TLC GRADUATES' TRANSITION TO HIGH SCHOOL: ADJUSTMENTS, NEEDS AND PERSONAL GROWTH

Ma. April M. Pengson
Master of Arts in Education

Abstract

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the transitional experiences, particularly the adjustments, needs, and personal growth of TLC graduates during their transition from elementary to high school. The study used purposive sampling in choosing its 14 respondents, aged 13-14, who graduated in school year 2014-2015. One-on-one interview was used to gather data. The researcher analyzed the data through open and focused coding, with the final stage of analysis using Schlossberg, Walters, and Goodman's (1995) Transition Model. The results of the study showed that the respondents had both negative and positive emotions when they transferred to another school. The respondents also had positive and negative experiences when it comes to social adjustments. With the major themes that emerged in the study, the factors that affect the students' transition to high school experiences are: psychological factors, sociocultural factors, person-environment condition, school culture adjustment and needs, learnings and success. The study recommends that elementary schools should have programs to address the emotional, social and educational needs of the students. Orientation and visitation to schools where students will transfer in high school should also be considered. There should also be activities or programs where students could evaluate their own personal growth.

Keywords: transition, adjustment, high school transition, personal growth, needs

The transition from elementary school to secondary school has been identified as an important, yet stressful event for young adolescent students. It is stressful because the changes in the adolescents' life happen at the same time, including puberty, family relation and the school (Santrock, 2001). In this stage, the students move from the final elementary year to the first secondary school year. Uvaas and McKevitt (2012) defined transition as the movement of all students from one school setting to the next. The term does not refer particularly to transition supports related to individualized education plans for special education students.

Transition from elementary to secondary includes a move from a smaller neighborhood elementary school with usually self-contained classrooms to a larger or indefinite setting with more students and different teachers for different subjects (Rathus, 2006). Compared to secondary school, elementary school classrooms are normally warm with more caring teachers and students getting to know one another well and working together on different class activities. Students see themselves as members of a family in the classroom. However, in secondary school, the classrooms are larger with more students and with several teachers at a time. Students may not know their classmates well and the classroom atmosphere is quite competitive.

Because of the difference in school environment, transition from elementary to secondary school has been linked to negative educational, social and emotional outcomes of some students (Bailey & Baines, 2012). On the other hand, there are studies that showed the tendency of adolescents to adjust successfully in the secondary education, both in academic and social aspects if they are prepared by their elementary school, if the support from the family is strong and if the secondary schools where they will go have organized programs to assist them during transition.

There is a gap in the literature that focuses on the holistic experiences of transitioning high school students. Although the literature is replete with studies pertaining to

college students, the experiences of the two groups vary based on a number of factors such as age, maturity, level of education, and school environment, among others. Because few studies deal with high school students in existing literature, this study aimed to fill in the gap by exploring the needs, adjustments, learnings and successes of new high school students.

Identifying the specific school adjustments that the students go through during transition is very important so as to provide them with the necessary support programs to help them through the transition period with ease.

A non-sectarian school in Baliwag, Bulacan - The Little Campus North Bend School (TLC) provides a small classroom environment for preschool and elementary pupils. For the past 15 years, the school has maintained small class sizes, having a maximum of 15 students per class, where the students are very well known by the school personnel.

TLC gives emphasis on the development of the whole child and provides educational programs appropriate for the children in each level. Slade and Griffith (2013) define the whole child approach to education as one that focuses attention on the social, emotional, mental, physical as well as cognitive development of students. This approach also views the purpose of schooling as developing future citizens and providing the basis for each child to fulfill his/her potentials.

TLC also implements the whole-school approach in classroom management and in safety and security maintenance. A whole-school approach is a way when the school system and the community of people that constitute a school make collaborative effort and practices to help and guide the students for intervention and change (Rogers, 2000).

To define its character as a learning institution, TLC promotes learning as a joyful process of discovery, develops each student's potential for leadership and encourages its

students to be proud of their personal achievements.

TLC's Preschool Program adheres to developmental curriculum where students discover and explore their environment actively. Hence, the school provides for a range of play-based activities that are meaningful, stimulating and enriching.

The Preschool Program of TLC is open to two years old for Toddler's Class to five years old for Kindergarten Class. The program follows a quarterly school calendar where students are assessed quarterly.

The school uses the criterion-referenced grading ever since it started its Grade School program in 2001. In criterion-referenced, the students are graded based on pre-determined criteria or standards. Letter grades are assigned to compare the students' performance to the learning objectives and not to their classmates' performance.

