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## LIVED EXPERIENCES AND SUCCESS STORIES OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLE IN TARLAC

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### Abstract

Tarlac is recognized as the “Melting Pot” of Central Luzon because it caters diverse individuals, culture and language. It is the most multicultural province in Central Luzon, because it is made up of integrated ethnolinguistic groups - the Tagalog, Ilokano, Pampango, Pangasinense and indigenous groups such as the Aeta. The colorful experiences, developed dreams, hardships and sorrows, care and effort carried and associated with the stories of the lives of the natives brought and described different types of capital that will serve, cause and produce unique and rich of culture that will serve as the foundation for having a significant history of the province of Tarlac.

In this regard, the indigenous people are considered to be among the marginalized groups because of their unique way of life, habits, beliefs, and physical characteristics. The stereotype as uneducated and uncivilized distinguishes them from the society they live in, so it is necessary to have a holistic awareness of their biological, social, cultural, religious, linguistic, behavioral, and economic characteristics in order to be fully understanding their identity, identity and personality.

The researcher used traditional research methods in Philippine Psychology such as interview, questioning, visitation and observation. Research participants were purposively selected from based on their success in life. The purpose of the research is to illustrate the hardship, triumphs and the success story of the native Aetas in the province of Tarlac. This research aims to provide a meaningful analysis and narration about the life stories of indigenous people who have been successful in life in various fields. The purpose of the study is to know their experiences and highlight their academic journey towards acquiring their academic title, their internal and external motivation, inspiration, source of strength, courage, hope, fear and dreams, and the factors that affected these aspects.

**Keywords:** Aeta, indigenous people, Melting Pot, Tarlac

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### Introduction

Tarlac is recognized as the “Melting Pot” of Central Luzon because it caters diverse individuals, culture and language. It is the most multicultural province in Central Luzon, because it is made up of integrated ethnolinguistic groups - the Tagalog, Ilokano, Pampango, Pangasinense and indigenous groups such as the Aeta. The colorful experiences, developed dreams, hardships and sorrows, care and effort carried and associated with the stories of the lives of the natives brought and described different types of capital that will serve, cause and produce unique and rich of culture that will serve as the foundation for having a significant history of the province of Tarlac.

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Often at the center of stereotypes as uneducated and uncivilized are the Aeta, Ayta, Agta, Ati or Negrito natives. They are considered to be the first group of people who settled in the Philippines, even before the arrival of foreigners or the arrival of Austronesian people. They are one of the most dominant ethnolinguistic groups living in the mountainous part of Luzon. They describe themselves as indigenous which means “from the land of Pinatubo” (Cura, 2019). According to the book Cultural Center of the Philippines Encyclopedia of Philippine Art vol. 2 1994, the Aeta, Ayta, Agta, Ita or Ati are native Filipinos with brown skin, short height, curly hair, round and big black eyes and a low nose.

They have agile and slender bodies that suit their main occupations of hunting, farming, and planting sweet potatoes, bananas, potatoes, plums, and gabi.

There are different indigenous Aetang groups found in Central Luzon especially in the province of Tarlac, there are Aeta Abelling, Aeta Mag-Anchi, Aeta Hung^ey and others. They have a high regard for their language (Inalvez, 2014). There was variation in their language according to the group they belonged to. They call themselves Ayta which means "man" or "Paran Pinatubo Ayta" which means "people who live near Mt. Pinatubo (Guanzon, 2007). Their names are usually based on their geographical location, relationship with other people and their history. They are known as ancient people who moved from place to place in order to find food and necessities, and sometimes they were unfortunate enough to be evicted from the land that was taxed for life and inherited from their ancestors.

The research focused on the Aeta Abelling tribe of Tarlac, also known as Aeta Abellen or Aeta Aburlin. They inhabit a part of the Zambales Mountain Ranges particularly in areas within the Province of Tarlac (NCIP, 2020). They mostly come from and are found in the towns of San Jose, Capas and Care Tarlac. In some places they are referred to as Aeta Abellen or Aeta Aburlin. They live in civilization itself but the arrival of the Spaniards is what pushed them to go to the mountains. When the Spaniards came they were forced to live in the mountains of Zambales. The Abelling began to live in the mountains and obtain their needs from natural resources (Sicat, 2011). In the study, emphasis was placed on the various capitals that have been instrumental in the success of the indigenous Aeta participants in the research. The interest of the researcher who is in the field of education to study the ethnic groups in the Philippines arose from her experience with the natives due to her participation in the extension services and outreach programs of the university she serves. The Aeta Abelling tribe was chosen to be the focus of the study because more of their number have been successful in their chosen fields. They are also often the university's partners in providing opportunities to indigenous youth who want to complete their studies.

