

Perspectives of College Students on the Filipino Rescue Mission to the Jews

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ABSTRACT

This research explored the participant's sensemaking capacity using their written narratives on the documentary on the Filipino rescue mission to the Jews during the Nazi holocaust. The study used the framework point of view (POV) and perspective as these two are considered the main cognitive processes that help shape a person's narrative. Through the lenses of POV, the research sought how the participants positioned themselves to understand the character's stance in the documentary and the type of POV they used as a point of angle in writing their narrative. More than organizing their thoughts, the concept of perspective gave a background of how the participants attached personal meanings to the character's story during the rescue mission, and weaved these to draw their interpretations of this historical event. The study, with 37 participants, applied frequency counting, percentage calculation, and thematic analysis for the data analysis. The findings revealed that participants primarily used the first-person POV as a point of angle to express their thoughts about the rescue mission. On the other hand, their narratives revealed different themes that emphasize how Filipinos accepted the Jews, the endearing Filipino trait that surpasses hospitality, the humanitarian legacy etched in history by President Manuel Quezon, and their reflections on the event which most of the participants does not know about. The study also highlights the importance of incorporating emotional cues to effectively shape the writer's perspective in a narrative to vivify not only the understanding of historical events but also the personal meanings the writer attaches to them.

Keywords: *Perspectives; Point of view; Thematic analysis; Empathy; Sense-making*

Introduction

The way we look at things and concepts is deeply coalesced in our being. How we perceive experiences is an integral part of our personality which is inspired by our culture, development, and education, among other facets in life surrounding us. These factors directly influence our perceptions and thinking in general, and we are adjusted in this way. Like what is held by Erkinov (2022), how we view experiences goes beyond our personalities as it is always influenced by three internal systems: time (past, present, and future); dimensional (physical, emotional, and mental); and functional (political, economic, and digital). The concept and meaning derived from experiences differ as they contain a generalized idea of reality which rarely changes until the influence of the internal systems mentioned. How we understand concepts is the outcome of various life factors that nurture and develop how we view things. These are among the reasons why Education and interaction with other people are deemed important as they contribute to the growth of knowledge which we need to develop to have a rich and insightful point of view.

Human interaction allows us to represent another person's mental perspective and to understand their behavior. Moreover, it helps us to discern their point of view, motivations, and feelings about how they understand the world and their experiences (Wolgast, et al., 2020). As a tool for emotional expression, language has an important value in people as it helps to understand human experiences with the help of spoken, written, and sign language (Chen, 2022). On the other hand, conversations [as a form of spoken language] with other people help break cognitive limits as it expands our understanding of various subjects and links us to different networks of meanings (Harari,

2015). People are accustomed to making sense of and attaching meanings to different concepts they encounter in their lives.

One way of looking at people's sensemaking capacity is through their narratives as it can help in understanding their perceptions and points of view. How people express themselves in writing a narrative can reflect how they organize their thoughts. Reflecting and working on a specific topic adds a personal tone to a writer's narrative. Similarly, Ntinda (2019) claimed that narratives constitute the basis of people's thought patterns and give a framework for their *sense-making* process. Weaving personal life lessons into narratives can give a glimpse of how people behave internally and the meanings they ascribe in their daily social contexts. In other words, narratives can be considered as a form of *storytelling* which is a natural inclination among humans. Storytelling and the delivery of narratives is a vehicle for humans to communicate, connect, and understand one another and the world around them in the form of spoken, visual, or written accounts of interconnected events (Ranade, et al., 2022).

People have different ways of writing a narrative which shows their position in the story; and how they are observing a certain aspect in their terms. Point of View (POV) is the writer's focal angle of seeing, hearing, smelling, and sensing the story's settings, characters, and events. The writer/observer uses POV to express their emotions about a concept or a certain character (Al-Alami, 2019). Also, POV is an approach to how the writer/observer conveys their thoughts to the readers, and how the readers can connect/identify with the writer/observer. This pattern of point of view can be made effective using its three types: the *first person*, *second person*, and *third person* point of view.

