people. For one of the volunteers, patience with perseverance is important that if a person knows how to wait he will learn how to be patient as well. Same as what the participants said that if you are a volunteer, you should not rush things. As we observed, volunteering is giving valuable lessons in the basics of working for change, particularly with “respect to its nature, process, and pace.” (Dalisay, 2004, p.89)

Being flexible and adaptable to the culture are also important lessons that the volunteers have cultured. Volunteers became adaptable and flexible in a different kind of situation and activity. They understood the culture of a different country and the importance of being adaptable to it. They have learned to work in a different culture and to learn a lot about the people and their social, political, and cultural aspects. It is indeed true that there were volunteers who claimed that the changes on their beliefs and values are the ones that were influenced to a very considerable extent level. (Viray, 2012, p. 60).

Volunteers also learned to understand that a volunteer must be flexible; open-minded and has to lower expectations especially to the placement where he or she is assigned to. As Medina's study indicates that aside from training as preparation, introductory sessions on work and conflict management, expectation-setting meetings, and additional skills training is vital to make the adjustment process to the ‘different way of living’ less difficult (Medina, 2012).

Appreciation of the profession also impacted the volunteers by heart. The volunteers learned to love their profession even more because they see that being a volunteer is a serious job. One of them joyfully exclaimed that she is happy to see that there are activities and kind of work that she never thought she can do in her real profession. Moreover, for another one, he realized that it is indeed possible actually to do the challenge of the placement even when you are alone.

The participants learned the importance of being thrifty and to present themselves well groomed in front of other people to get more respect from the community. Same as what one of the volunteers said that they were just being paid with very minimal allowance so being thrifty is a must. Also, he learned that volunteering is creating a change not only in that given country,

but also in the origin of the volunteer.

One of the volunteers understood that as a volunteer you should have a clear and appropriate reason of why you are going to volunteer not just as someone who would like to tour in different countries or “Voluntourism” as he called it. Volunteering, then, must have a goal or a purpose, and this usually is done for the benefit of the other. (Omoto and Snyder, 1995)

Volunteers also learned a great deal on how to adjust to difficult life situations and learned to understand and accept the things that they cannot change in the community. The volunteers realized that change is hard to impose, and a volunteer must consider that every culture has a different approach. We can say that volunteering impacts on the society are Economic impacts, Social impacts and Impacts on volunteers (Wu, 2011).

Aside from the different virtues injected to the volunteers, these lessons learned helped them somehow to change their views and opinions in life. Added to that, volunteering afforded the participants modest as well as grand opportunities to know themselves better. (Dalisay, 2004, p.89)

The participants learned to understand the essence of volunteering and evaluating oneself as a volunteer. For one of the volunteers, the lessons she have learned changed her perspectives in life. Wisdom and understanding which she learned increased her patience, strengthened her other values and have made her a better person. While for another volunteer, the lessons that he learned taught him to become very kind and accommodating to all.

However, for one of the participant, these experiences have impacted him negatively. He was able to bring an overly confident attitude to his home where he said that he became dominant, and it came to a point that he could not distinguish his place in the home anymore.

Achievements of VSO Bahaginan Filipino Volunteers

Dalisay (2004) expressed that volunteers assessed their achievements along different dimensions. Some volunteers did so along the lines of self-development while others evaluated their success in the areas of service delivery, advocacy, and policy-setting. This is parallel to the findings of from the studies participants that Filipino international volunteers gained.

