

A Phenomenological Research on Smart-Shaming and Its Impact on the Productive Skills of High-Performing Learners: Basis for Anti-Smart-Shaming Campaign

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Abstract

Purpose. This study aimed to develop a program that would address the increasing cases of smart-shaming in Sta. Lucia National High School. It also sought to describe the smart-shaming experience of SLNHS high-performing learners, explore the contexts and situations which have influenced or affected high-performing learners' experience of the phenomenon, and discover the impact of smart-shaming to the productive skills of high-performing learners.

Design/Methodology/Approach. This study utilized a qualitative phenomenological research design to uncover the lived experiences of the participants in terms of the smart-shaming phenomenon. The informants of the study were 5 high-performing learners of Sta. Lucia National, 5 parents of the high-performing learners, and 3 English teachers of the academic year 2020-2021 who were chosen purposively. In-depth interviews with the said informants were conducted to gather the necessary data. Through Hycner's (1999) Explication Process, data were analyzed. It was ensued by the development of the anti-smart-shaming campaign.

Findings. It was found out that smart-shaming negatively affects high-performing learners' studies, self-esteem, and socialization. Emerging themes from high-performing learners' smart-shaming experiences are smart-shaming terms, and perceived effects of smart-shaming to high-performing learners. It was also revealed that various contexts and situations may influence or affect high-performing learners' experience of the smart-shaming phenomenon. These contexts and situations are themed as smart-shaming opportunities, types of smart-shamers, types of smart-shaming, changed views of high-performing learners, parent's awareness of their child's smart-shaming experiences, smart-shaming victims' coping mechanism, and smart shaming solutions. Findings also show that the smart-shaming phenomenon creates negative impact on high-performing learners' speaking skills while its impact to high-performing learners' writing skills varies from person to person.

Research Limitations/Implications. This study is limited to the informants' shared experiences, feelings, and perceptions. A parallel study with a different locale may obtain varied results.

Originality/Value. There are only few studies dealing with smart-shaming and at present, there is no existing study that relates the smart-shaming phenomenon to the productive skills of high-performing learners. With this said, this research could offer a different angle of the abovementioned phenomenon that could help contribute to the findings of the existing researches.

Key Words: Smart-shaming, Productive Skills, High-Performing Learners

Introduction

During the earlier years, intellectuals or persons with highly developed intellect were highly respected and praised for their remarkable contributions in the society. Intelligence back then was celebrated for it is viewed as something powerful, something that could ease the way of life, and something that could affect change to

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the lives of many. Before, intellectuals who discovered useful inventions, laws, theories, and concepts were given due credits for they were highly regarded for their wisdom.

However, today's generation, termed as "Generation Z," happened to have a different perspective when it comes to intellectuals. This new generation is known as Gen Z, but have also been called I Gen, Founders, and Centennials. Dimock (2019) marked 1996 as the endpoint of the Millennial generation and 1997 as the beginning of Gen Z. Thus, the age range of this generation is from 8-23 in the year 2020 which means that students of today belong to this generation.

Recent research has shown dramatic shifts in youth behaviors, attitudes and lifestyles-both positive and concerning- for those who came of age in this era (Dimock, 2019). Based on the findings of Generational White Paper (2011), Gen Z has an informal, individual and very straight way of communicating. Gen Z also tends to be more impatient, instant minded, lacking the ambitions of previous generations, have acquired attention deficit disorder with a high dependency on the technology and a very less attention span, individualistic, self-directed, more demanding, acquisitive, materialistic and entitled generation so till now (Gaidhani, Sharma, & Arora, 2019).

According to Gaidhani, Sharma, and Arora (2019), Gen Z has brought new worldview and different expectations as customers, employees, and citizens. Youth of this generation are determined to be highly connected, living in an era of high-tech communication, technology driven lifestyles and prolific use of social media. In fact, the *Institute for Emerging Issues* (2012), defined Gen Z as the most ethnically diverse and technologically sophisticated generation (Gaidhani, Sharma, & Arora, 2019).

In relation to this, Amanda Slavin (2015) finds that Gen Z wants to be heard irrespective of their young age. Technology is a part of their identity and they are tech savvy but lack problem-solving skills and have not demonstrated the ability to look at a situation, put in context, analyze it and make a decision (Joseph Coombs, 2013 in Gaidhani, Sharma, & Arora, 2019).