The Aeta Abelling tribe lives in a part of the Zambales Mountain Ranges particularly in areas within the Province of Tarlac (NCIP, 2020). They mostly come from and are found in the towns of San Jose, Capas and Care Tarlac. In some places they are referred to as Aeta Abellen or Aeta Aburlin. They live in civilization itself but the arrival of the Spaniards is what pushed them to go to the mountains. When the Spaniards came they were forced to live in the mountains of Zambales. The Abelling began to live in the mountains and obtain their needs from natural resources (Sicat, 2011). Later, they also started farming, animal husbandry, grazing and mamuso/muso (collecting banana hearts to sell and earn money. While preserving much of their intangible heritage, the Aeta Abelling now share many lowland culture of their neighboring Ilokano-speaking communities (NCIP, 2020).

As we all know, indigenous people are often marginalized in the country. They often are often misunderstood and misinterpreted because they lack in education and opportunities that will meet their needs and fit their culture which is the instrument for them to complete their studies and achieve academic success. The government as well as non-governmental agencies are doing various types of intervention to meet the educational needs of the Aetas, although it is undeniable that access to quality education is still their main need and the lack of opportunities such as the availability of scholarships and grants to help them graduate to college, achieve academic success, find good jobs and enjoy full success in life.

A phenomenological study explores what people experienced and focuses on their experience of a phenomenon. As phenomenology has a strong foundation in philosophy, it is recommended that you explore the writings of key thinkers such as Husserl, Heidegger, and Sartre. The study will utilize the questionnaire of Morales (2022) which is used in her prior research (2022). This will be the basis for the development of the study instrument. From the created list of criteria for each capital, a questionnaire was created and a questionnaire was used on six (6) selected participants who studied and graduated from Tarlac State University who came from different towns in Tarlac. The cycle developed by this paper contains 150-item trait criteria derived from preliminary research conducted by Morales (2022) in his previous research. Using this 150-item questionnaire, the interview and the answering cycle were conducted to determine the initials and the created capital caused by the success in life of the selected study participants. Also they can add and list attributes that are not on the list found in the cycle. Indigenous Aetang participants were purposively selected based on the needs of the research.

The main purpose of this research is to identify the problems, struggles, challenges and conflicts experienced by the respondents. This study also wants to identify the hopes, dreams, achievements and highlight the journey to success of the Aeta natives. The study will thoroughly present the data and knowledge based and anchored in the success story

of indigenous features that will show how different capitals can shape and change the initial capital of the participants in the study. It will also clearly lay out the five capitals that will make a theoretical contribution to Filipino Studies and Cultural Studies.

The available data is based on the actual life stories, experiences, views and knowledge of the selected study respondents. From the gathered information, it was emphasized what are the initial economic capital, cultural capital, social capital, symbolic capital and emotional capital of the participants, how they benefit from it, and how the transformation took place. this. And from the collected data, the implications of the study on Cultural Studies and Filipino Studies will be presented.

This research aims to provide meaningful reporting and narration about the life stories of indigenous people who have been successful in life in various fields. The purpose of the study is also to know the experiences passed to reach their academic title, internal and external motivation, inspiration, source of strength, courage, hope, fear and dream, and the factors that affected these aspects.

The data obtained from the preliminary interview conducted with the indigenous Aetang participants in the study was also used. Through a video recorder, voice recorder and MS Teams, the researcher gathered all the data obtained from the participants, followed by making a transcription and outline to record, align and organize the interview answers. From the framework, the researcher summarized the answers that became the basis of the analysis conducted. Phenomenology is the best method identified by the researcher to be able to analyze the stated purpose and problems of the study. Also, this approach lends itself to gaining knowledge anchored in the real-life situations of the featured Aeta natives resulting in a rich and holistic narrative about their life success story.

The researcher also considered the collected data from the interview with the indigenous Aeta participants in the study. The researcher gave written permission to the Tarlac State University to obtain the list of native scholars who studied and graduated from college at the university. The selection of participants in the study was based on the list provided by the Scholarship and Financial Assistance Unit of Tarlac State University. The interview participants were selected based on their high level of education, success in their field, success story in life, tribe they belong to and their place of origin. The researcher also contacted various tribal chieftains of the Aeta natives to have mediators or primary informants (insiders) who will be the researcher's guide in conducting the study. As for the ethical concern, the researcher gave written consent to the participants to fully consent to be a participant in the study.