Theme	Statement
Implementation of Change	“I was able to change their system, organize their work...” “...changed their Standard Operating Procedures.” “...that there were changes on their attitude... on how to value people” “I was able to help build toilets in the school”
Improvement on the Community	“...to be able to introduce a workshop successfully.” “...introduced the quality control system to them” “...there are a lot of possibilities to improve themselves using technology” “I was able to improve two schools making those classrooms a child friendly”

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Accomplish the organization's objectives	<p>"I was used as an instrument achieve the goal for the placement and the partner organization and also to the beneficiaries"</p> <p>"I was able to fulfill... to finish"</p> <p>"...to be able to finish my placement."</p>
Helping people and sharing knowledge and skills	<p>"I think being able to share your skills and touching other people's lives is a great achievement in a lifetime"</p> <p>"you will feel fulfilled if you are able to work, at the same time you are able to share some things."</p>
Bridging the gap and collaborating with other organizations	<p>"Bridging the gap between training institutions, (schools and training facilities)"</p> <p>"...collaboration with the general medicine to the laboratory, dealing with clinicians..."</p>
Building camaraderie	<p>"I gained a lot of friends and I learned a lot of things"</p>
Winning the trust of the community	<p>"it's the matter of winning the trust of the community"</p>
Opportunity to travel	<p>"Actually I was able to travel"</p>

According to Clardy (as cited in Lysakowski2005), "a volunteer is someone who is committed to your mission. It is someone who has connections to people you cannot reach otherwise; someone who wants to give their time, talent and treasure to help you." Moreover, the meaning of volunteering itself serves as an achievement already when put into practice by the volunteers.

Implementation of Change was one of the achievements emphasized by the volunteers. One of the participants said that he was able to change the health system of the community he was serving with. Another volunteer stated that the biggest achievement for her is when she was able to respond to the hygienic needs of the children in the school by building toilets for them with the help of the chairman in the community.

On the other hand, there were volunteers who consider the changes on the attitude of the community as their achievement whereas they believe that they were able to impact not only the health and education system of the community but the attitude of the people as well. One of the volunteers considers it as an achievement that he was able to introduced technology to the people. He showed that the technology can improve an individual.

Improvement on the community is also cited as an achievement for the volunteers. One participant was satisfied with being able to improve the classroom of the schools and to make it child-friendly for the children. While for another volunteer, he focused more on how to improve the attitude of the people he was serving. He said that the people have learned to think more critically, to address people properly, to respect and value people equally.

As we see, volunteering can represent a substantial trial period and provide an opportunity to experiment and put preferences to practice (Street, 1994).

The link to the organization of the placement is also important whereas the volunteers considered the accomplishment of the organization's objectives as an achievement. The

volunteers were satisfied that the organization used them as an instrument of change. The participants considered it as an achievement to win the trust of the community. One of them considered it as a significant achievement when she won confidence of the head of the schools she was managing. As we clearly see, volunteering then creates a sense of self-worthiness and instills self-esteem indeed. (Street, 1994).

Being able to visit other countries was also an achievement for the volunteers. One of them said that he really likes to travel and somehow volunteering helped him to make it happen. However, more than that, the main achievement for him was being able to help and the feeling of being fulfilled because he knows he was able to help and share knowledge to someone. While for another volunteer, being able to share her skills and touching other people's lives is a great achievement for her. It is indeed true that volunteers' happiness is resonated from the happiness of the people they served. (Dalisay, 2004, p.89)

One of the volunteers has used her achievements in her personal career. As soon as she was able to win the trust of the District Education Office, she got invited and being sent to different outstanding schools which are not the scope of her volunteering. This truly showed her skills being needed in the development of the educational system of other outstanding schools which she used in her personal career as a teacher.

For another volunteer, being flexible working with other nationality helped him to become successful in his job as a humanitarian in another organization after his placement. On the other hand, another participant is planning to initiate a project where she could gather children and teach them conversational English so they could perform better in school when she has the opportunity. Lastly, as one of the volunteer's placement came to end, she received many job offers from different international NGO's operating in Malawi, and that is how she landed to her new job.

Studies show that most people do, in fact, hold the belief that helping others is a good way to gain fulfillment for yourself (Robert Wuthnow, 1991).

For most of the volunteers, truly treasured the experiences they had because aside from the fact that they were able to successfully volunteer in their placements, they also gathered friends that they get in touch with even after the placement. Truly, it gives the imperative feeling of being needed as through volunteering somebody is offered help, which is by itself a very rewarding experience for the helper. (Street, 1994).