Gen Z grew up in a technology-rich environment where they were highly-influenced by social media. They used to document their lives online which most of the time causes comparison among their peers. In social media, the said generation are also exposed to rampant cases of bullying and bashing. With these said, this generation tend to bring these negative influence of the virtual world into the real world .

Nowadays, most of the common Gen Z learners show disgust instead of admiration to the smart ones. The intellectuals tend to be humiliated when expressing their thoughts in school. They also tend to receive sarcastic and negative comments from their classmates once they performed better than the rest of the class. Based on the aforesaid treatment, Gen Z seem to be promoting a new trend that is mediocrity.

Mediocrity, as defined in Meriam Webster, is the state of being ordinary. Since majority of the class are usually average learners, they are more dominant than the smarter ones. This means that their opinion in class may heavily count or they can easily influence others. However, promoting mediocrity in class through smart-shaming is something that should be put to an end and to be given appropriate actions to prevent intellectuals from hiding in their shells.

Background of the Study

At present, there is a growing trend of smart-shaming in schools which is becoming a very alarming condition to learners. Sta. Romana (2015), in her article "*Smart-shaming and our Pinoy culture of Anti-intellectualism*,"

stated that there is a pervasive thread in the Filipino culture that seems to celebrate ignorance. She also emphasized that Filipinos tend to see high intelligence as a negative trait and in turn, playfully shame people when they're "too smart" for our common tastes.

Cusi (2019), in his study *"Isang Pagninilay sa Kultura ng Panghihiya sa mga Matatalino,"* illustrated a smart-shaming scenario in the classroom. This happens when an intellectual shares a rich thought in class but tend to be interrupted by terms like *"ang lalim mo naman," "eh di ikaw na,"* and *"ang galing mo naman."* These phrases connote that the listeners refuse to listen further to the smart learner's ideas. These terms also intend to ridicule rather than to praise intellectuals. Instead of having a meaningful discussion in class, smart-shaming terms tend to suppress ideas (Cusi, 2019).

As an educator, the researcher witnessed some cases of smart-shaming in her English and Filipino classes at Sta. Lucia National High School in Dolores, Quezon. In the said locale, high-performing learners tend to be smart-shamed when they share their rich thoughts or opinions orally in class, when they use the English language fluently, or when a teacher praises the learners' answers or outputs. The researcher also observed that smart-shaming also happens when the teacher announces the highest pointer in a written activity. The smart-shaming terms such as *"edi wow," "ikaw na," "bida-bida"* and *"pabibo,"* are commonly uttered by smart-shamers even with the presence of the teacher in class which then results to the mortification of the smart-shaming victim. These instances discourage the learner to strive to be smarter and eventually hinder the victims to express themselves freely. This smart-shaming scenario does not only happen in the workplace of the researcher but also in other locales as evident in the existing studies of Rodriguez (2017), Abuan et.al. (2019), Cusi (2019) and in the wide range of articles circulating online such as that of Sta. Romana (2015), Baygan (2016), Chino (2018), and Pillos (2019) just to cite a few. The said context shows how alarming the smart-shaming phenomenon becomes in the educational setting.

The aforesaid observations of the researcher violate the student-friendly concept of the Department of Education since it does not make the learning environment conducive and non-threatening to learners. DepEd Order No. 40 s. 2012, known as DepEd Child Protection Policy, states that pursuant to the 1987 Constitution, the State shall defend the right of children to assistance, including proper care and nutrition, and special protection from all forms of neglect, abuse, cruelty, exploitation and other conditions prejudicial to their development (Article XV, Section 3, {2}). It is also cited in this order that DepEd, together with its partners and stakeholders, shall ensure that all schools are conducive to the education of children and the best interest of the child shall be the paramount consideration in all decisions and actions involving children. DepEd also reiterates a zero tolerance policy for any act of child abuse, exploitation, violence, discrimination, bullying, and other forms of abuse.

In a similar vein, Republic Act No. 10627 also known as Anti-Bullying Act of 2013 requires all elementary and secondary schools to adopt policies to prevent and address the acts of bullying in their institutions.

With these existing policies, learners must be protected in all aspects. But with the advent of smart-shaming, learners became targets of psychological violence. Psychological violence, as defined in D.O. No. 40 s. 2012, refers to acts or omissions causing or likely to cause mental or emotional suffering of the child, such as but not limited to intimidation, harrassment, stalking, damage to property, public ridicule or humiliation, deduction or threat of deduction from grade or merit as a form of punishment, and repeated verbal abuse.

