

**Lived experiences of students in remote and marginalized communities:
Basis for intervention program**

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ABSTRACT

The phenomenological study set out to capture the everyday realities of secondary-school students who live in the remote, marginalized villages of Tanudan district. Its dual purpose was to (1) identify the obstacles that hinder their schooling and the coping tactics they use to stay enrolled, and (2) distill the core qualities that make these learners “resilient indigenous students,” as expressed in their own stories of struggle and achievement. The findings are intended to inform the design of community- and school-based interventions that can reinforce the support network the students already rely on. Because the goal was to uncover lived experience, the researchers conducted semi-structured interviews, allowing each student to narrate his or her personal journey of perseverance. The data revealed that, despite considerable hardships, geographic isolation, limited resources, and cultural marginalization, these youths regard education as a purposeful pathway toward a brighter future. Their narratives show a striking capacity to adapt, persist, and find meaning in learning. Equally important, the study highlighted the pivotal role of families, teachers, and the broader community. Parental encouragement, attentive mentorship, and collective village support emerged as the primary forces that shape and sustain the students’ resilience. By translating these insights into targeted programs, policymakers and educators can better nurture the strengths already present in Tanudan’s indigenous learners.

Keywords: Resilience, Remote, Marginalized students, Lived Experiences

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INTRODUCTION

Education is globally recognized as the primary engine for social mobility and human development. However, the ideal of "education for all" often falters at the geographical and socio-economic fringes of society. For students living in Geographically Isolated and Disadvantaged Areas (GIDA), the pursuit of learning is not merely an academic exercise; it is an act of defiance against terrain, distance, and systemic neglect. Education is frequently viewed as a basic right and a significant means of achieving social mobility. However, numerous students residing in isolated and disadvantaged communities still face enduring

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challenges in accessing quality education. Geographic remoteness, scarce resources, and financial limitations pose obstacles to academic achievement and personal growth. The research conducted by Fitzgerald et al. (2024) indicates that poverty and certain systemic barriers contribute to educational inequality, aligning with the findings of Blanden et al. (2022), who also noted that socio-economic factors play a role in disparities in education among students. These disparities are not unique to any one country; they reflect a global challenge documented across diverse contexts. Recent studies, such as Symonds et al. (2023), emphasize how socioeconomic disadvantage remains one of the strongest predictors of educational inequality. In addition,

Moreover, despite these challenges, students in marginalized settings often demonstrate remarkable resilience. Resilience is defined by the Oxford Dictionaries as the capacity of one to withstand or recover from difficulties. The human being's resiliency is inherent in nature, so that when in times of difficulties, the human being tries to rise again and go on with his/her life. The American Psychological Association (2020) mentioned that Psychologists identify resilience as the dynamic process of adapting effectively and recovering from significant adversity, trauma, tragedy, or intense stress. In remote communities, resilience is often expressed through lived narratives: stories of perseverance, coping strategies, and the support systems that sustain learners amid scarcity and exclusion.

In the Philippines, the Department of Education has made strides through the "Last Mile Schools" initiative, aiming to bridge the gap between urban centers and remote indigenous communities. Yet, in the rugged highlands of the Cordillera Administrative Region—specifically in the municipality of Tanudan, Kalinga—the reality of being a student is shaped by unique phenomenological "horizons." Here, the "remote" is not just a distance on a map; it is a lived experience of intermittent connectivity, physical exhaustion from mountain trekking, and the constant negotiation between ancestral traditions and modern educational requirements. However, as stated by Garay et al. (2020), Filipinos are strong fighters; they survive amidst numerous untoward circumstances. Thus, Pagaoa et al. (2024) found in their study that the resilience factor has a crucial role in influencing the academic achievement of Filipino adolescents. In like manner, Filipino teachers showed notable resilience during the pandemic, the COVID-19 pandemic, this was shown in the study of Antonio (2022).

While existing literature has explored resilience in various educational contexts, few studies have foregrounded the voices of students from remote and marginalized communities. Their lived experiences remain underrepresented, leaving a gap in understanding how resilience is cultivated in environments marked by scarcity and exclusion. By focusing on these narratives, this study seeks to amplify student perspectives, highlight the interplay of personal and communal resilience, and contribute to a more inclusive discourse on educational equity.

Statement of the problem

This study aims to explore the lived experiences of the students in remote and marginalized communities as a basis for the development of school and community partnership and support Intervention. It seeks to answer the following questions;

1. What are the lived experiences of marginalized indigenous students in Western Tanudan District in the context of their education?
2. What resilience strategies do the students employ to overcome these challenges and persist in their secondary education?
3. What community and school support interventions should be developed based on the results of the study?

METHODOLOGY

This study investigated how students in the Western Tanudan District students program construct narratives of resilience through a qualitative research design anchored in Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). The study was structured to present a detailed methodological framework that included participant selection, data collection procedures, and the systematic analysis employed to capture the essence of the students' lived experiences. IPA was selected because it is a form of qualitative inquiry especially suited to uncovering how individuals interpret significant life events. As a teacher researcher embedded in the community, the researcher assumed a double hermeneutic stance by interpreting the students' accounts while recognizing that the students themselves were also interpreting their struggles within a marginalized context. This orientation allowed for an in depth and idiographic exploration of resilience by emphasizing personal meaning rather than producing a broad and surface level survey of student experiences.