The study also focuses on the recognition and understanding of indigenous groups, ways of life and journey towards their success in life. It is important to pay attention and intensify the researches related to Cultural Studies such as studies regarding the life stories of the natives and the factors that affected their success that shaped their personality. It is also appropriate to focus on the publication of cultural studies thereby increasing researches, academic journals and literature that will develop Filipino consciousness towards the realization of nationalistic ideologies. The study aims to serve as a challenge to readers, researchers, Filipino students and scholars and professionals in the academic field to contribute research that will greatly develop the theoretical corpus of Cultural Studies, Filipino Studies, and Tarlaqueño Studies.

### **Statement of the Problem**

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The available data is based on the actual life stories, experiences, views and knowledge of the selected study respondents. From the gathered information, it was emphasized what are the initial economic capital, cultural capital, social capital, symbolic capital and emotional capital of the participants, how they benefit from it, and how the transformation took place. this. And from the collected data, the implications of the study on Cultural Studies and Filipino Studies will be presented.

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The purpose of the research is to illustrate the struggle and success story of the native Aeta people in the province of Tarlac. The study presented their journey towards reaching their dreams and goals in life where their experiences and journeys towards achieving their high level of education, reaching their academic title were emphasized, their internal and external motivations, inspirations, sources of strength, courage, hopes, fears and dreams, and the factors that affected these aspects. This research aims to provide a meaningful analysis and narrative about the life stories of indigenous people who have been successful in life in various fields.

## **Materials and Methods**

### **Methodology**

This chapter is divided into six (6) parts: (1) the method of data collection, (2) the instrument used in data collection, (3) the theoretical bases used in the study, (4) the scope and limitations that show the scope and boundaries of the study, (5) the presentation of ethical concerns in the study, and (6) the conceptual framework that will be the basis for the study's purpose.

### **Data Collection Method**

This phenomenological study explores what indigenous people experienced and focuses on their experience of a phenomenon. As phenomenology has a strong foundation in philosophy, it is recommended that you explore the writings of key thinkers such as Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty before embarking on your research. The research will use traditional methods in Filipino Psychology where a thorough presentation of answers from interviews, questioning, visiting and observation is shown. This is the best method identified by the researcher because many important variants were discussed in order to fully implement the stated problems of the study. Also, this approach is well suited to achieving knowledge anchored in each experience and narrative resulting in a meaningful and holistic success story of indigenous Aeta features. It also presents data that expands and develops readers' knowledge and experience.

The researcher gave a letter of permission to Tarlac State University to obtain the list of native scholars who have graduated college from the university. The selection of participants in the study was based on the list provided by the Scholarship and Financial Assistance Unit of Tarlac State University. The interview participants were selected based on their high level of education, success story in life, tribe they belong to and their place of origin. Most of the participants studied at Tarlac State University, graduated from college and some have masters and doctorate degrees. Featured participants are a Tribal Governor/commissioner, a principal in Sta. Cruz Elementary School (first native Aetang to graduate with a PhD in San Jose, Tarlac), a network engineer and wordpress developer, first principal of TFBC Inc, and an inspirational native Aeta teacher. Most of them have titles, are highly educated and some are recognized and respected in their fields and disciplines. The indigenous features were chosen to emphasize one of the goals is to tell the story of the success of the indigenous Aeta people in Tarlac using Pierre Bourdieu's economic philosophy and theory of capital.

Through a video and voice recorder, the researcher gathered all the data obtained from the participants, followed by making a transcription and outline to record, align and organize the interview answers. From the framework, the researcher summarized the answers that were the basis of the analysis conducted.

The research questionnaire by Morales (2022) will be the basis for the development of the study instrument. The questionnaire was created and used on the selected participants who studied and graduated from Tarlac State University. The questionnaire developed by the researcher contains 150-item trait criteria derived from preliminary research conducted by Morales (2022). Using this 150-item questionnaire, the interview and the answering cycle were conducted to narrate the struggles, triumphs, and the success stories of the selected participants in the study.

To gather sufficient data for the study, the researcher conducted initial interviews with the participants. Rivera is pleased to host the interview on July 30, 2022 at San Sebastian Heights, San Vicente, Tarlac City. While the researcher conducted the interview with Valdez on November 26, 2021 in Sta. Cruz Elementary School. Onia, on the other hand, hosted the interview, on April 4, 2022 in Northern Hills, San Rafael, Tarlac City along with a follow up interview with the other Abaya contestants. Meanwhile, the data collection and interview with Asio and Ignacio was carried out on January 30, 2023 followed by the interview with Panguelo on March 17, 2023.