This appalling situation triggered the researcher to study the impact of smart-shaming to the productive skills of high-performing learners since they are the ones commonly victimized by smart-shaming. The researcher finds it significant to conduct this phenomenological research for it would unveil the lived experiences of SLNHS high-performing learners that could provide a rich source of data to understand the smart-shaming phenomenon. Also, there are only few studies dealing with smart-shaming; thus, it is necessary to conduct this type of research to gain better understanding and to give more light to the said phenomenon. This study is considered as novel by the researcher since at present, there is no existing study that relates the smart-shaming phenomenon to the productive skills of high-performing learners. With this said, this research could offer a different angle of the above mentioned phenomenon that could help contribute to the findings of the existing researches. As an educator, the researcher considers herself as the right person to conduct the study since she had witnessed how the smart-shaming phenomenon influenced the performance of her learners. The researcher also has the enthusiasm to resolve the existing problems caused by the phenomenon.

Based on the aforementioned concepts, the researcher decided to conduct a phenomenological research on smart-shaming and its impact to the productive skills of high-performing learners. The results of this study are expected to become a basis to develop a program that would address the increasing cases of smart-shaming in schools.

Objectives of the Study

This study is aimed at discovering the impact of smart-shaming to the productive skills of high-performing learners of Sta. Lucia National High School in Dolores, Quezon for the academic year 2020-2021.

Specifically, the study sought to achieve the following objectives:

1. Describe the experience of SLNHS high-performing learners in terms of the smart-shaming phenomenon.
2. Explore the contexts and situations which have influenced or affected SLNHS high-performing learners' experience of the phenomenon.
3. Discover the impact of smart-shaming to the productive skills of high-performing learners.
4. Develop a program that would address the increasing cases of smart-shaming in schools.

Theoretical Framework

Smart-shaming is a form of verbal or electronic type of bullying which could affect learners' self-esteem in expressing their thoughts in school. Being a victim of this kind of bullying might hinder learners to make use or to improve their productive skills so as to avoid being ridiculed or humiliated in class. Thus, this study is anchored on Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs developed by Abraham Maslow and in the Theory of Second Language Acquisition of Stephen Krashen.

According to Maslow (1943), esteem centers around seeking recognition from others and from oneself as a worthwhile person. Thus, one's sense of competence combined with reaction from others produces one's self-esteem. This need is satisfied when one experiences feelings of worth, strength, usefulness and confidence. Maslow (1943) suggests students must be shown that they are valued and respected in the classroom. Maslow (1943) also argued that students with a low self-esteem will not progress academically at an optimum rate until their self-esteem is strengthened.

Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis in his Theory of Second Language Acquisition states that a number of affective variables play a facilitative, but non-causal, role in second language acquisition. These variables include motivation, self-confidence, anxiety, and personality traits. Learners with high motivation, self-confidence, a good self-image, a low level of anxiety and extroversion are better equipped for success in second language acquisition. Low motivation, low self-esteem, anxiety, introversion and inhibition can raise the affective filter and form a "mental block" that prevents comprehensible input from being used for acquisition. In other words, when the filter is up, it impedes language acquisition (Schutz, 2019).

When learners experience smart-shaming, it drives them to have lack of confidence, motivation and may even develop anxiety. Though they may regard themselves as smart and capable of expressing and sharing rich ideas, they tend to suppress those for they might be affected by what others would think or say about their capabilities. Thus, it hinders learners to reach the top of the Hierarchy of Needs, self-actualization, which allows learners to recognize and make use of their full potentials. The smart-shaming phenomenon also impedes second language acquisition for it raises the affective filter of the learners.

With the outcome of this study, it is anticipated that high-performing learners' esteem needs would first be satisfied in order to reach the peak of the hierarchy and that the affective variables that may affect second language acquisition be taken into account.

Methodology

Locale of the Study

The study was conducted at Sta. Lucia National High School in Dolores, Quezon where several high-performing learners were victimized by smart-shaming. The increasing cases of smart-shaming in the aforesaid institution was also taken into consideration in deciding upon the locale of the study.

Research Design

This study utilized a phenomenological qualitative research design to uncover the lived experiences of the participants in terms of the smart-shaming phenomenon. According to Creswell (2004), phenomenological research seeks to discover how individuals construct meaning of the human experience.