Following IPA guidelines as outlined by Pietkiewicz and reiterated by McLeod, 2024, the study required a small and homogenous sample, generally composed of 3–10 participants, and the use of semi structured, in depth interviews. In line with this requirement, the researcher employed purposive criterion sampling to recruit ten students who satisfied specific conditions. These participants were enrolled at the school where the researcher teaches in Taloctoc, Tanudan, Kalinga, resided in a last mile sitio or other geographically isolated area that required at least one hour of mountain trekking or river crossing to reach the school, and maintained regular attendance despite documented socioeconomic or geographic barriers. The deliberate selection of this cohort supported a rich and intensive analysis of each participant's resilience narrative.

To comprehensively explore the resilience narratives of the students, the researcher served as the primary instrument of the study. The researcher recognized her dual identity as both a Member of the Faculty and a Researcher. To mitigate power imbalance, reflexivity was consistently practiced throughout the inquiry. A journal was maintained in order to separate personal biases as a teacher from the raw narratives shared by the students during the semi structured interviews. This reflexive practice helped preserve the integrity of the participants' accounts while supporting a more disciplined and self-aware interpretation of the data.

Ethical considerations were treated as essential throughout the conduct of the study because the confidentiality of individuals participating in research may be at risk, as noted by Mirza et al. (2023). In recognition of this, the researcher consulted ethical guidelines to ensure compliance with the principles and practices of responsible research. In the process of acquiring permission and beginning data collection, strict ethical guidelines was adhered to. Formal authorization letters and detailed research proposals was obtained from the School Heads and the Principal of the involved institution. Depending on local regulations, official approval from the School Dean was also requested to ensure adherence to institutional policies. This gatekeeping procedure ensured that institutional permission was obtained before any data collection or participant interaction begins. In addition, comprehensive informed consent forms written in clear language was secured from all participants. These forms detailed the objectives of the study, the potential risks and advantages, and the methods to be used in maintaining confidentiality and ensuring voluntary withdrawal. Finally, in order to safeguard the vulnerability of students in an underprivileged community, verbal consent from parents and verbal agreement from students was obtained.

The data gathering procedures were shaped by the researcher's direct, ongoing, and firsthand contact with the potential respondents as their Araling Panlipunan teacher. This close relationship established a foundation of trust and cultural understanding that was crucial in conducting research with vulnerable or marginalized populations. The researcher's

positionality as an insider practitioner provided immediate access to the students' educational environment, cultural context, and lived experiences within the curriculum. This position also enabled the formulation of highly relevant research questions and the sensitive interpretation of findings. The established rapport significantly minimizes potential social desirability bias and encouraged participants to share their insights more authentically. The primary tool for data collection was the Semi Structured in Depth Interview. Because the participants were the researcher's students, the interviews were conducted in a conversational manner to reduce the power dynamic. Instead of using Yes or No questions, the researcher employed prompts such as, "Can you tell me about your journey as a student in your community?" and "Can you describe a moment when you felt discouraged or thought of stopping school?" After permits were secured from the appropriate authorities, interviews were conducted in a neutral and comfortable space, either in a quiet area in the school garden or in the student's home, in order to foster an atmosphere of Kalinga hospitality. Throughout this process, the researcher used a journal to document her own reflections and observations as a member of the school community. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim, with local dialects and metaphors used by the students carefully preserved.

The corpus of qualitative data collected in this study was subjected to a systematic and highly rigorous analytical regimen following the six-step iterative framework articulated by Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009) for interpreting lived experience accounts. The analysis began with immersion in the transcript through repeated reading of each interview transcript until a feel for the data was achieved. This stage involved more than a simple review of the text. Rather, it required a deliberate and almost performative listening to the participant's narrative as though the researcher were hearing the student speak directly. Attention was given to the rhythm of speech, pauses, repetitions, and emphatic moments in order to preserve the authenticity of the student's voice. At the same time, the researcher made marginal notes on initial impressions, striking phrases, and any affective tone that appeared to emerge from the transcript.

Once immersion had been achieved, the second stage focused on detailed linguistic and metaphorical analysis. In this phase, the researcher undertook a fine-grained examination of the language choices used by the students. This included cataloguing key lexical items, recurring idioms, and especially metaphorical constructions such as "climbing a mountain" and "being a bridge." These metaphors were treated as windows into the participant's conceptual world because they revealed how abstract ideas such as resilience were made concrete in experience. Emotional markers including expressions of hope, frustration, pride, or fear were also highlighted and coded because these often-indicated moments of heightened meaning that was later inform theme development.

Building on the linguistic and affective annotations, the researcher then moved into a more synthetic analytical task by clustering coded excerpts that appeared to share a common underlying meaning. Each cluster remained provisional and open ended and was labeled with a tentative heading that captured the essence of the grouped data, such as "Negotiating Family Expectations" and "Strategic Use of Community Resources." During this phase, the researcher remained reflexive and continually checked that the labels that emerged stayed faithful to the participant's own words rather than reflecting imposed external assumptions or preconceptions.

The next stage involved mapping inter theme connections by relating the emergent themes to the broader conceptual framework of resilience. The researcher constructed a visual map, often in the form of a mind map or diagrammatic schema, in which each emergent theme was positioned relative to the others. Arrows or lines were used to denote hypothesised relationships, such as the possibility that self-efficacy may feed into adaptive coping. This mapping process made explicit the ways in which different strands of meaning converged,

diverged, or reinforced one another, thereby clarifying the structural architecture of resilience as experienced by the Tanudan student.