By definition, 1.) The *first-person point of view* is the one narrating the story. The key point in deciphering first person POV is the use of 'I'. This character is the one closely related to the action or the main character of the narrative; 2.) the *second person point of view* is structured around the 'you' pronoun. For Al-Alami, second person POV can draw the reader into the story as the writer feels like he/she is directly talking to them, and 3.) the *third person point of view*, is where the narrator can move freely from time and knows more than what the characters know. Third person POV has two types: the *third person omniscient* where the narrator has a fully unrestricted view of the story, and the narrator can freely give opinions and observations having a God's eye view of the story, and the *third person limited* where the narrator is inadequate from accessing the characters from outside (Al-Alami, 2019). The narrator sticks closely to one character only but remains usually in the third person POV.

Generally, POV's function is focused on the construction of narrative structure and the presentation of thematic meanings. It is an integral tool of description in the author's command to portray personal emotions or characters' feelings about an experience or situation. This is like an '*internal focalizer*' who guides the rhythm of the storytelling (Wang, 2021). Aside from using POV as a mode of narration, it also serves as a guide for the writer to effectively express what they want to convey to the readers, and a way to describe what lies in the [story] character's consciousness.

Another way of understanding how people look at things can be described using their perspective. Saliya (2023) defined perspective as a way people look at things subjectively. Both perspectives and points of view are highly subjective processes that depend on the observer's interpretations. For example, some might see University as a place to have fun, whereas some might see it as an academic ground with too many ethical restrictions. Furthermore, it is important to know that to have a deeper understanding of perspectives—words and concepts have different meanings to individuals (p. 37).

Perspective is also how we see something by understanding an idea and its relation to everything else. Another related concept that facilitates understanding various views and perspectives is *perspective-taking*. Clavard et al. (2023) referred to perspective-taking as '*the active cognitive process of imagining the world from another's vantage point or imagining oneself in another person's shoes to understand their viewpoint, motivations, intentions or, emotions.*' Perspective-taking is one of the most important aspects of human cognition, given our status as social beings (Cabrera, et al., 2022). These characteristics of looking at things are deemed important for the person to effectively express his/her thoughts and opinions about a subject. At the same time, by using their narratives, we can look at how they connect their observations to different situations as part of their '*sensemaking*' process which adds depth and meaning to their writing.

Similarly, perspective-taking is a way for the observer to participate in someone else's experience to [somehow] grasp their feelings and worldviews. Abramson (2021) claimed that looking at people's perspectives and paying attention to how they interpret things allows the observer to be moved by other people's experiences. Whether the observer is actively perspective-taking or not, if they just pay attention to other people, he/she (the observer) will feel likely to be concerned for them and become involved in their experiences. For an observer to effectively harness perspective-taking, they must infer emotionality through imagination and retrieval of related memories, as described by De Greck et al. as '*intentional empathy*'—asking people to empathize with others (in this case, to write a narrative) to activate empathy-associated brain areas in just the presence of emotional cues (2012).

Cabrera et al. (2022) argued that perspectives are not only for people or things with eyes. That is: any person, place, thing, idea; any element in an ecology. Any node in a network has a unique perspective that exists in nature (material systems) and can be taken by the human mind. For example, an elk and wolf in the Yellowstone ecosystem have a perspective and humans can cognitively take these to better understand the system. Likewise, an item, like an atom or a blood cell has a unique perspective, as does a position in space, or any concept (economic, structural, political, etc.). In simple terms, human cognition alone can grasp different perspectives to give access to new insights.

Moreover, perspective-taking has been regarded as one of the main psychological mechanisms to relate to other people and characters as a handful of studies suggest that it can be a practice to improve empathy. This current knowledge is supported by social neuroscience, philosophy of mind, and cognitive narratology (Fernandez-Quintanilla et al., 2020), and using point of view in analyzing a narrative can help the observer (researcher) understand how a person relates to the storyline and identify themselves with it, to create a written narrative—be it a personal one, or any other type. The conduct of the study will be guided by the following objectives:

1. What is the POV used by the students in their written narratives on the Filipino rescue mission for the Jews during the Nazi Holocaust; and
2. What are the students' perspectives on the rescue mission?

