

EDUCATORS IN THE BPO INDUSTRY: A QUALITATIVE INQUIRY

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Abstract – *The study focused on the lived experiences of education graduates in the BPO industry. The study utilized the phenomenological approach, precisely the hermeneutic phenomenological method of inquiry. The participants of the study were Education graduates employed as Customer Service Representatives. They were explicitly Education majors who had been employed in different BPO companies and must have been working in the industry for a couple of months or a year. In addition, the number of participants was determined by data saturation. The study generated six (6) core themes, namely; collected (1) The Credentials, (2) Disappointment & frustration, (3) Motivation and Financial Stability, (4) The BPO Businesses, (5) The Challenges, (6) Bad Habits. The study's extensive narrative data provided a glimpse into the lives of former educators who went on to work as call center agents. Due to their limited financial resources and the scarcity of employment options in the teaching profession, the teachers decided to work in the BPO industry. Also, the teachers in the BPO sector struggled with their work schedules and mental health challenges; as a result, some of them turned to unhealthy coping mechanisms like smoking and drinking.*

Keywords: Education Graduates, Call Center Agents.

Introduction

Over the past several years, the Filipino call center sector has expanded tremendously. The preference for the Philippines has been linked to the country's enormous pool of college graduates who are computer literate and proficient in speaking American English. The sector has attracted workers with high compensation and monetary incentives, which has contributed to the rise. Call center employees make more than twice the minimum wage required by law. Moreover, due to the lucrative call center industry and the prospect of a high salary, many teachers and education graduates opted to work as call center agents putting their teaching careers on hold.

Smithers and Robinson (2003) looked into what influences teachers' decisions to quit the field. Workload, fresh difficulties, the state of the classroom, salary, and personal circumstances were the five main variables that were noted. They came to the conclusion that among these elements, workload and compensation had the greatest and least significant roles in motivating instructors to quit their positions. Similarly, Watt & Richardson (2007) highlighted that the growing wage difference between teaching and other professions is a key factor in why people believe that teaching is a less rewarding profession than other disciplines.

According to Abulon (2014), The teacher's wage is a conspicuous disincentive that is frequently defined by poor income along with their overworked and underpaid state. The smartest students are discouraged from accepting the job of teaching the future generation in the Philippines due to the negative image of the teacher. For years, the government's failure to address teachers' predicament led to their grim economic circumstances and a stabbing blow to the profession's honor. For individuals who choose a better profession, the word "teacher" has come to be seen as a joke (Calibo, 2014). In addition, there is a surplus of qualified teachers each year as a result of the low and stagnant demand for teachers throughout the years. Many of our professional instructors were unable to practice their profession because of the nation's educational system's poor capability for absorption (PSA, 2003)

It is with these views and opinions that the researchers wanted to undergo this study. This undertaking explored the lives of education graduates employed as customer service representatives. The focus of this study was to identify the factors and reasons that pushed them to become customer service representatives and what made them remain in the industry. This study wanted to give insights and information to those future graduates who would soon start a career. Thus, this paper explored the journey of education graduates and sought depth understanding of their lived experiences as customer service representatives.

Domain of Inquiry

The primary purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of education graduates working as Customer Service Representatives.

Methods and Materials

The study utilized the phenomenological approach, precisely the hermeneutic phenomenological method of inquiry. The study will explore the lived experience of education graduates working as call center agents. Hermeneutic phenomenology concerns the life world or human experience as it is lived. The focus is on revealing details and seemingly trivial aspects within the experience that may take for granted to generate a sense of knowledge and meaning (Wilson & Hutchinson, 1991). Likewise, Annells (1996) viewed hermeneutics as an interpretive development that pursues to bring understanding and disclosure of the phenomena through language. Moreover, hermeneutics is the study of human cultural activity as texts with a view interpretation to find intended or expressed meanings (Kvale, 1996).