TLC believes that the first tool in making the students learn is to provide them with first-hand experiences. Class trips are scheduled in Preschool and Grade School every quarter. The students visit farms, factories, private and public offices, airfield, supermarkets, restaurants and other places depending on the class theme. On its yearly educational tour, the students watch repertory, visit zoos, museums, big factories, and other historical places out of town. In 2012, TLC held its first international tour in Singapore with its students and parents.

TLC also offers after-school programs such as performing arts and athletics to develop the students' love for music and sports. The school has a Music Ensemble, Catholic Children's Choir, Hip-hop Dance Club, Drum Brigade and Pep Squad.

To develop students' potential for leadership, TLC has a Student Council where students from Kindergarten to Grade 6 get to choose their leaders to represent their level to

the council. The newly-elected officers experience their oath-taking at the Office of the Mayor every year.

The school also has a Writing Club. Those who love to write are able to join the club. The outputs of the members or volunteers are published in the school's journal released every semester.

The school also has Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts where the members are taught the virtues of the scouting movement.

Though a non-sectarian school, TLC observes Catholic activities and holds mass every month. The student sacristans serve, while the Catholic Children's Choir lead the songs of praises during the mass. The non-Catholic pupils are given other activities under the supervision of non-Catholic teachers.

TLC also has bullying awareness program, individual and group guidance and counseling, monthly psycho-spiritual integration sessions and catechetical homeroom instruction by intermediate level students with primary grades.

Since 2006, the school already had nine batches of Grade 6 graduates. TLC's Grade 6 graduates have made it to the secondary education program in Manila schools such as Ateneo De Manila University, De La Salle University, Miriam College, Xavier School, Assumption College Makati, University of Sto. Tomas, Immaculate Conception Seminary, and Multiple Intelligence International School. Some are also doing well abroad. Several students who chose to stay in the province were enrolled in St. Paul College-San Rafael, St. Mary's College-Baliwag, Montessori De Sagrada Familia and in other known big schools in the province of Bulacan.

Given that the TLC graduates are exposed to small, intimate school setting with consistent small class sizes, this study aims to find out the specific school adjustment experiences that the TLC graduates went through during

their first year in secondary education.

With TLC's plan to introduce Junior High School Program beginning with Grade 7 in June 2016, results of the study will be helpful for the school to find out the specific school adjustment experience that its former graduates underwent during transition from elementary to secondary school. As such, the findings of the study will be used in planning for more effective school support programs and interventions.

Review of Related Literature

Researchers who have studied the transition from elementary to secondary school found out that the first year in secondary education can be difficult for many students. Santrock (2001), in his book *Adolescence*, stated that during the transition, the students experience the top-dog phenomenon, the condition of moving from the top level in elementary being the oldest, biggest and most powerful students to being the youngest, smallest and least powerful students in the lowest level in secondary school.

Moving from elementary to secondary school could be alarming for most students. Students during this period have to adjust to a more demanding school setting with different academic structures and expectations. They also need to adjust their social interactions with their new teachers and peers (Rice, et al., 2012). It takes time for the students to gain the same level of achievements in elementary when they go to secondary school because of the new challenges they face.

Students' Transition and Adjustment to High School

Transition is a process of change. According to Colombatto (2001), meaningful transition requires an emphasis on the change of the institutional path-dependent process. The transition process includes the dynamics of power, an attitude toward risk, uncertainty, ideology, and

opportunities. Even though opportunities are presented in any transition process, those opportunities may be enhanced or stifled by scientific and individual development or other extraneous factors.

For students, opportunities presented by a transition include a certain degree of individual autonomy, meeting new people and making new friends, juggling social activities and school, as well as leaving behind one's comfort zone. Moreover, understanding and planning help to ease the transition challenges encountered by students (Lake Land College, 2009).

McDonough (2004) observed that transition to high school poses a great deal of challenges to all students. While some of the challenges are student-oriented, other challenges arise due to the nature of high school education. Students' transition and adjustment to high school cuts across psychological, academic and social issues. Although the core challenge facing the student is taking personal responsibility, Schultz (2002) suggested that teachers and administrators should serve as guides, mentors, role models, and resources for students.

Psychological issues. Psychological change, identity development and self-concepts are among the psychological challenges that students experience during transition (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Students' psychosocial issues are related to their transition and adjustment. Psychosocial issues result in students being overwhelmed by all that they have to accomplish. Another psychological issue that influences students' success at transition and adjustment is cognition or the reasoning ability. In study of Ukomadu (2010), he found out that students who recognized different school or academic culture are able to adapt to the education system. Although intelligence is very important to be successful in education, it is not the only requirement.

