LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LEFT HANDED STUDENTS IN A RIGHT HANDED ACADEMIC WORLD

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Abstract: The world in which we live consists roughly of mostly right handed individuals. This is the reason why most of the tools, facilities and equipment are designed for right handed people which make left handed of a disadvantage. Hence, this study essentially investigated the lived experiences of left handed students from the College of Teacher Education in Cagayan State University. It made use of qualitative method of research with 205 respondents who were identified using purposive sampling. The instrument used in the study is a structured interview that elicited the exceptional experiences of left handed students with respect to the structural conditions of the University. Responses were analyzed using the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. Results show that left handed students feel great as a person because they are unique individuals and there only a few of them in the world. Also, left handed students experience challenges living in a right handed academic world yet they are able to adapt with these challenges through varied strategies. Indeed, left handed students are flexible for they can fit in a world intended for right handed people.

Key words: left handed students, qualitative research, purposive sampling, interpretative phenomenological analysis, flexible

INTRODUCTION

The world in which we live consists roughly of mostly right handed individuals. This is the reason why most of the tools, facilities and equipment are designed for right handed people which make left handed of a disadvantage. As such, left-handers lived in a society which is basically right handed. People who are left-handed are more skillful in using their left hand than with their right hand. Most of them will use their left hand in carrying out almost all activities. Hence, left-handedness is certainly an everyday phenomenon. The left-handers have to put in great effort even for simple tasks of life contrary to their natural tendencies and face problems in the use of tools for routine chores. Some of the evident challenges for left-handed individuals include school desks that are unworkable,
vegetable peelers that are of no use, pens that spread ink and make writing unreadable and computer mouse that cause spasms of hand (Flatt, 2009).

In like manner, left-handed people are placed at a constant disadvantage by society. Nearly all tools and devices are designed to be comfortably used with the right hand. For example, scissors, a very common tool, is arranged so that the line being cut along can be seen by a right-handed user, but is not visible to a left-handed user. Furthermore, the handles are often molded in a way that is very difficult for a left-hander to hold, and extensive use causes severe discomfort and pain. Computer mouse are also very frequently shaped to fit the right hand. Rulers as well are difficult to use, resulting in upside down measurements. Writing is difficult to learn for a left handed child if, as is usually the case, the writing teacher is right handed. This is because, when properly done, left handed writing is a mirror image to that of the right hander, making the learning process confusing for the left handed student. The result is that the majority of left handed people write with their hand curled around the pen so that it can meet the paper at the same angle as the right hander, rather than simply tilt the paper the opposite way. Once this habit is formed, it is difficult to break. (http://psychology.wikia.com/wiki/Left-handed)

In similar context, Cagayan State University offers education to both right handed and left handed students. But it has been observed that facilities are intended only for right handed students which create uneasiness for the left handed students. During exams and activities that require writing skills, left handed students feel uncomfortable because they have difficulty adjusting to chairs intended for the right handed students. Indeed, left handed students survive in a right handed person’s world. They struggle with simple everyday tasks that a right handed person has no issues with.

It is on this context that the researcher embarked on this study. The left handed students’ lived experiences were explored to reveal significant information as they journey in a right handed academic world.

FRAMEWORK

A person who is left-handed primarily uses his or her left hand, more so than the right hand; a left-hander will probably use the left hand for tasks such as personal care, cooking, and so on. Writing is not as precise an indicator of handedness as it might seem, because some
people who are left-handed, write with their right hand and use their left for everything else. (http://www.livescience.com/17009-left-handedness-ambidexterity.html)

A widespread idea exists that left-handed individuals are more intelligent and creative than right-handed people. The supporting data for cognitive skills performance of left-handers are intricate. In a study it was found that on average the left-handers show lower performance in high school. While other studies have established the contrary results that left-handers are significantly more intelligent than the right-handers (Faurie, Vianey-Liaud & Raymond, 2006; Ghayas & Adil, 2007).

Left-handers learn foreign languages better and quicker, have stronger spatial perception, are more creative, their visual memory is more developed and they often exhibit fighting. They are somehow more flexible than right-handers. They appear to be capable of switching over their hand for performing tasks more easily than right-handed people. They think more quickly when playing computer games or sports, which is the reason they are considered better player than right-handers (Pawlik-Kienlen, 2008).

Left-handed people are likely to be more visual than language-based, making them ideal for artistic pursuits. Research has shown that university students are more likely to major in visually-based, as opposed to language-based, subjects when they’re left handed. While another study — not comprehensive at only 103 students — showed that within the sample, 47% of art students were left- or mixed-handed. (http://www.anythinglefthanded.co.uk/lhinfo/advantages.html#sthash.LZi9aemd.dpufTranscript)

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that it can meet the paper at the same angle as the right hander, rather than simply tilt the paper the opposite way. Once this habit is formed, it is difficult to break.

This study is based on the concept that left handed students experienced complexity as they cope with the structures in school meant for the right handed. It is undeniable that the right handed students have no issues with the tools, equipment and the like used in school which the left handed students have difficulty dealing with.

It is within this premise that this study evolved. The left handed students lived in a right handed academic world where they experience its inconveniences.

**OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

This study essentially investigated the lived experiences of left handed students with respect to the structural conditions of the University.

**METHODOLOGY**

This study used the qualitative method of research. The interpretative phenomenological analysis was utilized to analyze responses of the participants relative to their lived experiences with respect to the structural conditions of the University.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The aim of this research was to gain a detailed understanding and in-depth knowledge of experiences of left handed students in a right handed academic world. Results revealed themes related to how the participants feel as a person, their experiences as well as the problems encountered in the University.