The participants of the study were Education graduates employed as Customer Service Representatives. They were explicitly Education majors who had been employed in different

BPO companies and must have been working in the industry for a couple of months or a year. In addition, the number of participants was determined by data saturation.

To analyze the data, the researchers used the Colaizzi method. Colaizzi's (1978) unique seven-step process provides a rigorous analysis, with each step staying close to the data. The result was a concise yet sweeping description of the phenomenon under study, validated by the participants that created it. The method depends upon which first-person accounts of experience; these might come from face-to-face interviews but could also obtain in multiple ways; written narratives, blogs, researched diaries, and online interviews. The stages were illustrated in the table below.

Ethical Consideration

Each of the eight (8) informants was invited to a private session by the researchers in order to safeguard and uphold the ethical standards in research. informed them of the study's significance. They were given a full explanation of the research study's facts. It explains the purpose and framework of the study, the specifics of how and why they were selected as informants, and the potential advantages and drawbacks of participation. Participants were also told that they have the right to revoke their consent to participate in the study at any moment. They were also told by the researchers that their participation was optional. The informants had the right to refuse to answer any questions during the interviews if they so desired. The informants were similarly ensured that their identities are protected throughout the study using fictitious/pseudo names. Any information they revealed is treated with high respect and confidentially. In addition, the informants are assured that they can access anything they want to know about the results or findings of the study. The participants are also given ample time to decide whether to participate in the study. The respondents signed informed consent before the interview session commences.

Results and Discussion

This section contains the materials gathered throughout an interview. Colaizzi's Method was utilized for interpreting and analyzing the gathered data. The researchers discovered the following themes based on the data collected (1) The Credentials, (2) I was Discourage, (3) Motivation, (4) The BPO Businesses, (5) The Challenges, (6) Bad Habits.

Theme 1: The Credentials

This theme presents the accreditation/qualification of education graduates as one of the requirements to teach in public schools. In this part, the education graduates tackle their journey of achievement as bachelor's Degree holders.

Subtheme 1.1: Licensed Teacher. This subtheme presents the quality of education graduates employed as customer service representatives after becoming bachelor's degree holders. According to informants 1 and 6, they passed the Licensure Examination for Teachers

after they graduated from college and are now licensed teachers working as customer service representatives.

"Luckily na ka apil ko sa last Board Exam before Covid, and on the same year 2019 pag gawas sa result sa PRC isa akong pangalan ang na ka pasar that December 1, 2019, the result came out for December 2019 Board Exam. Yes! I am a Bachelor of Elementary Education graduate, so education licensed teacher ko, unya Customer Service Representative ko karun."
Informant 1

"I graduated in 2013, took up the exam in the same year, and passed in the same year. I was able to teach for 3 years, and I am handling both elementary and high school, and also handled college learners as well."
Informant 6

Subtheme 2.2: Teaching Experiences. This subtheme presents the teaching experiences of the informants. Informant three (3) already had teaching experience in private schools for one year.

"Yes, nakasulay ko sa private 1 year" **Informant 3**

"It was really good. ESL work is different from private school because we do not have much work to do like we are just; going since it is an offline class, we are going to teach students face to face. Students are going to go to our room, and then we do not know what they will ask us to teach. Only grammar so good, so I taught Japanese students, but they are not most of them like studying abroad. Hmmm! Because they want to take ESOL, something like an English portion can help them find a job abroad, so that is why most of our lessons students were like pronunciation classes and then grammar classes."

Informant 4

Another Informant said that working as an ESL teacher was less on paper works and the student would ask them what to teach, unlike in teaching private or public schools, teachers were the ones who would prepare everything.

"Yeah, in my first year of teaching, I'm an adviser of grade 5 learners, in my first year of teaching. I did not find it a struggle, although they are a handful less supervision because you can put them in your pockets. Unlike high school learners, they are rebellious with their way." **Informant 6**

In addition, Informant six (6) stated that in his first year of teaching, he did not find a struggle compared to teaching High school because learners were rebellious in their way.