Academic issues. Academic curriculum and skills requirements are far more different in secondary education

than in elementary education. Benner (2011) found out that the most difficult aspects of being in secondary school are the homework and grades. With the difficulty of homework and bigger academic responsibility, students feel the need for intense studying for their academic success.

With considerable differences in elementary school and secondary school academics, where there is greater emphasis on evaluation of students, this aspect of transition is considered as one major concern (Mackenzie et al., 2012).

Social issues. The most influential social groups during the period of adolescent are the parents, peers, teachers and other school personnel. Each has its own substantial role during transition. Parents play an important role in students' social adjustment. Researchers suggested that parental support could be associated strongly with social aspect. The students identified their parents as the most helpful persons during the transition. Students who experienced less disruptions and showed greater flexibility during transition are found to have supportive parents who monitored and get involved in their academic and social lives. It was also found that family context could be a source of support and stability during the time when a series of changes happen at adolescents' lives (Benner, 2011).

In addition to parental support, peer relationships serve as another important support during the transition period. A number of evidences proved that peer relations have great impact on the adolescents' social adjustment during transition. It has also been identified as an important protective factor on negative effects of transition (Aikins et al., 2005).

Researchers claim that the importance of peer relationships heightens during adolescence. Moving into bigger schools with older peers and new same-age schoolmates changes adolescents' social networks during secondary school transition (Benner, 2011).

Teachers and other school personnel. Similar to the roles of parents and peers during transition, the part of teachers and other school personnel to the total adjustment of the students are of great importance. During transition, the students have to adjust to a whole new group of educators with different expectations. Generally, the relationships of students with teachers and other school personnel during the transition to secondary education fall apart. Compared to their elementary school teachers who are warm and caring, the students see their teachers and other school personnel in secondary school as less supportive and less caring. They rate them as less helpful than those in their elementary school (Benner, 2011).

Social support and peer group influence. A new high school environment provides great opportunities for socializing, diverse friendships, and academic learning. When students from a small school transfer to a bigger school, they encounter people from outside their homogenous group for the first time and become susceptible to peer influence (Massey, Charles, Lundy & Fischer, 2003).

With a number of adjustments that the students have to make during transition, they have to learn coping skills and strategies even during elementary to help them breeze through the transition. Hence, the purpose of this paper is to explore the experiences of grades school students who transition to high school.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual constructs are derived from the theoretical framework discussed in detail in this chapter. The interplay of these factors affect the students' transition and adjustment phase.
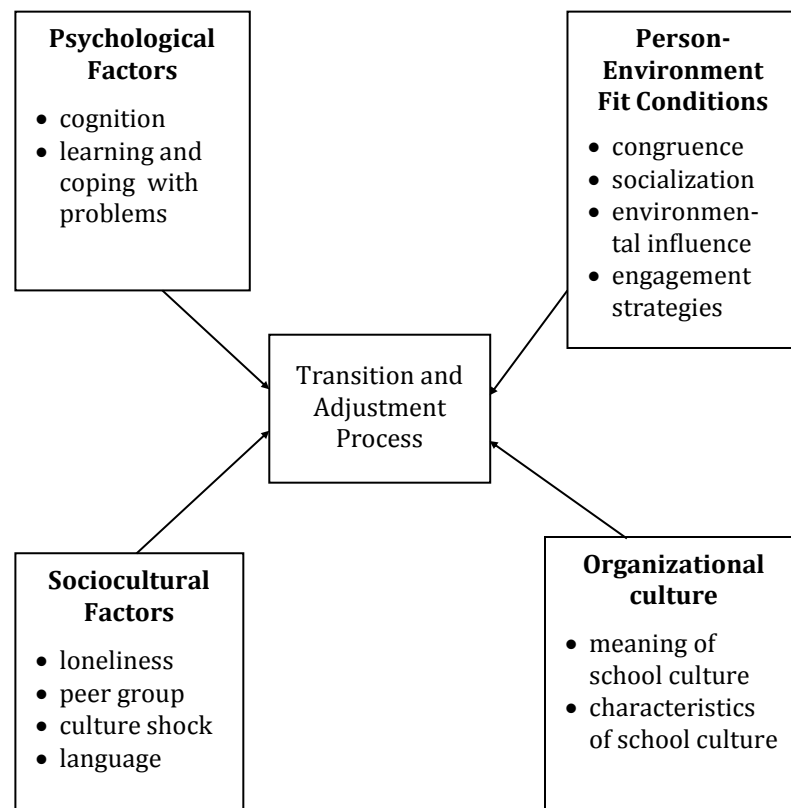

Figure 1. The framework, adopted from Okumadu, 2010, depicts the factors affecting students' transition to high school.