After the researcher's thorough analysis of the video recordings, audio recordings, and summary of six (6) interviews, it was decided that it is appropriate to use phenomenology. Participants voluntarily gave their signed informed consent. They also agreed to use their real identity in research and published articles that present their life success story. Due to lack of time and money, the researcher was unable to transcribe the six (6) interviews and instead kept them as video and audio recordings. Data from preliminary interviews conducted with indigenous Aeta participants in the study were also used. Through a video recorder and voice recorder, the researcher gathered all the data obtained from the participants, followed by making a transcription and framework to record, align and organize the interview answers. From the framework, the researcher summarized the answers that became the basis of the analysis conducted. The researcher also discussed the transformation of the initial capitals that gave rise to the created capitals that became an important factor in the success of the indigenous participants in the study. This is the best method identified by the researcher because seven variants that are all important were analyzed to fully realize the stated purpose and problems of the study. Also, this approach lends itself to gaining knowledge anchored in the real-life situations of the featured Aeta natives resulting in a rich and holistic narrative about their life success story.

The researcher will use interview, observation and recording of important information to gather enough evidence to support the study. The data gathered will serve as the foundation to cover the whole study. According to Tongcua (2018), interviewing is a type of oral discourse that consists of two people, the interviewer and the interviewee. Conducting an interview is a form of communication where two people want to have a face-to-face conversation to better clarify a topic or issue. This is a meeting where information can be gathered that can be reported or made public. The date, time, day and place of the interview are set during the period when the participants can be interviewed. The researcher started by asking questions to start the discussion in order to gather data and information needed to understand and document the experience and success story of the indigenous Aeta people.

Phenomenology is utilized in the study. Phenomenological research is a qualitative research approach that seeks to understand and describe the universal essence of a phenomenon. This approach will highlight the lived experiences of the Aeta native respondents in the study while suspending the researchers' preconceived assumptions about the phenomenon. In line with this, phenomenological research studies aims to identify deeper insights into how people understand those experiences.

Researchers using phenomenological research design assume that people use a universal structure or essence to make sense of their experience. They interpret the participants' feelings, perceptions, and beliefs to clarify the essence of the phenomenon under investigation. Phenomenological research design requires the researcher to bracket whatever a priori assumption they have about the experience or phenomenon.

Furthermore, researchers use phenomenological research designs to understand a phenomenon's universal nature by exploring the views of those who have experienced it. This approach is popularly used to study lived experience, gain a deeper understanding of how human beings think, and expand a researcher's knowledge about a phenomenon. For example, a researcher could explore a phenomenon like antisocial behavior in the workplace, women's experiences with a particular disease, and many more. The researcher used traditional methods in Filipino Psychology where the thorough presentation of the answers from questioning (Javier), conversation (Javier), interaction (Enriquez, Javier), interview, visiting and observation was shown. The research participants from different towns in Tarlac were purposely selected based on the level of education attained, academic title, profession and field they belong to.

The purpose of the research is to illustrate the struggle and transformation of capitals in the success story of the native Aeta professionals in the province of Tarlac. The study will present the success stories of selected respondents. Where the dynamics of Bourdieu's capitals were emphasized in the story of the success of the Aeta people in Tarlac. Also focused on the initial economic capital of the respondents, how they benefited from it, and how it was transformed. Also explained are the initial cultural capital of the respondents, how they benefit from it, and how it has been transformed. Also, it was determined what changed in their economic capital, cultural capital, social capital, symbolic

capital and emotional capital due to their success. It is also explained what capital has changed the most due to their success in life and what capital is most important in their journey to success. While the initial social capital of the respondents was also discredited, how they leveraged it, and how it was transformed. Focus was given to the initial symbolic capital of the respondents, how they leveraged it, and how it was transformed. And collected other important capitals of the respondents except for Bourdieu's four main capitals. In conducting the research, interviewing and recording important details will be used to gather sufficient evidence to support the study. The information gathered will serve as a stream of data to cover the entirety of the study. The data and information gathered in this paper are important factors to understand the culture, tradition, way of life and success story of the indigenous people in Tarlac.

### **Theoretical Basis**

Using phenomenology, this paper will outline the factors that shaped the lives of the successful Aeta natives in Tarlac. The data and information gathered are important factors to understand the culture, tradition, way of life and success story of the natives of Tarlac.

### **The Instrument Used In Data Collection**

The research utilized a questionnaire that is first use by Morales (2022) to be the basis for the development of the instrument of the study as well as the collected data from the initial interview with the indigenous Aeta participants in the study. Through the video recorder, the researcher gathered all the data obtained from the participants, followed by making a framework to record, align and organize the answers that were given in the interview.