THEME 2: Disappointment and Frustration

This theme presents the reasons and discouragement of the informants on why they did not prefer to pursue teaching as their profession.

Subtheme 2.1. I don't like teaching. This subtheme presents the factors why education graduates did not pursue teaching as their profession. This includes education was not their first choice. Also, the presence of their family members influenced their decision to pursue the course.

“Teaching was not my first choice on what gonna be my course getting, so it the influence of my aunt, who is a teacher. My parents also push me to be in line with this job because they already have a seaman. They already have a chef, and they already have the police, they do not have a teacher, which is very common to our bloodline, so I was the chosen one, no choice, because you know I was not born with the silver spoon, so I took up education.” **Informant 6**

Moreover, informant six (6) shared that teaching was not their first choice; it was a choice of their relatives. It was due to the financial crisis, and they could not afford a higher course or the course that the informant wanted.

Subtheme 2.2: Less teaching opportunities. This subtheme discussed why education graduates could not pursue jobs as teachers. Every year, more education students graduate, but fewer opportunities for employment in the teaching profession were available.

According to informant one (1), due to a lack of points, the informant was not hired in public schools and then indicated that it was difficult to apply in public schools whether they already had an experience in teaching.

“True, actually naa pa nag-una nako pila pa ka years sila ga apply. Ila gali experience kay pure teaching wala pa jud gali sila ka sulod.”

“Oo, naka try nako pero nakulangan sa points para maka pasar. 70 mana na no? ang pasar sa public. 69 ra man ako points.” **Informant 1**

“Maglisod ka ug pangita ug opportunity sa kana na profession like kanang gustong magpublic kailangan pasila maghulat ug tuig usa maka item dili siya practical” **Informant 3**

Lastly, according to informant three (3), it took much work to find an opportunity to teach in public schools, for it takes time, effort, and energy. One needs to wait if there was an available position, and it was practical to wait for a short time.

THEME 3: Motivation and Financial Stability

This theme presents the motivation of education graduates working as customer service representatives.

Subtheme 3.1: Salary. This subtheme presents the reasons for education graduates working as customer service representatives. Their thoughts was based on their perspectives and experience working as customer service representatives. These include the higher salary offered by the company compared to teaching.

“The salary because call center agencies offer a much higher salary than another job, especially for teaching in private schools.” – Informant 1

“What motivates me is the salary kay mas dako pa kaysa teaching.”
Informant 3

Informant three (3) added that the salary for working as a customer service representative was much higher compared to teaching, especially in teaching private schools.

“The salary motivates me despite how toxic the work is. I always think this is the reality, and this work will help my family and me.” Informant 2

Furthermore, another informant shared that they preferred to work in the BPO industry despite the toxic environment and stressful work due to the excellent compensation compared to teaching with a small salary.

Subtheme 3.2 Well compensated. This subtheme presents the satisfaction of education graduates working in Business Process Outsourcing Companies because they were well compensated.

“The salary because call center agencies offer a much higher salary than another job, especially for teaching in private schools.” Informant 3

As stated by informant three (3), no regrets about working in the BPO industry due to the excellent compensation.

“No, there is no regret at all, and I feel thankful to have this job and be part of the BPO Industry. I feel satisfaction since the compensation is excellent, and because of this job, I can help my family by providing for their needs.”

Informant 7

Subtheme 3.3 Self-enhancement. This subtheme presents how education graduates working as customer service representatives improved or changed one's personalities and professionalism.

“Regrets for me, no, because as I mentioned earlier, it helps off my shell also, it seems you are confident to show who you are. So, there are no regrets because I learned many koan lessons and experienced working as a Customer Service Representatives. In regards with family pressure and akong pamilya wa mo pressure because mama also knows when time comes naga mapulan nako

sa customer service representative kabalo man siya mo apply ko sa public school as teacher sa DEPED” **Informant 1**

Moreover, Informant one (1) added that working in BPO boosts confidence and makes you out of your comfort zone, and you eventually learn lessons and experiences in life.