Methodology

Research Design

The first objective of the study used frequency counting to get the number of preferred POVs of the participants. To get a clear description of the frequency counting, the percentage was also applied to the number of narratives per POV category [$f/N=100$]. The second objective of the research determine the participants' perspectives regarding the rescue mission of the Filipinos to the Jews which was led by President Manuel L. Quezon. The analysis of this part of the research was anchored in Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis. Nieman (2023) defined this as a process of helping the researcher to be engaged in the data, making the important parts of the stories surface for the researcher to pair with other similar themes. This framework not only helps the readers understand the underpinning concepts of the study but also what the narratives intend to tell. Moreover, this process is appropriate as it involves coding the qualitative data to identify potential concepts that will then be collected as themes. *Semantic coding* was used to identify concepts within the data and code them only through their surface meaning alone. The analyst is not looking for anything beyond what the participant has said or what has been written (Nieman, 2023). The collected codes will be organized to *show patterns in semantic content* and then *summarized into interpretation*.

Research Participants

There are 37 participants for the study composed of 29 AB Communication majors; 7 Political Science majors and 1 Psychology major; all from the College of Arts and Sciences at a university in Lucena, Quezon Province, Philippines.

Research Instruments

The participants were made to write a short essay after watching a documentary titled '*An Open Door: Jewish Rescue in the Philippines*' which is about a mission that saved 1,300 Jews who fled to the Philippines to escape the Nazi holocaust [which the video can be accessed in YouTube]. The students' thoughts were posted in the Neo Learning Management System (NeoLMS) as an online activity.

Data Gathering Procedure

A short detail was followed in collecting and analyzing the data: 1.) *organizing the data* which are the narratives of the 37 participants; 2.) *italicizing words or statements* that the researcher conceives as containing the participants' perspective about the topic; 3.) *retyping the chosen sentences or phrases* as it exactly appeared in the narrative; 4.) *arranging the phrases or sentences* according to its POV category and getting their frequency and percentage; 5.) *coding the data* using semantic coding 6.) gather the codes and arrange them according to their relevance, to create a theme; and 7.) produce a report, selecting appropriate extracts to support the analysis. To determine what POVs are used by the students, their narratives were gathered in a table and grouped according to their type: column 1 for first person POV; column 2 for second person POV; and column 3 for third person POV.

Ethical Considerations

The names of the students were not included in the data to maintain their privacy. Only numbers are indicated for each narrative [participant 1, 2, 3, and so on...] but are not arranged successively.

Results and Discussion

POV Used by the Students in Their Written Narratives on the Filipino Rescue Mission to the Jews.

1st person point of view: the use of 'I' (first person singular) and 'we' (first person plural)

There are 21 students, out of 37 (57%) who used the first-person point of view. Most of them used the pronoun 'I' as a point of angle to explain what they thought about the rescue mission. On the other hand, they used 'we' in sentences

describing how Filipinos looked beyond race and opened the country for the protection of the refugees. In this sense, the participants tried to identify themselves with the Filipinos who helped the refugees to create an effective narration. As described by Fernandez-Quintanilla et al. (2020), first-person POV is an effective mode of narration as the writers re-enact, stimulate, or imaginatively experience in a first-person way what they perceive as the character's mental state and mental activity, and experience what must be like to be in those shoes. This idea was supported by Meng & Bell (2022) that the first-person perspective increases identification with the character, thereby leading to higher levels of perceived identification with the story. A sense of reflection is often offered by writing from a first-person point of view.

2nd person point of view: the use of 'you' (second person singular) and 'yourself' (second person plural).