After the thematic mapping of an individual case had been completed, the researcher repeated the entire analytical sequence for each of the remaining participants. When all cases have been analyzed in isolation, a cross-case examination was undertaken to identify resonances and contradictions across the various student narratives. This comparative analysis was essential for distinguishing experiences that were idiosyncratic from those that were shared across participants. It also allowed the researcher to identify contextual factors, such as gender, socioeconomic status, or school environment, that may modulate the expression of resilience.

The final stage consisted of synthesizing the most robust and recurrent themes across all cases into a set of master themes. These master themes did not function merely as a summary of the data. Rather, they represented the distilled essence of the Tanudan student experienced and embodied both the overt content of the narratives and the subtle emotional currents running through the data set. For each master theme, the researcher developed a comprehensive narrative that integrated illustrative quotations, contextual explanations, and connections to the theoretical literature on resilience. This process culminated in a richly textured and evidence-based account that faithfully represented the lived realities of the participants while advancing scholarly understanding of resilience within the particular cultural and educational milieu of Tanudan.

Through this meticulous and iterative six step process, the analysis moved from the granular texture of individual words to the overarching patterns that was characterized the collective experience. By adhering to the methodological rigor proposed by Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009), the study ensured that the resulting themes were grounded in the participants' own expressions and were analytically robust enough to support meaningful interpretations and implications for policy and practice.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This Results and Discussion section is grounded in the narratives of 10 participants, identified as S1 to S10, and interprets their lived educational experiences in direct relation to the objectives of the study. Drawing from the gathered qualitative data, the discussion organizes the participants' accounts into interrelated themes and codes that illuminate how schooling in a remote community is shaped by structural hardship, communal support, personal resilience, and future-oriented aspiration. The analysis remains anchored in the actual statements of the participants and examines how educational experiences extend beyond classroom instruction into a broader process of social, emotional, physical, and developmental negotiation. Through this lens, the findings reveal that the student journey is not simply academic, but is deeply embedded in the realities of community life, family obligation, financial limitation, interpersonal support, and the desire to create meaningful change.

The data show that in this community, a student's daily life was shaped by a relentless clash between overwhelming structural obstacles and a hardy, home-grown resilience. Their path was not limited to classroom lessons. Rather, it constituted a full-scale logistical challenge involving grueling commutes, sometimes a long walk across villages and at other times a trek up steep hills, while simultaneously managing household chores and the pressure of mastering demanding subjects such as mathematics. When external strains such as tight budgets or scarce resources intersected with academic difficulties, the combined pressure drove students toward a breaking point. Yet defeat was not the inevitable outcome. The school's social fabric, particularly friendships among classmates and the unwavering encouragement of devoted teachers, functioned as a vital safety net. A sudden wake-up call in the form of poor grades

often activated this support network, prompting a shift from despair to determination. Ultimately, students were propelled by two intertwined goals: the immediate need to cope with the workload and the longer-term ambition to acquire the skills that would enable them to uplift and transform their own community.

The first major cluster of findings highlights how the student experience is rooted in a collective identity, where education is understood as a communal journey rather than an individual pursuit. Under the theme Community & Support, the participants described schooling as fundamentally grounded in a “warm, supportive community,” where family ties and mutual aid provided the emotional and social foundation for persistence. This is captured in the shared statement, “My schooling is a journey through a warm, supportive community; we lean on family ties and help neighbors through clean-up drives” (S1, S4, S5, S8). This account shows that students did not approach education as isolated learners, but as members of a collective social world in which success was shared and hardship was made more bearable through communal solidarity. The significance of this pattern lies in the way support becomes normalized in everyday life, suggesting that the students’ resilience was not purely internal, but socially cultivated within a community that valued mutual care and participation.

At the same time, the participants’ narratives also reveal how their educational paths were shaped by formidable structural adversity. Under the theme Challenges & Adversity, coded as Structural Barriers, the realities of “climbing mountains” and living under financial strain illustrate that access to education involved both literal and figurative uphill battles. The path to school was not only physically exhausting, but symbolically reflected the burden of poverty, scarce supplies, and constant testing of one’s endurance. Although the same quotation, “My schooling is a journey through a warm, supportive community; we lean on family ties and help neighbors through clean-up drives” (S1, S4, S5, S8), is repeated in the source text under this theme, the discussion surrounding it clearly situates the student experience within a dual reality of support and deprivation. Thus, the findings indicate that the warmth of communal ties did not erase structural barriers, but rather existed alongside them, helping students withstand rather than eliminate these obstacles.

The student journey itself emerged as a cycle of internal and external pressure that shaped character formation. Through the theme The Student Journey, the participants reframed peer pressure and stressful lessons not merely as burdens but as meaningful experiences that contributed to personal development. This is evident in the statement, “My path is a cycle of peer pressure and tough, stressful lessons that ultimately serve as valuable experiences for personal growth” (S7, S9). Within this framing, difficulty was interpreted not only as suffering but as friction necessary for growth. Such a perspective suggests the presence of a growth mindset among participants, wherein hardship was not denied but transformed into a source of learning. This interpretation aligns with the broader pattern in the findings that students did not view struggle as meaningless. Instead, they often regarded it as part of a formative process that strengthened their ability to continue.