“My experience in the BPO industry is pretty much doing well. I'm exposed to a lot of meetings, a lot of training which hone my skills my ability to speak in front of a lot of people by speech and oral communication skills that all I can think.” **Informant 6**

Additionally, the informant explained that working as a customer service representative somehow develops and hones one's ability, especially in communication skills and in speaking in front of a lot of people.

THEME 4: The BPO Businesses

This theme presents the ways and techniques of a customer service representative in handling different customers' complaints and problems

Subtheme 4.1 Strategies. This subtheme presents the strategies of customer service representatives on how they handled work, dealt with irate customers, and provided excellent solutions to the customer's concerns.

“Actually, dako nga advantage ug education graduate ka nag trabaho ka ug customer service representative as what you mentioned gi nurture man ta during our college days diba gi nurture manta nga taasan atong pasensya para sa mga bata sus samot pa jud taasan nimo imong pasensya para sa mga tigulang like ang akong account health insurance man ang of course its 65 years old above American in the United States of America man. Ngano dli man covered akong dental, ngano wal man covered sa kong eyeglasses dili ko kakita, unsa man akong mabuhay wala man koy ikabayad so imong taasan imong pasensya.” **Informant 1**

As stated by Informant one (1), education graduates working as customer service representatives had a great advantage because they are nurtured to be patient in dealing with students, which was substantial working in the BPO industry.

“Yes, basically when I reach out to customers, I focus more on educating man gud for customers' complaints, so there is a way we can educate the customers. In a way, you would not still be mad without using too much emotion because of that, and we apply that also in customer service.” **Informant 2**

However, Informant two (2) stated that in dealing with customers, they were also educating them about their complaints and giving solutions to their problems, so education graduates working in the BPO industry were a great advantage.

"We have protocols for that, and we just need to calm ourselves and try to relay to the customer or the client and solve the problem as much as possible." **Informant 3**

Furthermore, according to informant three (3), in solving the customers' problems, one just needs to be patient and calmly communicate with the customer.

"Yes, miss, patience with irate customers." **Informant 4**

Lastly, according to Informant 4, being humble and approaching customers nicely despite the customer's toxicity was very important as a customer service representative.

THEME 5: The challenges

This theme explains the challenges experienced by education graduates while working as customer service representatives and how they cope with them.

Subtheme 5.1 Time Management. This subtheme presents the working schedule of Education graduates working in Business Process Outsourcing. It was a challenge for them since they were working the night shift and the work schedule changed timely.

"Ah, okay, I think the biggest challenge is the working schedule because you are working at night, and sometimes when you go home, there might be danger in the area or way you live. And working at night is very hard because it's very tiring." **Informant 3**

As informant three (3) stated, working at night was very challenging because they might be in trouble or danger when going to work.

"Aside sad ana kulang imo tulog, labi na adjust-adjust ang time clock sa gawas. Since amoa alas twelve (12) jud dapat mata naka sa ala una hantud sa buntag. Mag adjust jud imong tulog ana mora ug maboang kay mao lagi need man gyud nimu mo trabaho. So, magmata ka ana ug time na ting katulog nimu." **Informant 4**

Moreover, one informant expressed that the biggest challenge of working as a customer service representative was the adjustment to biological time working at night and sleeping during the day, which may affect the agents' health.

"You need to have a rest because you don't have ample time to sleep when you're in the BPO because you struggle with your time or sleeping hours"

because you'll be in nocturnal you know the animal you'll be awake during the night and sleep during the day a lot of factors wherein you will be affected within your sleep it's because during the day it's so very hot you can't sleep there are a lot of noises outside, but if you are the type of person just good with the noise outside people working and active during day you can't stop for them not to make noise, so that's it." Informant 6

Lastly, it was difficult to sleep with the noise outside, primarily if one worked in the BPO industry and went to bed during the day, according to informant six (6).