Left handers feel great, extraordinary, unique and special. It is because they feel different from others. As one participant reported, “I am unique because I am one of a kind and there are only few left handed individuals”. Other responses include: “I am special because I have creativity and people admire my hand writing”, “I feel great because I can fit in with right handed people”, “I always like being left handed. It meant you were a bit different”.

These responses can be further explained by Alfred Adler. According to Adler, when one feels encouraged, one feels capable and appreciated and will generally act in a connected and cooperative way. When a person is discouraged, he may act in unhealthy ways by competing, withdrawing, or giving up. It is in finding ways of expressing and accepting encouragement, respect, and social interest that help a person feel fulfilled and optimistic. (http://alfredadler.edu/about/theory)
Likewise, Professor Chris McManus of University College, London (2002) has been researching on left handedness and is about to publish a new book called Right Hand, Left Hand. He is convinced that the proportion of left-handers is rising and left-handed people as a group have historically produced an above-average quota of high achievers. (http://www.anythinglefthanded.co.uk/research/left-handedresearch.html#sthash.6kJgR5wo.dpuf)

Similarly, research has shown that university students are more likely to major in visually-based, as opposed to language-based, subjects when they're left handed. While another study of 103 students showed that within the sample, 47% of art students were left- or mixed-handed. Likewise, great artists such as Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, Raphael and Rembrandt are all left handed. (http://www.anythinglefthanded.co.uk/being-lh/lh-info/advantages.html#sthash.SZo35xvq.dpuf)

Further, the life of the left handers, was, on the whole seen as a life of positive experiences in school because they receive equal treatment from their classmates and teachers. With these experiences they feel contented being a left handed. The majority of left-handers, though, do not see it as an important part of who they are because they can blend well with their right handed classmates.

Also, one major theme that emerged was regarding “challenges and their management” in the life experiences of the left handers which included two sub themes: “challenges in school” and “tackling with challenges”. The participants faced some challenges in hand use such as difficulty in using desk chairs in schools and problems using computer mouse and scissors, and at times are deprived of some school activities.

Some of the statements of the participants along this include the following: “I experienced aching back from using right-handed desks”, “I can’t write fast most especially during dictation because I feel uncomfortable with my right handed armchair”, “My wrist gets sore because of the spring of the notebook when I write”, “In taking notes or taking exams, I still have to bend my body so that I can write on my paper legibly and comfortably because the arm chair is intended for a right handed”, “I have difficulty adapting myself to those right handed because they do things faster than a left handed”, “In my PE classes, I always get confused because we always start with our right so I have difficulty adjusting”, “I was not able to join some activities like the drum and lyre, playing soft ball because I could not find
gloves for a left handed as well as I have difficulty learning to strum a guitar”, “Eating in the
canteen next to right handers causes a lot of discomforts”.

These kinds of experiences and challenges were an inconvenience for the left handed
students. At times, the people around them have little information and sometimes their
special needs are not fully understood.

A way to describe the obstacles of the lefthanders to overcome is to think of them as
intrinsic biases (related to physical attributes). It means that a tool has built-in advantage for
the right hand over the left. The majority of tools, utensils or sports equipment are designed
for the right handers. (Masud, et.al., 2012)

For all these problems, left handed students use some strategies for “tackling with
challenges”. Some of these were basically the personality traits that helped them to
overcome the obstacles they faced. They tackled challenges in school by being confident,
creative, and daring and by thinking differently. It was reported by participants that, “I can
still adapt with the environment designed for right handed people”, “I can do or perform
what a right handed person can do”, “Being a left handed is a gift or a blessing because I
have talents such as creativity and we are good in painting and drawing”, “Everyone treats
us the same as right-handers, but I believe we do need special attention. I think being left-
handed has made me stronger, because I always had to cope with right-handed people
telling me not to complain”, “I always sit on the left side of writing areas so I do not bump
elbows with my classmates”, “I find extra chair for me to use for writing but sometimes this
does not happen because chairs are only enough for the whole class”.

The challenges experienced by the left handed students along the structural conditions of
the University are evident. However, accommodation for left-handers is a practical and
economic issue. The assumption is that left-handers will just improvise and deal with the
situation as seen in the responses of the participants, “I had difficulty using the armchair for
right handed at first, but as time passes by, I was able to accustom myself using it”,
“Adaptation is the key word, you get used to it all, and it becomes normal to you”, “Being
left-handed means having to adapt to a right-handed world”, “Lefties have to live in a right-
hand world. It’s a challenge, but also an advantage to be forced to use your non-dominant
hand for so many tasks. I think lefties end up more versatile and adaptable and flexible as a
result”.

This is confirmed by Melissa Roth who states that some think left-handers' brain structures may be the product of living in a right-handed world. Accordingly, growing up surrounded by right-handed equipment, instruments, appliances and tools, lefties give their non-dominant side more exercise than the average righty. "Biomechanic research has revealed that training the non-dominant side of the body actually enhances the dominant side—something known as the cross-training effect—since the body's neural network is integrated on both sides."

Indeed, left handers are flexible; they are able to adjust and fit in to a world intended for a right handed.

CONCLUSIONS

Left handed students are ready and able to adapt to a right handed world. They can blend in a world intended for right handed people. They may experience challenges along the way yet these do not hinder them from performing what is expected of them. They get used to the daily challenges posed on them and are able to overcome them through the process of adaptation. Hence, they may experience difficulties in a right handed world but they are able to fit in and accomplish with ease the tasks.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study is limited to the experiences of participants in the academic world hence; future researchers are encouraged to conduct further study on the same subject but in a wider scope among left handed students. It should include other variables that may affect the personality of left handed students. Also, this area of inquiry would also benefit if researchers will explore a range of issues in-depth such as discrimination and suppression experienced by left handed people during their growing up years.

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