The second-person point of view was not used in the narratives in any way, even in describing President Quezon or the rescue mission as the essay mainly focused on how the students processed the event on their terms. According to Albright & Langan (2023), a second-person approach is only used when the writer speaks directly to the reader using the pronoun *you*. This approach is only appropriate for giving direct instructions and explanations to the reader (p. 167), which was not the aim of this study.

3rd person point of view: the use of 'he' or 'she' and having an unrestricted view of the description (third person omniscient); and the narrator is inadequate to access the characters from outside (third person limited).

There are 16 students, out of 37 (43%) who have written their narratives using the third person point of view, all of which used the third person omniscient. They freely talked about how the Filipinos during that time opened the country to be a refuge for the Jews, and how President Quezon should be regarded as a standard of what a true leader should possess. Moreover, they freely shared various descriptions of how Filipinos and their leaders at that time risked their safety and economic state to help the Jews. In research by Johnson and Mullen (2007), writing using third person POV helps writers maintain a neutral and unbiased stance which can limit personal opinions and emotions compared to writing in a first person POV. It promotes objective analysis of the subject matter which is particularly important in academic and research-based essays.

The Students' Perspectives on the Rescue Mission to the Jews.

The second part of the objective is the report of the themes crafted out of the codes from the narratives using semantic coding. The main themes that are created as a basis for analysis in this part are 1.) *Filipinos' acceptance of the refugees*, 2.) *Description of the Filipino spirit*, 3.) *Endearing Filipino traits*, 4.) *Description of Filipino's humanitarian legacy*, 5.) *Filipinos prioritizing humanity over race*, 6.) *Reflections on the rescue mission*, 7.) *Recognizing the excellence of Manuel L. Quezon as a leader* and 8.) *Others*. The eighth theme [which is the **others*] houses the codes that don't seem to fit with the main themes. *'The Filipino personality is imbued with many values that serve as a key discipline in pursuing what is good for their life and that of others.'* This idea is reflected in the sample statements of the participants which are selected to highlight the analysis.

Filipinos' Treatment of the Jews

The Jewish refugees sailed out of Germany to stay as far away from the Nazis as possible. Moreover, aside from keeping them alive, the participants viewed this act as a way of giving new hope to the refugees with no hesitation whatsoever. In the meantime, they were given a second home for the time being when the holocaust was still raging in Germany.

In one of the narratives, *"Philippines became a sanctuary for the protection of the refugees"*. This is a commendable act of hospitality—offering housing, employment, and being considered as part of the community during that time. The Jews were, *"treated as humans,"* and the country was seen as a place of protection to them as they were treated with kindness. This effort was certainly an act of friendship and compassion for the participants.

Description of the Filipino Spirit

The participants believed that the Philippines hold a very strong humanitarian tradition. This has been an identity associated with most Filipinos with people of other nationalities. This is the same idea given by the participants in their narratives explaining the Filipino spirit which is extending a helping hand to those who are in need. The documentary showed that Filipinos had been victims of racial discrimination even before this event in history happened, the reason why they are eager to help for they have felt the same thing for themselves.

"Empathy and compassion work a lot in the hearts of every Filipino" as one participant has seen the willingness to help the refugees even though they have been struggling in their own country. Participants shared that helping others even at the lowest point in their lives shows how strong their race is because they managed to be selfless and sacrificed to beam hope to the fleeing refugees. A Filipino value that is almost related to empathy and compassion is *kabutihang-loob* or *kagandahang-loob* which was defined by Macaranas & Macaranas (2018) as a sense of internal goodness of a human being. Filipinos use this value objectively as a moral standard to ensure the good of oneself and others.

Endearing Filipino Traits

Some various traits and values have been distinguished as definitely Filipino. In the narratives of the participants, the most common Filipino value is being hospitable. Hospitality is deeply embedded in a Filipino's personality, greatly valued in society, and can be found in all human interactions (Pe-Pua & Protacio, 2000). This is the most common attribute that surfaced describing the efforts of the refugees. Also found in a participant's discussion was, *"It is beyond hospitable"* which can imply that what they saw in the documentary transcends the value of hospitality, and is more of, *"love for humanity"* and a *"humanitarian act which goes the Bayanihan spirit"*.