The conceptual dimensions describe the nature of psychological factors, environment-fit conditions, socio-cultural factors, organizational culture, and transition and adjustment processes that exemplify students' transition and adjustment to secondary education. The framework is intentionally broad in order to explain the various components that form the process of transition and adjustment, as well as the institutional responses to the issues raised in the constructs.

Theoretical Framework

Schlossberg's (1984) transition theory is very significant in providing insights in dealing with issues related to students' transition to secondary education. In his qualitative study, he acknowledged the need for a framework that would facilitate an understanding of individuals in transition and direct them to the help they need so that they can survive the ordinary and the difficult process of living. Schlossberg, Walters, and Goodman's qualitative study (1995) defined transition as "any event, or non-event that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles" (p. 27). Furthermore, Sargent and Schlossberg (1988) stated that transitions involve the psychological processes that individuals undergo when they are accommodating significant changes in their lives. Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman's (1995) transition model is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman's (1995) Transition Model

Transitions
• Events or non-events resulting in changed relations, routines, assumptions, or roles
• Meaning for the individual based on:
Transitions
Type: anticipated, unanticipated, non-event
Context: relationship to transition and the setting
Impact: alterations in daily life
The Transition Process
• Reactions overtime
• Moving in, moving through, and moving out
Coping with Transitions
Influenced by ratio of assets and liabilities in regard to four sets of factors:

Table 1. Continuation

• *Situation:* trigger, timing, control, role change, duration, previous experience, concurrent stress, assessment
• *Self:* person and demographic characteristics (socioeconomic status, gender, age, stage of life, health, ethnicity), psychological resources (ego development, outlook, commitment, values)
• *Support:* types (intimate, family, friends, institutional), functions (affect, affirmation, aid, honest feedback), measurement (role dependent, stable and changing supports)
• *Strategies:* categories (modify situation, control meaning, and manage stress in the aftermath), coping modes (information seeking, direct action, inhibition of action, intrapsychic behavior)

Note: Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman, 1995.

The Schlossberg et al. (1995) transition model acknowledged that transition consists of different phases. The proper understanding of these phases would help to address the problems brought about by the transition process for high school students. The fundamental nature of the model is that for individuals to be effective or successful in coping with transition, they should employ multiple methods. At the same time, students should show some flexibility in the process of transition. Furthermore, a positive outlook, commitments, values, and belief in one's own ability can also play a significant role in a transition (Schlossberg, Waters & Goodman, 1995).

Statement of the Problem

TLC is a school where English is the language for communication inside and outside of the classroom. This poses a problem to students because other schools do not have the same language policy. Another concern is the

student population. The school maintains the ideal 15-20 students per class to effectively teach students at a manageable level. Students are therefore used to small class size with classmates who they have become familiar with since kindergarten.

Since it is only this year, school year 2016-2017 that TLC has offered Grade 7, previous students who graduated from elementary were hesitant to transfer to big schools that are at least at par with the quality and standard of TLC. Thus, these differences make transition to high school difficult for them. In order to help the students cope with transition, the researcher decided to explore the experiences of their elementary graduates as they adjust to high school life.

Specifically, this study aims to answer the main question: What are the experiences of TLC elementary graduates as they transition to high school?

Methods

This is a phenomenological study that aimed to explore the experiences of TLC elementary students as they transition to high school. Qualitative method, to which a phenomenological study falls, investigates situations based on experiences of people. It helps explain the points of view of people at a given condition by drawing out concepts directly from them.

Population and Sample of the Study

Purposive sampling was used in selecting the study's participants. The sample consisted of 14 TLC graduates of school year 2014-2015, nine males and five females, with ages ranging from 13-14 years old.

Table 2 shows the distribution of TLC graduates in different schools in Manila, Bulacan, and abroad.