This process of endurance was closely tied to aspiration. Under the theme Aspiration (Future & Impact), students located meaning in their present hardship by connecting it to future service. The statement, “I am driven by the hope of entering a tech career to solve real-world problems and give back to my community” (S2), demonstrates that educational ambition was linked not to personal advancement alone, but to social reciprocity. The desire to enter a technical field and solve real-world problems reflects a forward-looking orientation in which the students’ dreams were inseparable from the needs of the community that nurtured them. The findings therefore suggest that aspiration functioned as a bridge between present struggle and future contribution. It was not merely hope for escape, but hope for return, service, and transformation.

Taken together, these themes capture the lived reality of students who pursued their education inside a close-knit community. Their experience was not a solitary trek but a collective one, woven through family ties, neighborly help, and community clean-up projects. This social fabric supplied a warm safety net that softened the blows of external hardship and turned educational success into a shared victory. At the same time, the data lay bare the structural obstacles that loomed over these students. “Climbing mountains” served as a double metaphor, referring both to the literal steep terrain that separated villages from schools and to the figurative weight of poverty, scarce supplies, and relentless testing of resolve. Surviving these conditions demanded stamina, as students were required to fight continuously to keep the doors of learning open. Rather than seeing pressure and difficulty as mere roadblocks, participants reinterpreted them as engines of growth. Peer pressure, demanding curricula, and other stressors were reframed as opportunities to develop a growth mindset, turning hardship into valuable learning experiences. Motivation, therefore, sprang from a broader purpose. The students were not chasing personal prestige alone. They aspired to acquire technical skills that would enable them to tackle real-world problems and give back to the community that had supported them. This created a virtuous cycle in which community support fueled individual resilience, and graduates in turn envisioned channeling their knowledge and hope back into the same community, reinforcing its future well-being. In this sense, the journey of these learners was a dynamic interaction between environmental adversity and communal solidarity. Resilience emerged not as an isolated trait, but as a shared resource sustained by family, neighbors, and a collective ambition to transform challenges into progress for themselves and for the community that raised them.

A second thematic cluster deepens this understanding by showing how peer and teacher relationships, daily travel, school climate, and inner determination all shaped the students’ educational persistence. Under Social Fabric (Peer/Teacher Support), the interpersonal environment functioned as a critical safety net. The statement, “Camaraderie and supportive teachers provide a ‘safety net’ that makes the exhausting school days rewarding” (S1, S4, S5), indicates that relationships within the school served as an emotional buffer against fatigue and stress. This suggests that the school climate itself acted as a reward structure, not because the days were easy, but because they became meaningful in the presence of encouragement and companionship. The rewarding quality of the school day, therefore, was not primarily tied to comfort, but to the emotional significance of belonging.

The Physical Journey theme, coded as Commute/Logistics, further reveals that the educational experience began long before students entered the classroom. Participants described how “Daily travel involves significant logistical and financial hurdles, yet the routine provides moments of peace and mental focus” (S3, S7, S9). This statement demonstrates the dual nature of the commute. On one hand, it represented an exhausting and costly barrier, reinforcing the material disadvantages students faced. On the other hand, it offered a rare moment of quiet and psychological preparation. This duality shows that students had learned to derive utility from adversity. Even hardship became, at times, a source of mental focus, suggesting the development of adaptive coping mechanisms that allowed them to transform routine struggle into personal preparation.

Within the campus itself, the school was not viewed simply as an institutional structure but as an intellectually and emotionally energizing environment. Under the theme School Environment (Academic Vibe), participants stated that “School is a place of active discovery and engagement, where the classroom spirit drives the student forward” (S2, S8). This finding points to a positive classroom culture that students experienced as dynamic and motivating. The phrase “active discovery” suggests that learning was not passive, and the reference to “classroom spirit” indicates that the momentum of the group contributed to persistence. This

interpretation is important because it suggests that, despite the physical and economic hardships associated with accessing education, the school itself offered intellectual nourishment that validated the effort required to attend.

The final theme in this cluster, Internal Drive (Grit/Mindset), captures the psychological force that sustained students amid fatigue and pressure. The statement, “Despite physical fatigue and pressure, a strong sense of gratitude and determination fuels the desire to finish” (S6, S10), shows that perseverance was grounded not only in ambition but in gratitude. This combination of gratitude and determination suggests that students viewed education as a meaningful opportunity rather than a burdensome obligation alone. Their desire to finish was therefore an internal psychological achievement that interacted with, but was not wholly dependent on, external support. The findings indicate that while peer support, teacher care, and school engagement were essential, persistence ultimately required students to sustain an inner conviction that their hardship was worth enduring.

The experience of students in the remote community is thus defined by a complex interplay between external physical hardships and a deeply supportive internal and social culture. The theme Physical Journey highlights that schooling began long before the classroom. The mention of “logistical and financial hurdles” suggests that the act of getting to school was itself a significant barrier. However, for some, the commute also served as a transitional period for “mental focus,” showing that students developed coping mechanisms that enabled them to convert hardship into preparation. The Social Fabric theme indicates that the school served as more than a place for instruction. The “safety net” provided by camaraderie and supportive teachers made the “exhausting school days rewarding,” suggesting a high level of emotional labor and community bonding within the institution. The School Environment theme reflects a classroom culture of “active discovery,” implying that the pedagogical atmosphere was engaging enough to offset physical fatigue. The Internal Drive theme further shows that students possessed grit and gratitude, revealing that education was understood as a goal worth suffering for. In line with these observations, Siason et al. (2025) reported that personal growth emerged as a central theme in their study, “Unveiling Student Lived Experiences and Perceptions on the K 12 Education Program in the Philippines,” echoing the findings of the present research. Indeed, a dynamic interplay between environmental adversity and communal synergy characterized the lived experience of students within the community. For the participants, the student journey was not merely an academic path but a multifaceted uphill battle (S3, S6, S10) defined by structural barriers and financial strain. However, this struggle was mitigated by the Civic and Social Fabric of their environment. Resilience was manifested not as an isolated trait, but as a collective resource, as students “lean on family ties” and found strength in a “supportive community” (S1, S4, S5, S8). Furthermore, the narrative reveals a transformative orientation toward stress, where peer pressure and rigorous lessons were reframed as essential catalysts for “personal growth” (S7, S9). This journey was ultimately anchored by a reciprocal sense of aspiration. The students’ drive to enter technical careers was fueled by a “hope” to solve “real-world problems” (S2), suggesting that their personal resilience was inextricably linked to the future well-being and impact they intended to return to the community that sustained them.