"This showed the true essence of the Bayanihan culture," states that solidarity and compassion are a strong culture in the country [closely like *pakikipagkapwa-tao*] which was seen by the participants. On the other hand, the Bayanihan is simply cooperation, compassion, and helping the community in whatever means they can. This Filipino trait is extended not only to their fellow countrymen but is also available to other nationalities who seek their help.

Description of the Filipino Humanitarian Legacy

The participants took pride in stating that, *"Being a Filipino is a symbol of pride for me,"* and *"I am honored to be a Filipino."* They believe that what they saw in the documentary is symbolic of pride and honor which will be remembered forever by the Jews. The compassion of the Filipinos to accept people who are not of their race, when they are having challenges of their own due to the Second World War—was a concept too large to be expressed in a documentary. However, the participants believed that extending a helping hand was a natural act among the Filipinos and believed that they did it without hesitation. *"People have admired this aspect of the Filipino culture,"* said one participant which they believe is accurate to how Filipinos are seen by other nationalities—caring and helpful.

Filipinos Choosing Humanity Over Race

'The Filipinos accepted the Jews without hesitation' was a recurring statement within the data set. Moreover, they agreed that helping one another should not only be exclusive to their race. One of the participants said that *"Filipinos protected them and regarded them as a family"* which is an inspiring story from one of the survivors, making them realize that Filipinos made them feel welcomed and treated them as equals. This is deemed true according to a description by Macaranas & Macaranas (2018) as Filipinos are known to express *pakikipag-kapwa tao*, which means relating to another fellow human which presumes that others are regarded as important as much as the self, regardless of background.

"The US is now facing issues with racial discrimination against Black Americans, Asian and Latin communities" also stated by a participant who, and held that this event in history should inspire other nations to all should give importance to respect and less on a person's racial background.

Reflections on the Rescue Mission:

The most common concept that surfaced in the narratives was that of *'amazement'* after watching the documentary. Some of them were not familiar with this event in history, while some of them were aware of it and heard it in a previous subject but did not pay any attention to it until now. *"It opened my eyes to the absolute concept of humanity,"* as one participant said, taking time to appreciate the scenario, also described as, *"a story of courage which is marked in our identity."* The participants' reflections on the efforts were a showcase of compassion, humanity, and inspiration. This was a remarkable stance as it was clear in the documentary that during that time, the Philippines also had challenges to face under American colonial rule. *"This is very touching"* as the participants saw how humanitarian Filipinos can be when the event requires it. Moreover, the values and morality are reflected in the documentary which is an expression of selflessness, and the participants knew this established the brotherhood between the Jews and the Filipinos.

Recognizing the Excellence of Manuel L. Quezon

President Quezon was perceived to be a role model by the participants, which they added as, *"a role model for the new generation of Philippine leaders."* They see him as a standard of how a leader should be, which, after seeing the documentary have set their comparisons against the leaders of the country today. *"President Quezon is an example of a compassionate leader, full of bravery and heroism"* because when the other countries have closed their door, he (Quezon) issued an open-door policy for the refugees and offered visas, and an opportunity to resettle in the country. One narrative states that, *"What President Quezon did was not surprising, because he is a pure Filipino, he will help other people without thinking twice"* which shows the participants' appreciation for him for leading this part of history, valuing the Filipino spirit of Bayanihan and extending it to people of a different nationality. Moreover, the actions of Quezon should be a lesson to be taught in classroom settings, and how it is a relevant topic to show how hatred can take away people's families, home, freedom, and their identity. The participants also learned that simple acts of compassion can change someone's life, and the country, for the better.

Others

Some participants felt ashamed for not knowing this event took place. “*I have no idea what happened during those times*” because this was not discussed with them in any subject during their previous years. Another participant has written “*I’m very disappointed,*” for knowing this happened only now, and for not appreciating the efforts of the early Filipinos to save the lives of people from the holocaust.