Subtheme 4.5: Mental health. This subtheme presents the mental health problems experienced by Education graduates working as customer service representatives that could have caused stress.

"Lisod jud kaayu ang call center kay sa work man gud labi na daghan ang calls, focus ka sa imong monitor, focus ka sa problem sa imo costumer. Sige kag dawag sa ilang problem. Aside ana wa kay mahimo, kasab-an pa ka ang worst kay I fuck paka. So mura didto, ma challenge jud ka kung unsa ka kagahi siya akong na koanan. Hilak lang ka nga wala kahibalo tungod goro sa kakapoy sa lawas na wala ka kasabot. Tarung man ta imong tulog pero inig mata nimu you feel unmotivated. Di na ka ganahan mo trabaho. Nakaingun gud ko na kaning call center kay di jud siya para sa tanan. Niya Ubay-ubay ra gyud ang magdugay kay tungod affected jud kaayu ilang mental health permi pa kang magkasakit." Informant 5

As stated by informant five (5), it was not easy and very challenging working as a customer service representative, and not all would stay in the industry for too long because it could affect one's mental health.

"What is my advice, maybe try not to dili seryosohon ang job kay pagseryosohon nimu siya maayu medyo toxic ang work place. Tapos kapoy ang imohang job kay gabii na ang inyung duty. Just try to enjoy ang imohang job as customer service representative". Informant 3

However, Informant three (3) advised that if you work as a customer service representative, one should not take the job seriously, knowing its toxic environment.

THEME 6: Bad habits

This theme presented education graduates' bad habits while working as customer service representatives.

Subtheme 6.1: Smoking. This subtheme presents the issue of customer service representatives who smoke during their duties.

“Well, speaking kanang manigarilyo akong uban mga kauban sa trabaho naa pod gani mga girls na manigarilyo.” **Informant 1**

According to informant one (1), some of their workmates and even girls would smoke at work.

“Sometimes, depende sa sitwasyon”. **Informant 7**

As stated by informant seven (7), smoking was a way to relieve sleepiness and stress at work. It happens during working hours or depending on the situation.

“Dili man ko mo smoke kay makadaot nas бага. Ang uban siguro sa amoa especially mga boys sila gyud na ang kosog kaayo mo smoke sa trabahoan, bisan working hours.” **Informant 8**

Subtheme 6.2: Drunk. This subtheme presents the issuance of some workmates who got drunk in times of duty.

“Ang mga boys nako nga mga friend mag bar jud hinoon sila unya manginom ug Beer. Mag standby na sila didto.” **Informant 1**

As informant one (1) recollected, after work, some of their colleagues would go to the bar to have fun and drink alcohol to unwind.

“One-time ra man to pero dili ko hubog gamay ra gud kaayo. Ang akong mga amego sila pero maka manage pa man sila sa work kay not really man gyud hubog.” **Informant 3**

Moreover, informant three (3) stated that one time he was a little bit drunk while on duty but still managed to do the work.

“Ako musulod manko ug bar pero muadto rako didto mo inom ra man. Basta ma stressed ko, mag relaxed ra ko sa place.” **Informant 3**

"Ah yes, but occasionally mo drink ko but Dili ko mo duty ug hubog ha." **Informant 6**

“Dili man gyud malikayan sa nga kapoy ang trabaho, so we also need relaxation. Naa man say manulod ug bar pero dili tanan ha. Pero wala ra ug musulod sa bar manginom ra gud ug Beer ginagmay pawala sa kakapoy sa work.” **Informant 7**

Lastly, informant seven (7) shared that working as a customer service representative was exhausted so, they also wanted to have some relaxation; one way was going to the bar.

Subtheme 6.3 Affairs. This subtheme presents the affair of some workmates acting lascivious with their co-workers.

“Kanang ka mingle or char-char. Uso gyud ng fling-fling didto sa workplace kay diha mura ug makatapok naman ang mga tao or workers. Aside ana mag sige sad kita tungod sa trabaho. Naa gani toy time during working hours naay mag kiss-kiss ka workmates nimo.” **Informant 3**

According to Informant three (3), some of their workmates were kissing during working hours, which was inappropriate, especially while on duty.