Another major portion of the findings centers on what may be described as insurmountable walls, referring to the convergence of external burdens, academic difficulty, and psychological crisis. The educational landscape presented in this data is one of survival and eventual transformation. The trajectory begins with the overwhelming weight of external and academic pressures that push students toward points of crisis, yet these same moments of crisis also appear to function as catalysts for change. Under the theme Compounding Barriers (Environmental Load), participants described how “External pressures, including household chores, bullying, and pandemic-era module confusion, significantly hinder academic focus”

(S1, S6, S9). This finding demonstrates that academic performance was not undermined by schoolwork alone, but by a layered combination of domestic responsibilities, social conflict, and systemic confusion. The barriers were therefore compounding rather than isolated, destabilizing the students' ability to concentrate and maintain continuity in their studies.

Beyond these environmental pressures, subject-specific academic difficulty intensified distress. Under the theme Academic & Mental Strain (Subject Difficulty), participants revealed that "Facing 'insurmountable' walls in core subjects like Math leads to moments of crisis where students consider quitting" (S3, S4, S7, S8). This statement shows that the challenge was not simply poor performance in a difficult subject. Rather, mathematics became emblematic of a broader crisis of confidence and persistence. The phrase "consider quitting" indicates that academic strain had psychological consequences severe enough to threaten continuation in school. Thus, the difficulty students encountered in core subjects was not merely intellectual, but vocational and emotional, shaping how they perceived their capacity to continue.

Importantly, however, the findings also identify a point of recovery. Under the theme Resilience & Recovery (Growth/Recovery), participants explained that "Low performance acts as a 'wake-up call' that triggers a shift toward seeking help and building the perseverance needed to succeed" (S2, S5). This finding is significant because it shows that failure was not always understood as terminal. Instead, poor performance often initiated a shift in orientation, from passive discouragement to active help-seeking. In this sense, resilience emerged as a reactive trait, forged through recovery rather than present from the beginning. The students' ability to reinterpret low performance as a wake-up call demonstrates the capacity to derive growth from crisis, reinforcing the earlier themes of grit and transformation.

The stories students tell therefore expose a profound battle for mental and emotional stamina. Core subjects, especially mathematics, were described as "insurmountable walls," suggesting that the obstacle was not simply a lack of effort but a deeper erosion of confidence. The data capture moments when these academic roadblocks triggered genuine crises, prompting some learners to contemplate quitting altogether. The difficulty was therefore as psychological as it was intellectual. Moreover, these challenges did not arise in a vacuum. Students simultaneously carried heavy environmental loads, including household chores, occasional bullying, and the lingering confusion of pandemic-era online modules. These overlapping stressors produced a cascade of compounding barriers in which the sheer volume of demands made studying feel nearly impossible. Yet the most hopeful thread in these narratives is the shift from failure to perseverance. Low grades were not portrayed solely as defeat, but as wake-up calls that pushed students to seek support. This turning point transformed hardship into a catalyst for growth and forged the resilience required to move forward.

The data further elaborate these struggles through three specific categories of challenge. First, under Academic-Life Imbalance, participants indicated that "Balancing community/home duties with schoolwork leads to a loss of focus and academic struggles" (S1, S5). This finding shows that students were rarely able to occupy the role of student alone. They were also family members, workers in the home, and participants in community life. The result was what may be understood as time poverty, in which the criteria for being a helpful member of the family directly conflicted with the demands of being a successful student. Second, under Economic Instability, participants described "Significant stress regarding tuition, textbooks, daily expenses, and the stigma of being 'the last to pay'" (S2, S4, S6, S9). This statement shows that financial hardship was not only material but psychological. The phrase "the last to pay" signifies shame, public exposure, and vulnerability, making education emotionally costly as well as expensive. Third, under Mental Health & Pressure, one participant stated that "High-pressure deadlines lead to mental blocks, brain fatigue, and questioning one's ability to finish"

(S3). This reveals that academic deadlines generated more than ordinary stress. They produced cognitive exhaustion and existential doubt, intensifying the students' sense of fragility.

These findings paint a stark picture of the structural and emotional hurdles students had to navigate. The evidence suggests that the obstacles they encountered were not simply added tasks, but hindrances that diminished the brain's ability to concentrate and manage time effectively. As a result, students could be physically present yet mentally hindered, unable to reach their potential because their mental batteries were drained by external pressure. There is also a clear link between these challenges and self-identity. Poor grades or social conflict were often internalized as signs of personal failure, undermining self-worth and making students feel inferior when they failed to meet expectations. This is especially visible in the discussion of academic-life imbalance, which shows that many learners had to negotiate incompatible responsibilities. Financial instability extended beyond the absence of textbooks and tuition concerns to include the humiliation of delayed payment. Economic hardship thus became a persistent psychological burden, making education an exercise in anxiety and exposure. This is consistent with Siason et al. (2025), who concluded that poverty or financial instability is a barrier to students in the Tanudan region. Similarly, the theme of mental health and pressure shows that tight, high-stakes deadlines caused "brain fatigue" and mental blocks that undermined confidence. Students began to question their ability to complete tasks as external academic pressure became an internal crisis.