Conclusions

This study presented a collection of narratives describing the rescue mission given by the Filipinos to the Jews. These were analyzed using the concepts of point of view and perspectives. Point of view (POV) is an important angle for the writer to breathe a *narrative voice* into a story or a plot. Perspectives on the other hand [same with perspective-taking] is how a person sees a story in a subjective manner which was revealed using qualitative lenses.

Most of the participants used the first-person point of view (57%) to establish their engagement with the documentary as personally as possible. This is the most common POV found in the narratives as the objective question requires the participants to share their thoughts which are normally answered using the pronoun ‘I’. While 43% of the participants used the third-person point of view (third-person omniscient). This is usually found in describing the leadership shown by President Quezon; and the outpour of help given by the Filipinos to the Jewish refugees. The third-person omniscient was a choice for some of the participants as this was appropriate in recounting the humanity and compassion witnessed in the documentary. Also, this type of POV freely expresses the thoughts and feelings of the characters in the rescue mission. On the other hand, no participant used the second person point of view as this was not a choice when the narrative requires an in-depth and personal stance and is only appropriate when giving direct explanations and instructions to the readers (Albright & Langan, 2023).

On the other hand, perspective is an important concept to be integrated when writing narrative essays as this can activate a person’s neural responses when accessing the inner life of the characters and seeing the world through their eyes [also known as perspective-taking]. Like what was discussed by Adamson (2021), this action of perspective-taking [also known as an *empathy trigger*] is regarded and is most likely to produce empathy. This research showed how the participants understood the events and explored the variety of positive human interactions highlighted in the documentary. The magnanimity of the Filipinos shown in how they welcomed and treated the Jews, sacrificing their challenges to give them protection—was the utmost example of the *Bayanihan* spirit which the participants claimed as a solid virtue practiced in the country. Empathy and compassion were used to describe the traits of the Filipinos which were closely related to *kabutihang-loob* at *kagandahang-loob*.

The rescue mission was regarded as an effort that surpassed hospitality because this was more of an *act for humanity*—a legacy that must be recalled forever. The participants saw Manuel Quezon in a different respect apart from the classroom discussions of being the second Philippine President; but, was regarded as a leader who stand as an inspiration for the new leaders to look up to. His efforts, which were evident in the narratives, were seen not as a responsibility, but more of an absolute act of compassion and heroism. Participants noted that President Quezon made them proud to be Filipino. However, a few are not aware of this event in history and claim that they are disappointed with themselves for learning this only now. The disappointments of those participants who formed the **others* theme can be caused by a sense of guilt for not knowing this event happened, and not for anything else.

Furthermore, perspective-taking in narrative essays can be seen as effective in giving the views on the rescue mission as the participants shift from one point of view to another, not only to shape their narratives but more importantly, to attach personal meanings to the story they have witnessed. Some of them are glad that they came to know this event in history, and a large part of their narratives are an expression of admiration and wonderment that the Filipinos have impacted the lives of other nations. Looking at the story from their angle; plus, using their perspectives seems to be *emotionally engaging* to them rather than just a discussion-based classroom activity. This can be seen in how they weaved their imagination into their essays as if they were actual witnesses of this heroic event. Also, they actively created contrast and arguments—comparing the leaders before to the ones that we have now, to make their points clear.

As recommendation, teachers should encourage students to be engaged in activities that can activate reflection and perspective-taking such as writing essays and narratives. More than developing the students’ writing competencies, it will also hone their sense of reflection which is helpful in the various areas of their being such as interpersonal and intrapersonal relationships, developing their narrative voice (both oral and written), and enhanced communication skills. In facilitating qualitative activities, it would be more helpful if the students were given the chance to share their insights on historical events to create a sense of appreciation for the efforts of the early Filipinos. Not only this would help them foster a sense of reflection, but will open them to various cultural, historical, and social contexts which are beginning to be less discussed in the modern course curricula.

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Conflict of Interests

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