Acknowledgment satisfied the volunteers for the community showed their appreciation for the things that he had done to them. Moreover, that gave him the realization that material things are not as important as we view it and thus, we can say that it is true that volunteering is "rewarding, fulfilling and satisfying. (Dalisay, 2004, p.89)

On the other hand, achievements of the volunteers helped them to cherish their career more as a volunteer. Volunteers were given the chance to do a lot more outside the confines of the laboratory that has broadened their professional scope and made them appreciate their profession even more by being a volunteer.

Truly, volunteering is about committing yourself; it is not only about teaching, but touching life. (Kon, etal., 2004, p.34)

Conclusion

The main problem of the study is: “What are the experiences of VSO Bahaginan Filipino international volunteers’ on the health and education programs in foreign countries where they have volunteered?” The question is derived in understanding the experiences of Filipino international volunteers and what meanings can be derived from those.

Results of the study showed various experiences of being a Filipino international volunteer. Significantly, these skills include their reasons, enabling factors, activities, challenges, threats, lessons learned and achievements. Through the results of the study, the researchers came up with the following conclusions:

1. The reasons for the participants of the study on international volunteering include personal, professional and cultural. The reasons found in the study helped the volunteers in knowing their aim and goals. It is believed that the choice and commitment by a volunteer are key roles that lead to attaining their undertakings or missions (Carpenter and Myers, 2007; Ridley and Barr, 2006; Dalisay, 2004). The enabling factors made their work possible or easier though they were placed in a foreign country with different culture.
2. The wide range of activities or works of Filipino international volunteers showed the work they have done on health and education program for the development in communities in other countries. Aside from those, they have done other work outside their professional knowledge on health and education including capacity building, management, among others. From this experience of doing professional activities and other works in long term immersion, the volunteers can draw what lessons and achievements they have gained from volunteering in a foreign context. Moreover, it shed light on the contributions of Filipino international volunteers on the health and education in communities in foreign developing countries. It is shared by Biomed Central (2007) that though international health volunteers make small contributions; these have a significant impact on the development including capacity building and resource allocation.
3. The challenges faced by the participants of the study include personal and professional. As shown from the results, it implies that Filipino international volunteers have various coping mechanisms and strategies in addressing or overcoming such. This implies one should have different traits on how should overcome such, either someone already possess such qualities, or they are willing to acquire it themselves.
4. Based on the findings of the study, threat to the participants in the study are mostly security and health related. Though these threats encountered didn’t greatly affect most of the Filipino international volunteers, it is important to note on how to specifically address these threats and how they will still be able to continue their work aside from the guidance and assistance by VSO.
5. Results of the study showed there are several lessons learned can be derived from the experience of being an international volunteer. Some of these lessons learned through international volunteering was and can be applied in the Philippine context. According to the 2000 National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating (NSGVP), more than

three-quarters (79%) of volunteers said that their volunteer activities helped them with their interpersonal skills, such as understanding people better, motivating others, and dealing with difficult situations. Suh's (2009) study on undergraduate student international volunteers agreed "they do not just embark on these trips, return home, and then overlook the insights and lessons learned once they settle into their regular lives; rather, those experiences are woven into students' lives (p.197)."

6. This study showed Filipino international volunteers have gained various achievements from their experiences. These achievements had impacted to participants of the study's perceptions, beliefs, attitude and behavior. These achievements are not about awards or recognitions but mostly on the changes and improvement they were able to implement in the community and fulfillment within themselves. They perceive achievements by being able to become an international volunteer, complete their objectives, and become capable of finishing their placements. As a whole, it was found that international volunteering experiences have various effects and implications personally and professionally to the Filipino volunteers who participated in the study. This study is significant in that it addresses an area of research that has not been fully explored at present, thus contributing to this body of research.

NOTES

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