The data also suggest intrapersonal development and interpersonal isolation. Many students appeared to feel that they were facing these challenges alone because they lacked emotional support from family or peers in certain situations. In response to stress, some became defensive and hesitant to acknowledge errors, a coping strategy that could eventually develop into a more mature understanding of criticism. Taken as a whole, these themes show the convergence of socioeconomic shame, overwhelming expectations, social isolation, and structural inequalities in undermining student success. Furthermore, the research highlights two crucial insights when students were questioned about moments of discouragement: a future-oriented perspective can shield students from academic disappointment, and for many learners, self-identity is so closely linked to GPA that any slip causes deeper discouragement. It also reveals that personal life stressors serve as significant, and at times ignored, obstacles to academic persistence. Despite the high cost these pressures impose on students' daily lives and mental well-being, the data show that many are adopting adaptive coping methods that prioritize growth. While the first two areas focus on the harm these challenges cause, the third emphasizes the students' agency. They turned stress into resilience by actively seeking mentors and rethinking the meaning of challenge. In other words, they learned to navigate a difficult system by focusing on long-term goals instead of being consumed by short-term setbacks. In this regard, financial difficulties and academic challenges are merely two of the findings from the research conducted by CHILDDHOPE (2024) about the experiences of students in marginalized communities in the Philippines. Notably, despite facing such issues, some students from the Tanudan district remain optimistic about their ability to overcome these challenges through education.

A further layer of the analysis reveals that the most stable and consistent source of strength in the students' educational journey is the family. Under the broad theme Familial Pillar, the discussion explores the interpersonal and communal frameworks that underpin student persistence. By examining the data through the themes Familial Pillar and Family Support & Expectations, it becomes clear that educational success is not an isolated achievement, but a collective endeavor supported first and foremost by kinship structures. The Familial Pillar, coded as Primary Kinship Support, highlights the indispensable role of mothers, sisters, grandmothers, and other family members not only as emotional encouragers but as providers of the practical scaffolding necessary for schooling. This theme appeared across all

ten statements (S1-S10), identifying it as the most critical variable in student persistence. The participants' accounts illustrate this breadth of support: "I receive guidance and support from my family, teachers, and community with their advice, resources, and encouragement. Furthermore, my teacher provides additional lessons to help me cope" (S1); "My family and teachers rallied behind me, providing the resources I needed and offering steady guidance" (S2); "I draw strength from my family especially my ever-present mother along with teachers who generously set aside extra time to mentor me, and a community that serves as a positive influence" (S3); "My family cheers me on like my biggest fans, my teachers equip me with knowledge and skills, and the solidarity of my community steadies me on my educational path" (S4); "Both my family and the caring members of my community help brighten the road of my studies" (S5); "My grandmother is always by my side, especially throughout the pandemic; the community also lends a hand, though occasionally I sense envy from a few people" (S6); "My family is the primary source of everything I need, followed by teachers, while the community motivates us to take part in local clean up initiatives" (S7); "My family and friends have my back, particularly when I compete in sports events" (S8); "The combined support of my family and my community creates an encouraging environment that fuels my desire to learn" (S9); and "My sister finances my education and allows me to join activities that develop my talents, though at times the community can be judgmental and gossip prone, which can be frustrating" (S10). These statements collectively show that support was multidimensional, involving financial assistance, emotional encouragement, practical advice, moral guidance, and opportunities for talent development.

The theme Family Support & Expectations (Motivation & Sacrifice) deepens this insight by showing that students' motivation was often inseparable from the sacrifices made by their families. Students described a reciprocal psychological contract in which the visible labor and belief of family members created a desire to persevere and make them proud. This is evident in the statements, "I fuel my drive by visualizing my long-term goals and drawing strength from my family's encouragement, which pushes me to keep learning and growing" (S1), "My family's belief in me and their tireless effort to keep me in school ignite my motivation" (S4), "The support of my family and the comforting presence of my friends sustain my motivation during tough moments" (S5), and "My soaring ambition to make my family proud drives me forward" (S7). These accounts show that motivation was not primarily individualistic. Rather, it emerged from a moral awareness of family sacrifice and from a desire to validate the trust and effort invested in the student. For S1, S4, S5, and S7, academic persistence was directly tied to the emotional weight of family commitment.

The data further reveal several related dimensions of motivation. By visualizing a "brighter future," students such as S1, S7, and S9 were able to detach from current hardships and cultivate internal fortitude. This future-oriented mindset served as a defense against dropout by enabling students to frame present suffering within a larger horizon of possibility. Students such as S3 and S6 also transformed poverty and "disrespect" into adversity-driven resolve. Instead of allowing these hardships to diminish their spirit, they turned them into powerful motivators to improve their life conditions. This suggests a defiant form of resilience in which the desire to succeed is fueled by the very realities that could have caused surrender. Beyond the family, the "comforting presence" of believers, as seen in S2, S5, and S10, provided a safety net that reinforced institutional commitment and academic perseverance, especially when coursework became difficult.