Table 2. Distribution of TLC Graduates Batch 2014-2015 in Various Schools

School	TLC graduates enrolled
Assumption College	1
Immaculate Conception School of Baliuag	1
Immaculate Conception School for Boys	1
Montessori De Sagrada Familia	2
St. Mary's College of Baliuag	3
University of Sto. Tomas	4
Johannes Learning Senter	1
Carmenita Middle School	1
Total	**14**

Instrument of the Study

The interview schedule was the instrument used to gather data. It contained guide questions that asked about their emotional, social, and school experiences and adjustments such as what was it like to transfer to another school, what did it feel like fitting into a new environment, where do they go to for support, what are the strategies they used to adjust, and what are their successes, among others. For those abroad, the same guide questions were made into open-ended questions and sent to the two participants through email.

Data Analysis

Prior to initiating the qualitative data analysis, the record was transcribed and reviewed. Qualitative thematic content analysis was the primary approach to the analysis of the interview data. Focused and open coding were incorporated in a comparative analysis of the data to identify similarities and differences of the emerging themes (Corbin &

Strauss, 2008; Creswell, 1998; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2004). Initially, the researcher coded the interview responses.

Then, open coding was used to examine the initial raw data and develop categories for the information. When distinct patterns and repetition of phrases, ideas and responses were observed, a list of these possible open codes that represented the data from the interviews were listed. Examples of open codes obtained through analysis included school dynamics, uncertainty, change, language problems, needs and learnings. As the process was continued, the codes were grouped to look for additional patterns throughout the data.

After this procedure, focused coding was used, guided by a specific thematic issue, to analyze the codes more closely throughout the original open coding process. By looking at the interview responses, group codes and larger themes and concepts were developed. For example, the theme educational adjustment is followed by the codes culture shock, language issue, large classroom, big student population, and heavy workload. Participant quotes were moved under each code that had been previously marked during open coding of the data.

Once prominent themes within and across each area in data collection were identified, these were then compared to the Transition Theory. The comparison to Transition Theory provided a theoretical basis and organizational framework by developing a picture of this transition process.

Results and Discussion

This chapter presents the experiences of students as they transitioned from primary school to secondary school. Transition and adjustment process is the central framework for this study. This framework is very important because it provides insights into how to deal with the issues and challenges confronting elementary school students in their transition and adjustment to secondary education. In addition, this framework aims to assist in understanding students' transition and adjustment and direct them to the help they need in order to survive the ordinary and the extraordinary processes of studying in a different environment.

Process. The process of transition and adjustment comprises the variables of moving in, moving through, and moving out (Schlossberg, Walters & Goodman, 1995).

Moving in: The variable of *moving in* relates to the initial stress associated with the time the students arrive with high expectations of their institutions.

Psychological factors. One theme that emerged from the interview responses pertained to mixed emotions about leaving the primary school and their classmates. This feeling was expressed by an overwhelming majority of the students who were interviewed.

> *"I was really nervous and excited at the same time but mostly sad because of the fact that I was going to a different school. I loved TLC and I was going to miss it.* (R2)

> *"It is sad because I can no longer see my other class-mates and at the same time happy because I can meet new friends."* (R5)

> *"For me, transferring to another school at first is sad because I have to leave my classmate [sic]…"* (R3).

Responses revealed that over half of the participants found their transfer difficult, expressing varied negative emotions such as sad, scared and nervous. Among the negative emotions experienced by transitioning students are:

> *"It was harder than I think it was. It was hard at first because you don't know anyone at all. It was hard to adjust . It was like starting over again. It was a new world ahead of me."* (R7)

"Being a student there felt weird. Everything was new. To be honest, I became a mixed version of myself and what a normal student in high school would be." (R9)

"It feels awkward because the feeling of being a transferee is still there." (R10)

"It felt very sad because the people that I used to feel my emotions with would change with somebody else [sic]." (R11)

"I was scared transferring from TLC, because the school I transferred to is huge. I didn't know anybody. I was somewhat nervous what would happen next."

The responses illustrate that students experienced negative emotions because of the change that would occur as well as the uncertainty of their future. This was evident in the response of R8 when he said, *"I was nervous what would happen next."*

Moving through: The variable of *moving through* refers to the stage of coping with or managing the stress associated with the students' transition and adjustment to their new school. This may also be considered as the adjustment or non-adjustment phase of students.

Emotional adjustments. The negative emotions of students changed as they learned to adjust and cope with the changes. Both R1 and R12 expressed comfort as they articulated that it felt easier and normal when they got used to it.

"It's pretty hard at the start but if you get used to it, it'll be a lot easier." (R1)

"At first it was a bit unnerving since I was a new student, but later on it felt normal to study here because I got used to it." (R12)

On the other hand, the emotions mentioned by the respondents about their transfer were positive like gladness and upliftment.