Participants

The key informants of the study were 5 high-performing learners of Sta. Lucia National High School from Junior High School to Senior High School, 5 parents of the high-performing learners, and 3 English teachers for the academic year 2020-2021.

Research Instrument

This research utilized an interview protocol to the three groups of participants in this study such as the high-performing learners, parents and teachers to elicit a rich source of data on the smart-shaming phenomenon.

Analysis of Data

The collected data during interviews were analyzed in accordance to the procedures of Hycner's (1999) explication process comprising of five phases such as (1) bracketing and phenomenological reduction, (2) delineating units of meaning, (3) clustering of units of meaning to form themes, (4) summarizing each interview, validate it and modify where necessary, and (5) extracting general and unique themes. Data were presented in a narrative form containing the detailed information of the smart-shaming phenomenon as revealed by the high-performing learners, parents and teachers.

Summary of Findings, Conclusion, and Recommendations

This chapter presents the summary of findings derived from the phenomenological analysis conducted in this research. Moreover, this imparts the conclusions framed and the recommendations thereafter.

Summary

This study sought to discover the impact of smart-shaming to the productive skills of high-performing learners of Sta. Lucia National High School in Dolores, Quezon for the academic year 2020-2021 with an endview of developing a program to address the smart-shaming cases in schools. Specifically, this study attempted to describe the experience of SLNHS high-performing learners in terms of the smart-shaming phenomenon, explore the contexts and situations which have influenced or affected SLNHS high-performing learners' experience of the phenomenon, discover the impact of smart-shaming to the productive skills of high-performing learners, and develop a program that would address the increasing cases of smart-shaming in schools.

Using the phenomenological design, the results and analysis were done qualitatively by means of coding and decoding of the interview transcripts gathered from in-depth interviews. This study was conducted at Sta. Lucia National High School in Dolores, Quezon where high-performing learners were victimized by smart-shaming. A total of five (5) student informants, five (5) parent informants, and (3) teacher informants were purposively chosen to serve as the main sources of data in this research. An anti-smart-shaming program was developed based on the analysis of the results of the study.

Findings

Based on the foregoing research objectives, the following findings are revealed:

1. Smart-shaming negatively affects high-performing learners' studies, self-esteem, and socialization. Emerging themes from high-performing learners' smart-shaming experiences are smart-shaming terms, and perceived effects of smart-shaming to high-performing learners.
2. Various contexts and situations may influence or affect high-performing learners' experience of the smart-shaming phenomenon. These contexts and situations are themed as smart-shaming opportunities, types of smart-shamers, types of smart-shaming, changed views of high-performing learners, parent's awareness of their child's smart-shaming experiences, smart-shaming victims' coping mechanism, and smart shaming solutions.

3. The smart-shaming phenomenon creates negative impact on high-performing learners' speaking skills while its impact to high-performing learners' writing skills varies from person to person.
4. An anti-smart-shaming program has been developed based on the results of the study.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions are drawn:

1. Smart-shaming hinders learning for it negatively affects the intellectual, emotional, and social aspects of high-performing learners.
2. Different contexts and situations relating to smart-shaming emotionally affect both smart-shaming victims and their parents.
3. Smart-shaming impedes second language acquisition since it raises the affective filter of the learners in speaking. However, its impact on writing varies from person to person as it may have no effect, little effect, or positive effect depending on the manner high-performing learners handle their smart-shaming experience.
4. The developed anti-smart-shaming program may be evaluated by school administrators and the child protection committee for its effectiveness in addressing the negative effects caused by the smart-shaming phenomenon.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusions, the following recommendations are hereby offered:

1. School heads and members of the child protection committee may take appropriate actions to mitigate the smart-shaming cases in schools so as to ensure that the learning milieu is safe and conducive to learners.
2. Teachers may be aware of and responsive to the learners' smart-shaming experiences to protect victims from smart-shamers.
3. Teachers might also promote the continuous development of learners' productive skills despite of their smart-shaming experiences by providing positive feedback and by employing innovative teaching strategies that would encourage and engage victims.
4. Parents may regularly monitor their child's experiences in school so as to take immediate actions when necessary.
5. The developed anti-smart-shaming program may be implemented by schools to address the negative effects brought about by the smart-shaming phenomenon in the learning environment.
6. Parallel and/or follow up studies may be conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of the developed anti-smart-shaming program.
7. Future researchers may replicate this study using other locales and with increased number of informants.

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