Overall, the findings indicate that students' families served as their primary source of support, encompassing financial aid, moral encouragement, and other forms of assistance essential for educational pursuit. At the same time, the findings acknowledge that parents sometimes relied on their children for household responsibilities, which students accepted as

part of their familial bond. The second major source of support was the continuing mentorship provided by teachers, whom students regarded as crucial figures in transmitting knowledge and guiding them through challenge. The third source involved the spiritual and social foundations within the community, where belief in a higher power and the practice of prayer offered additional support. Finally, community participation itself was significant, as students derived strength from camaraderie and friendship and recognized the value of mutual action through practices such as community cleanup activities. This finding aligns with the results of Castillo et al. (2024), which indicate that strong support systems involving family, friends, teachers, and community resources play a crucial role in helping students manage socioeconomic difficulties and persist in their educational endeavors.

The final thematic cluster centers on the concrete strategies students used to remain resilient. Under Social & Spiritual Anchor (External Support Systems), or Spiritual & Relational Support, participants described drawing strength from faith, prayer, and the physical presence of family and friends. As S1 stated, “I trust in the power of prayer and in my own abilities.” S3 explained, “In difficult moments, I reach out to friends, family members, and relatives for support.” S4 similarly shared, “I find strength in knowing that God, my family, and my friends are walking beside me.” These statements show that resilience was sustained through both transcendence and relationship. Prayer and belief in God provided meaning and reassurance, while social support offered tangible emotional assistance. The coexistence of these forms of support indicates that coping was neither entirely personal nor entirely social, but grounded in a combined spiritual and relational ecology.

Under Self-Reliance (Internal Fortitude), participants also described a preference for independent problem solving before seeking assistance. S5 explained, “I first try to tackle problems on my own, and only seek help when I’ve hit a roadblock,” while S7 stated, “I work through issues independently, yet I’m not hesitant to ask for assistance when it’s needed.” These statements suggest that self-reliance did not mean isolation, but rather a staged coping strategy in which autonomy came first and help-seeking followed when necessary. This pattern reflects a balance between personal responsibility and relational openness, reinforcing the earlier finding that resilience involved both internal drive and external support.

Under Coping Mechanisms (Resilience & Grit), or Strategic Behavioral Adaptation, students described managing stress through planning, time management, and intentional emotional or cognitive breaks. S2 shared, “When challenges arise, I give myself a brief pause and recharge by scrolling through social media, listening to music, or watching videos.” S6 stated, “During tough times, I keep my eyes on my goals instead of getting lost in worry.” S8 explained, “I cope by planning my schedule more efficiently, breaking tasks into bite-sized milestones, and consulting mentors for guidance.” These accounts reveal that students used diverse but purposeful strategies to regulate stress. Some turned to short restorative breaks, others to goal focus, and others to structured task management and mentorship. Collectively, these mechanisms show that students did not endure hardship passively. They actively crafted ways to continue functioning despite pressure.

The data therefore reveal that students’ resilience strategies followed a layered process. They began by anchoring themselves in personal goals and in lessons drawn from past hardship, creating what the discussion identifies as reflective drive. Once motivation was secured, they shifted to strategic adaptation by breaking large tasks into smaller milestones and using digital or behavioral resets such as music or brief pauses to manage stress. Finally, social and spiritual support served both as encouragement and as a tactical resource to turn to when a personal roadblock was reached. These findings show that students did not succeed in a vacuum. Their educational journey was deeply embedded in a three-layered social ecosystem. First, the family served as the bedrock of support and the source of financial and emotional resources. Second, mentors functioned as academic facilitators who bridged the gap between

institutional expectations and student capability. Third, the community served as an environmental factor that provided opportunities such as clean-up initiatives and social solidarity, while also demanding the development of social resilience in response to negative pressures such as envy, judgment, or gossip. Significantly, S6 and S10 identified community “envy” and “gossip,” indicating that part of student development involved emotional regulation and the capacity to remain focused despite discouraging social dynamics. At the same time, the relationship between student and community was not one-directional. Students such as S7 mentioned participating in “local clean-up initiatives,” showing that they also contributed back to the community that supported them.

In synthesis, the findings of this study reveal that the educational experiences of the 10 participants were shaped by an intense but productive interaction between structural hardship, communal support, familial sacrifice, inner determination, and future-directed aspiration. The results show that students in the community navigated grueling commutes, financial instability, academic strain, social pressure, household obligations, and moments of psychological crisis, yet these barriers did not operate in isolation. They were continually mediated by the safety net of peers, teachers, family members, spiritual belief, and community participation. The study further demonstrates that resilience among these learners was not merely an individual trait, but a socially sustained and strategically enacted process involving prayer, mentorship, self-reliance, planning, and the reinterpretation of failure as a wake-up call for growth. Their aspirations, especially the desire to finish school, pursue technical careers, solve real-world problems, and give back to the community, reveal that education was understood not only as personal advancement but as social responsibility. These findings directly address the objectives of the study by showing how students’ lived experiences of challenge and support shaped their persistence, motivation, and vision for the future. More broadly, the results contribute to the understanding of education in marginalized and remote communities by illustrating that student persistence is best understood as a collective, relational, and meaning-laden process. This integrated view of struggle, resilience, and aspiration provides a strong foundation for the subsequent section of the manuscript, where the implications of these findings may be further developed in relation to conclusion, recommendations, or theory building.