"I feel very glad to have chosen a school that helps me do what I love and a school that inspires me to become the best version of myself." (R4)

"I feel so uplifted coz our school has some good standards and it is a good thing to meet their standards." (R13)

The responses of the students as they *moved in* was very different as they *moved through* the school system. As they *move in*, students had more negative emotions than positive ones, although the negative ones always went with positive emotions. However, they had positive emotions when they expect to gain new friends. In a study conducted by Loke and Lowe (2014), it was mentioned that students find excitement in having more freedom and being able to make new friends in high school.

Social adjustments. When it comes to social adjustments, half of the respondents had positive experiences while the other half had negative ones.

"I easily get comfortable because there was no much difference transferring from TLC to my present school because the language that we use is English. I fit in by joining school clubs and sports activities." (R1)

"You just have to be yourself to fit in high school." (R3)

With the respondents who transferred abroad, both had easy transition. Their responses were:

"My high school is great, it's the best school in our district and it's fun to be a student in my high school." (R1)

"I started with a language school for Grade 7. We only

*have a few subjects in this school. Being a student there was fun because we do not have a lot of homeworks and the subjects are easy because we still have to learn the language." (*R2)

On the other hand, among the factors that contributed to having negative experiences are the diversity of people, language concern, and culture.

"There were all these different types of people. It was super diverse and I had to take everything in such little time... I had to get over the fact that most people in school spoke Tagalog most of the time, compared with TLC who applied the whole English-only rule." (R9)

Because graduates of TLC are used to small class size, they only have few classmates. The comments made were:

"It was kind of hard to adjust to a bigger school because of the number of students per section." (R7)

"In my case I feel like that it was going to be hard to cope with the people in there because there are so many people which increased the shyness that I already have." (R11).

In elementary, R11 is really a shy person. He is also soft-spoken. This is probably the reason why he felt that the transition is going to be hard for him.

Furthermore, R4 who transferred to an exclusive school for girls somehow felt a discrimination.

"It was hard to be able to fit in a different school environment. People think that because you came from the province, you weren't as good as them. Making friends is one of the most challenging part of being in a new environment since you need to be able to know who they really are before actually trusting them."
It may be noted that 10 out of 14 respondents started

their school years at TLC from Preschool aged 3 to 4 years old. Those who are sociable have positive experiences while those who are active in clubs, with friendly attitudes and self-confidence found ways to make friends.

Mcdevitt and Ormrod (2004) stated that adolescents seek out peers whose values are compatible with their own and who will give them recognition status. Furthermore, Mackenzie et al., (2012) mentioned that students identify fitting in and making friends with great importance during the transition period. They also added that the key challenges during transition are making friends, fitting in, and dealing with bullying.

Moving out: Ukomadu (2010) defined *moving out* as the successful completion of the college program and graduation from their respective schools. However, in this study, since the participants are still in their second year and are still on their way to completion, moving out is defined as the success students gained from the experience such as learnings and academic awards received, or fields where they excelled in high school.

Based on what the respondents experienced during their transition, all of them learned positive life skills and developed a realistic and healthy self-esteem. The following could be considered as each of the respondent's personal growth:

Social aspect

"I learned to be more friendly and sociable to gain more friends." (R1)

"I learned to share things with other people who I don't really know unlike in the Philippines." (R2)

"I learned that we should not only do good in our academics, but also that we treat others with respect." (R4)
"I learned that we should not forget the other

people or friends that help us before." (R5)

Independence, openness and transparency

"I learned to be more independent to be able to adjust in my new school." (R2)

"I learned that I should be more open and transparent when you need to. We should also not be shy to share our opinions. I also learned that we should be who we are in front of other people since that is what we will be known for." (R4)

"I learned to stay the same. Every time I receive awards I always stay humble because if you start bragging about those things, people will start hating you." (R10)

"The number one thing that I learned was deciding the right thing. Since in high school there were a lot of situational questions that you had to apply into reality." (R12)

Challenges can be overcome

"I learned that even how hard the challenges you face, you can still get through them." (R7)

"That it is very hard to cope with new environment but as time passes you would be able to keep up." (R11)

"I learned about to manage my time in order to survive in the school." (R13)

Fifty percent of the respondents noted that they have developed their social skills based on their experiences. R1 who is friendly by nature learned that he needs to be more sociable to gain more friends. R2, on the other hand, learned that being independent is needed to be able to adjust to a really different school environment.

Most students were able to transition successfully in high school and that the experience provided them a deeper and richer experience in understanding themselves, the people around them, and the environment where they belong.