“Okay since daghan man gyud mag fling-fling or mag mingle-mingle didto sa workplace. Pero possible pod tingali ang naay kabit-kabit but I think that's too personal maong di gyud ta maka tell nga siya maoy kabit or unsa ba.” **Informant 7**

However, informant seven (7) stated it was typical for workmates to have "fling-fling," and worst, that some were having affairs, but it was only heard and observed by the informant in the workplace.

Discussion

The study yielded education graduates in the call center industry have the credential for teaching, they are board passers and some have worked in both public and private schools. According to Zhang (2008), two factors linked to teacher quality are teacher experience and education level. A fully qualified teacher is a person of competence and abilities who possesses dignity and a reputation for having strong moral standards, in addition to passing the board exam and earning the teaching license (Salandanan and Corpuz, 2011)..

In addition, another study finding showed that the teachers were discouraged to teach since they thought the job offered fewer prospects. Many beginning teacher educators have experienced culture shock and stress from working in such demanding academic environments while seeking to juggle numerous and frequently conflicting demands (Cole, 1999; Kitchen, 2008). According to Dinkelman et al. (2006), teacher educators must balance the needs of a variety of stakeholders, including mentor teachers, administrators, and students.

Moreover, the study also identified various factors, such as the high pay, which influence education graduates' decision to work as call center agents. With pay and financial incentives, the call center has attracted employees. Call center employees make more than twice the minimum wage set by law. Additionally, call center employees who work graveyard shifts to receive a 30 to 50 percent higher night differential pay (IBON, 2003). A new generation of relatively wealthy and financially independent young Filipinos has been produced by the sector thanks to the more than 100 call centers spread around the nation (Greenlees, 2006).

Another finding of the study presented the ways and techniques of a customer service representative in handling different customers' complaints and problems. According to Kumar (2019), call center agents frequently handle a ton of information and completely boring, repetitive duties. To placate and please the most challenging clients, they frequently have to pretend to feel good.

Furthermore, the study also revealed the challenges experienced by education graduates while working as customer service representatives and how they cope with them. According to Kumar (2019), call center employees typically face stress while at work as a result of the high standards set by management, fluctuating workloads, and rising customer expectations. They also have to achieve performance metrics and productivity targets. Because one of the organization's goals is to treat customers with the utmost respect, call center representatives may experience emotional distress as a result of having to deal with difficult clients while also providing exceptional customer service (Mukherjee et al., 2009). Additionally, the calls are tightly and continuously monitored, which can add to management's pressure while also posing challenges with the usage of modern technology (Annakis, Lobo, & Pillay, 2011).

Finally, the study shed light on the bad habits that were developed in working as a call center agent. According to popular belief, call center employees are more promiscuous and prone to vices like drinking and smoking, which are risk factors for unsafe sexual conduct (Raymundo and Cruz, 2004; Marquez, 2009). The study of Kamabalan et. al.(2010) found that call center agents have a higher experience to the following behaviors: casual sex, non-romantic regular sex (FUBU), sex with multiple partners, sex with the same sex, commercial sex, unprotected sex, early sex, and premarital sex, particularly notable is the greater sexual risk exposure of males working in call centers.

Conclusion

The study's rich narrative data revealed the lives of education graduates who went on to work as call center representatives. The teachers chose to work in the BPO sector due to financial constraints and a lack of opportunities in the teaching profession. Moreover, the work schedule and issues with mental health presented difficulties for the teachers in the BPO industry, and some of them adopt undesirable behaviors such as smoking and drinking as a coping mechanism. Thus, the findings recommend that the government should not only provide more teaching positions in the state-run schools but increase the salary and provides enough incentives to public school teachers to attract education graduates to pursue teaching position. Further, it recommends that BPO industries should conduct programs and activities that promote mental health.

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