CONCLUSION

The findings of the study collectively affirm that students navigate their educational journeys under conditions characterized by significant physical, emotional, and cognitive demands, conceptualized as a “Physical and Mental Marathon” shaped by financial strain, extended commuting, and competing household responsibilities. Despite these constraints, the results demonstrate that student persistence and success are not solely products of individual effort but are deeply embedded in a network of relational and institutional support systems. The school environment emerges as a critical “Social Fabric” in which peer relationships function as protective mechanisms that mitigate academic and emotional pressures, while the “Familial Pillar,” largely sustained by the sacrifices of mothers, sisters, and grandmothers, reinforces students’ commitment to educational attainment. Furthermore, the study reveals that academic challenges, particularly those perceived as “Insurmountable Walls” in demanding subjects such as Mathematics, are not interpreted as endpoints of failure but rather as catalytic “wake up calls” that stimulate a “Reflective Drive” toward improved study strategies, increased help seeking behavior, and sustained engagement with mentorship opportunities. This transformation underscores a developmental trajectory in which students evolve from individuals managing adversity into resilient and community-oriented learners who reframe

their struggles as “Valuable Lessons” that contribute to their long term personal and professional growth.

In direct alignment with these findings, the study advances a set of integrated and context responsive recommendations that emphasize the necessity of institutionalizing support mechanisms that already operate informally within students’ lived experiences. Schools are encouraged to adopt a holistic support ecosystem that formalizes the existing “Social Fabric” through structured peer mentorship initiatives while simultaneously strengthening the “Familial Pillar” by actively engaging key family members who provide emotional and financial stability. Addressing structural barriers such as “time poverty” requires the implementation of flexible scheduling and accessible learning modalities, including recorded lectures and modular instructional delivery, to accommodate students managing multiple roles. Additionally, the reframing of high stakes academic challenges into opportunities for “Instructional Adaptation” through targeted mentorship clinics, particularly in difficult subjects, is essential in transforming barriers into avenues for growth. The integration of resilience training within the curriculum further reinforces students’ internal capacities, ensuring that their progression from survival to professional competence is sustained through both institutional policy and collective community engagement.

Building upon these conclusions and recommendations, the proposed intervention program serves as a comprehensive and systematic framework designed to translate empirical insights into actionable institutional practices. The results of the “Resilience Narratives” study indicate that while students exhibit high levels of grit and adaptive resilience, they remain vulnerable to persistent “friction points,” including financial stigma, cognitive exhaustion, and time constraints associated with domestic responsibilities. These challenges necessitate a deliberate shift from a conventional instructional model toward a resilience centered academic environment that acknowledges and addresses the multidimensional realities of students’ lives. The intervention framework is therefore structured as a phased and progressive strategy that integrates institutional, pedagogical, and community-based approaches to support student success.

The initial phase focuses on institutional and financial sensitivity within a 0-to-6-month period, aiming to reduce the stigma associated with economic instability and resource scarcity. Measures such as digitized and private billing systems ensure 100% confidential payment notifications through SMS or email, thereby minimizing the social pressures experienced by students who are last to settle financial obligations. Complementary initiatives, including the establishment of a tool, textbook, and computer lending system with internet access, are expected to generate at least a 20% increase in resource accessibility among low-income students. The creation of an emergency hardship fund further addresses sudden financial disruptions by ensuring the availability of information, education, and communication materials related to scholarship opportunities and financial assistance.

The second phase, implemented within a 6-to-12-month timeframe, centers on pedagogical and cognitive support to address academic difficulty and mental strain. The introduction of scaffolded “Math Labs,” facilitated by subject specialists, is projected to produce a 15% improvement in passing rates in core technical subjects. Simultaneously, the adoption of modular learning options provides flexibility for students experiencing role conflict and limited time availability, ensuring that recorded lectures and alternative learning pathways are accessible. The incorporation of “Wellness Wednesdays,” characterized by structured 15-minute mindfulness and cognitive reframing activities during extended academic sessions, directly targets cognitive overload and burnout, promoting sustained engagement and psychological well-being.

The final phase emphasizes continuous social and community empowerment by strengthening support systems and reinforcing students’ sense of purpose and aspiration.

Institutional initiatives such as Parent or Guardian Appreciation Day are designed to encourage high levels of participation among familial support figures, particularly mothers and sisters, thereby validating their contributions and fostering deeper school family partnerships. The establishment of a peer mentorship network with a targeted ratio of one mentor per ten at risk freshmen addresses issues of interpersonal isolation while enhancing academic and social integration. Additionally, the implementation of a “Tech for Good” showcase encourages students to apply their skills to community-based problem solving, with success measured through the number of projects that address local needs, including potential collaboration with community training programs.

Taken together, the study provides a comprehensive understanding of the interplay between structural challenges, social support systems, and individual resilience in shaping student success. The conclusions drawn from the findings highlight the necessity of moving beyond deficit-oriented perspectives and toward a strength based, resilience centered framework that recognizes students as active agents capable of transforming adversity into opportunity. The proposed intervention program operationalizes this perspective by aligning institutional policies, pedagogical practices, and community engagement strategies with the lived realities of students. In doing so, the study contributes to the broader discourse on educational equity and student development by demonstrating that sustainable academic success is achieved not only through individual determination but through the deliberate cultivation of supportive environments that enable students to thrive. This integrated approach ultimately ensures that students’ journeys, marked by challenge and perseverance, culminate in meaningful professional outcomes and enduring contributions to their communities.

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