Academic successes. Most of the respondents are academic achievers in elementary. In high school, 9 out of 14 defined success as being an honor student or a topnotcher in class. There were some who mentioned that they succeeded by winning in academic contests, receiving special awards, and by being a top scorer in standardized tests. The others mentioned that they succeeded in sports. While for others, they succeeded simply by being hardworking and by getting high grades in difficult subjects.

Below are the some of the responses students:

"I won 3 gold medals on track and field, basketball champions, American football champion." (R1)

"I learned to speak a new language. I learned to play new sports like football, handball and skiing." (R2)

"I am an honor student in my present school." (R3)

"I have been part of Top 10 in our batch for the previous year. I am also awarded for Simplicity. I was able to exempt all my tests for the last quarter. This year, I am elected as a class officer. I am also part of the CIC (Community Involvement Committee), which spreads awareness about the problems in our school." (R4)

"I succeed at being a great student because I accomplished my goal to get more high grades to the subject that I have a hard time. I'm also a great student because I always follow the orders of my teachers." (R5)

"Because of my English speaking skill that I

learned from TLC, I get English awards for 3 quarters last year." (R6)

Surprise and Sense-Making

Louis (1980) formulated the variable of *surprise and sense-making* theory in the process of transition. This variable applies to primary students entering a different secondary school for the first time. Also their entry process to the said high school involves a *rational understanding*. This variable relates to the manner in which the students critically think, and rationally adapt to transition and adjustment issues and challenges in their high school environment.

School culture adjustment. The respondents also experienced major adjustment in high school education because of the difference in work load and higher expectations. Describing how this variable affected their transition and adjustment to secondary education, the respondents said:

> *"It is very different from grade school since the number of assignments grew and the teachers expected more from you since you are part of the high school body."*(R4)

> *"My school was heavy on pen and paper. We'd write down everything and I mean everything and that's not enough too, taking notes are important."* (R9)

> *"In my opinion, I would say it is very hard because there are so many projects. It was totally different from what I have expected. It was like you need to be a hardworking student because of the activities you have there.*" (R11)

Ellerbrock and Kiefer (2013) specified in their study that compared to elementary, students perceive teachers as more impersonal and quick to administer consequences. This was also confirmed in the response of R7 that there are

teachers who would deduct points for no reason.

Roybal et al. (2012) said teachers play critical roles in building a sense of connectedness between students and high school. Teachers who are considerate and caring are much more likely to ease the transition process for students while those who are inflexible and intimidating make it more challenging. Findings in the study also indicated that home-work, grades, and new procedures were the most difficult components of transition.

Language culture adjustment. Aside from the school culture, other factors that contributed to the sense of surprise of students are the diversity of people, language concern, and culture.

> *"There were all these different types of people. It was super diverse and I had to take everything in such little time… I had to get over the fact that most people in school spoke Tagalog most of the time, compared with TLC who applied the whole English-only rule."* (R9)

Because graduates of TLC are used to small class size, they only have few classmates. The comments made were:

> *"It was kind of hard to adjust to a bigger school because of the number of students per section."* (R7)

> *"In my case I feel like that it was going to be hard to cope with the people in there because there are so many people which increased the shyness that I already have."* (R11).

The shock and the surprise are related. In the case of R9, he was surprised to find out that most of his classmates speak Tagalog while he grew up in an "English only" school. According to Anderson et al. (2009), the surprise phase can take considerable time, forms, and experiences to resolve.

Person-Environment Fit Conditions

Stability in fit environment. Commenting on the variable of *stability in fit environment* and how it affected students' participation in the campus programs and activities, it is important to distinguish between students who come in as athletes and those who do not come as athletes. It was observed that students who easily fit in the environment are those who joined sports, clubs and other school activities.

> *"In my experience it wasn't that hard, since I was used to meeting a lot of different people. Because of my height, people would usually come to me and ask me if I play basketball."* (R12)

> *"I fit in by joining school clubs and sports activities."* (R1)

> *"I fit in with a group of friends who have the same interests as I do."* (R8)

Psycho-educational Model

Learning and coping with problems. The variable of *learning and coping with problems* refers to the manner in which students attain the required knowledge to transform faulty cognitions and perceptions into positive ones.

Social needs. At least 64% of the respondents go to their friends when they need support. Some of the responses were:

> *"I talk to my best friend, she was the first person I met in Johannes. She was the first person I talked to and I felt comfortable with her."* (R2)

> *"I always go to people I can give my full trust to like my best friends in school."* (R7)

> *"I always ask suggestions or support from my friends."* (R5)

There are respondents who revealed that they go to their teachers, classmates, and friends.