The researcher will use interview, observation and recording of important details to gather enough evidence to support the study. The information gathered will serve as a stream of data to cover the entirety of the study. Using the case study method, this research revealed how five capitals shaped the lives of successful Aeta natives in Tarlac. The researcher used traditional methods in the study of Filipino Psychology such as interviewing, questioning, observation, visitation and observation. The research participants from different towns in Tarlac were purposely selected based on the level of education attained, profession and success in life.

### **Scope and Limitations**

In relation to the study of the experience, success story, behavior, habits, culture and tradition of the indigenous groups that were part of the research, five variables were considered: tribe (tribe), location (location), profession (profession), age (age), and gender (gender) that the participants belong to. These variables helped to explain the experiences, life stories, views, attitudes, and beliefs of each indigenous people about themselves and their fellow indigenous people. Based on Banks' model (2012) – The intersection of Variables – The major variables of gender, race or ethnicity, social class, religion, and exceptionality influence an individual's behavior, both singly and interactively. Other variables, such as region and age, also influence behavior. The three main variable limitations of the study are considered in the explanations of each participant in the researches.

The study covers the in-depth interview and analysis of the success stories of the indigenous Aeta people in Tarlac.

The study was limited to six (6) selected participants from the Aeta indigenous group. The participants in this study were a Tribal Governor/commissioner, a principal in Sta. Cruz Elementary School (first indigenous Aeta to graduate with a PhD in San Jose, Tarlac), a network engineer, a wordpress developer, first principal of TFBC Inc, and an inspirational indigenous Aeta teacher. There is no set amount of time in conducting the interview so that the flow of the discussions will be natural and smooth. In carrying out the research, use interviews and record important details to gather sufficient evidence to support the study. The information gathered will serve as a stream of data to cover the entirety of the paper.

The researcher allowed descriptive questions posed by each participant to clarify experiences, life stories, perspectives, beliefs and concepts. All the participants in the study were able to provide great help in the conducted study to develop the case study about the dynamics of Bourdieu's capitals in the success story of the indigenous Aeta people in Tarlac. The data collected in this paper is an important factor to understand the culture, tradition, way of life and success story of the indigenous people in Tarlac.

### **Ethical Concern**

Before the set date of the interview, the researcher asked the permission of the native Aeta features regarding the interview. Also, the researcher will provide a consent letter that will be signed by the study participant. Through the letter and informed consent given to the respondents, their participation in the research was voluntary. The initial interview was conducted in the free time of the indigenous participants. Each interview was held at the principal's office in Sta. Cruz Elementary School, in a house in San Vicente, Tarlac City, a house in San Rafael, Tarlac City, a classroom in Burot High School and a learning center in Capas, Tarlac.

### **Conclusion**

This research clearly articulated the acquired information and knowledge anchored in the real-life situations of the featured indigenous people resulting in a rich and holistic account of academic success as a phenomenon. The views and explanations about the struggles and triumphs are also well laid out which will surely expand the experiences of the readers, especially the young generation of indigenous people not only in Tarlac but also in other provinces in the Philippines. The author suggests conducting research on different tribes and ethnolinguistic groups in Tarlac. It will generate data that will describe how education has changed the lives of the indigenous people as well as this phenomenon. Descriptive or phenomenological research can also be done on lived experiences of the indigenous people which will focus on other field and discipline. The data generated in this research will serve as a baseline that will help educators, researchers and institutions in the country in modifying and developing ways to help the IP communities and indigenous people to reach their full academic potential.

This research provided a meaningful analysis and narration about the life stories of indigenous people who have been successful in life in various fields. The study highlighted their experiences and academic journey towards acquiring their academic title, their internal and external motivation, inspiration, source of strength, courage, hope, fear and dreams, and the factors that affected these aspects. Based on the result of this research, the respondents shared similar problems, struggles or hardships that they encountered but it did not discourage them to stop rather they made it as a motivation to pursue their dreams and aspirations in life. It is evident that IP communities and the indigenous people nowadays are much empowered and are very much driven to fulfill their hopes and dreams despite of the discrimination and inequalities they face which hinders them from achieving their dreams. The result of this study showed how IPs value education for they believe that education will empower them and will open variety of opportunities that will enable them to further enrich themselves and their lives. Furthermore, they envisioned to help and raise their own community and be a catalyst of change in the society. In addition to this, indigenous people value their own identity despite the discrimination they get from the society. They have a strong hold to their ideologies, ideals and aspirations. So, in order to protect the IP communities, institutions should have organizations, office and departments that will educate them with their own identity, equip them with the knowledge and skills for them to be able to empower themselves and protect their rights and privileges.

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