> *"I go to my teachers and friends."* (R1)

> *"Most of the times, I ask my teachers but some-times I ask my friends, and classmates who know things about the matter."* (R12)

Findings also showed that 18% of the respondents knew that they could rely on their guidance counselor when they need support.

> *"In times when I really get scared to tell my friends what I feel, I go to our guidance counselor where I can really be open and transparent."* (R4)

> *"I talk to the guidance counselor because they deal with student with some cases of bullying and they give some advices."* (R13)

A follow-up question was asked to R13 since he mentioned about bullying. The respondent clarified that he only cited the guidance counselor as a person whom anyone could talk to if there is cause of bullying.

Educational or academic needs. In order to meet the educational needs of students, the right school that's fit to the students' personality should be chosen. When asked about who chooses the school where they would study, responses revealed that 50% of the respondents' choice of high school is based on their parents' decision while 35% is personal choice.

> *"I try it because my parents want me to try."* (R3)

> *"First of all, my mom searched different schools for girls that have a nearby dorm so that we can be more independent as a person."* (R4)

> *"It isn't really my decision to study there, because my parents are the one who told me to study."* (R12)

The results revealed that parents indeed play a major

part in children's decision-making when it comes to the school of choice. Although this is understandable because the students are teenagers and needed the guidance of their parents, they should be at least given a level of freedom to decide on their own, especially when it comes to selecting the school where they want to study.

Conclusions

Major themes identified in this research fall under the following factors: a) psychological factors, with subthemes as cognition and learning and coping with problems; b) socio-cultural factors which discussed about the negative and positive feelings of students during transition, peer group, and culture shock; c) person-environment fit conditions which discussed students' ability to fit in the new environment, socialization, the influence of the environment, and their engagement strategies such as joining clubs, sports, activities, and other school programs; d) school culture adjustment that presented adjustments in class size, work-loads of assignment and projects, and teacher issues; and e) needs, learnings and success which led to students' personal growth.

These themes are enmeshed into the three factors that the researcher wanted to explore in the study: adjustments, needs, and personal growth.

Adjustments. The lack of familiarity of the school as well as the people they deal with was the predominant hardships that appeared to play significant roles in the students' experiences of adjustment. Many difficulties also pertained to establishing friendships and building relationships while, at the same time, students were trying to adapt to the new educational culture.

Needs. Students voiced feelings of uncertainty and apprehension shortly after arriving in the new school. These negative emotions could have been related to their limited understanding of what high school was like, what to expect from teachers and academic workloads, and lack of preparation for the transition. Some incongruent expectations of high school life and challenges they face as they prepared to move had consequences on the students' emotional, social, and educational adjustment during and shortly after their first day in school, particularly their emotional adjustment.

Personal growth. Most students revealed that they came out of the experience a better person. Despite the challenges they faced during the transition stage, most confessed that they learned many things and became more mature in the process. The dominant learning that students mentioned was learning how to manage their time, followed by being prepared always for what's coming.

Another aspect of personal growth as presented by the respondents were the successes they attained for having fully adjusted themselves to the new environment. Most students considered themselves successful as they excelled in different activities in school. Although many have academic honors, excelling in sports and simply overcoming the challenges they faced were the students' basis in believing that they have succeeded.

Recommendations

Curricular and extra-curricular activities as well as other programs addressing the emotional, social, and educational needs of the students should be offered by the primary school to better prepare them for transition. Academic, sports, and artistic programs, among others, that target the specific interests of students should be developed so that all students may be involved and become part of a group within the school.

Pre-orientation for new high school students should be held to familiarize them on what to expect of high school education. Students' visitation of prospective high schools should be arranged to orient students about the school's

background and other relevant information. Students should also be trained time management skills by giving them work-loads commensurate to that of high school so as to prepare them for the academic tasks.

Students' self-evaluation of their personal growth after participating in various school activities should be conducted to determine which of the programs students learned most at the end of the year. The less chosen programs should be improved or scrapped altogether and changed into other more effective and appealing activities.

Replication of this study will help to verify the transferability of the findings of the study in student transition and adjustment process. Since the participants in the study are TLC elementary graduates, this study should be replicated using participants from other private primary schools having the same characteristics. Doing a similar study would provide a general concept on the emotional, social, and educational needs and adjustments of students in the private schools as well as their personal growth.

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