

Gutos Para Mag-Alam: A Life Story Of An Orphan

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Abstract — Poverty and education are deeply interconnected, with financial hardships often hindering students from accessing quality education. Despite these challenges, some students in remote areas exhibit remarkable perseverance, enduring long daily walks (gutos) to attend school. This study explored the hopes, dreams, fears, challenges, experiences, resilience, and coping mechanisms of an orphaned student facing such adversities. Using a narrative inquiry approach, data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews, with follow-up questions for clarification. Findings revealed that the participant remains determined to complete her education despite facing long and exhausting commutes, insufficient meals, extreme weather conditions, and financial struggles. Her resilience demonstrates the strength of students in similar circumstances, emphasizing the role of motivation, family support, and self-determination in overcoming adversity. This study underscores the need for stronger support systems for orphaned and indigent students. It recommends that the Department of Education strengthen community-based assistance, school heads collaborate with local government units and private sectors to provide financial aid, and teachers offer continuous guidance and encouragement. Furthermore, orphaned students are encouraged to develop perseverance and serve as inspirations to others experiencing similar hardships. By addressing these challenges through a multi-sectoral approach, schools and communities can help ensure that students from disadvantaged backgrounds receive the education they deserve.

Keywords — *Access to Education, Orphan, Poverty, Long Daily Walks (Gutos)*

I. Introduction

In the Philippines, access to education remains uneven, with children from underprivileged backgrounds facing significant barriers that hinder their academic progress. While some students enjoy uninterrupted schooling, many others are held back by financial difficulties, geographical

isolation, and a lack of support systems. According to the Philippine Statistics Authority, approximately 10.7 million individuals between the ages of 5 and 24 are not attending formal education, with a large proportion coming from disadvantaged sectors of society (Desiderio, 2024). Among the most vulnerable are orphaned children, who experience compounded challenges such as emotional distress, social stigma, and limited educational opportunities. Reports estimate that around 1.8 million orphaned and abandoned children live in the country, many of whom face difficulties in accessing education due to their circumstances (Chirowamhangu, R., 2022).

Despite these hardships, many orphaned students show remarkable resilience and determination in their pursuit of education. The phrase "Gutos Para Mag-alam," with "Gutos" being a Hiligaynon term for "walk," symbolizes the difficult daily journeys this student makes to attend school, often walking (gutos) long distances through challenging terrain. For orphaned students, this journey is not only a physical struggle but also a powerful symbol of perseverance and commitment to overcoming adversity. This daily walk is a manifestation of the desire to pursue education despite the overwhelming odds she faces (Motsa, N. D., & Morojele, P. J., 2018). While studies have focused on the struggles of impoverished students in general, there has been limited exploration of the specific lived experiences of orphaned learners who endure extreme conditions to continue their education. This research aimed to fill this gap by focusing on the experiences of an orphaned student who faces these daily challenges to attend school. Hence, this research was conducted.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study aimed to explore the life story of an orphaned student who faces the daily challenge of walking (locally known as Gutos) for an hour or more just to attend school and pursue her education. Through this research, her perseverance, sacrifices, and unwavering determination are documented to show the struggles faced by many students in similar situations. By focusing on her experiences, the study intends to inspire and motivate other students who may be considering dropping out due to financial hardships. It emphasizes the value of education as a means to overcome poverty and build a better future. Specifically, this study sought answers to the following questions:

1. What are the hopes, dreams, and fears of an orphaned student?
2. What challenges and experiences does the orphaned student encounter?
3. What are the resilience traits and coping mechanisms of an orphaned student?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The intersection of poverty, orphanhood, and education creates a complex picture of challenges, especially for students in remote areas. This review explores the various challenges orphaned student encounter and the systemic factors that influence their educational experiences.

Challenges in Accessing Education

Orphaned children in the Philippines encounter substantial barriers to education, primarily due to financial constraints. Economic hardships often prevent them from affording essential school-related expenses, leading to irregular attendance or, in extreme cases, school dropout. A 2023 report highlights that approximately 15.5% of Filipinos, or around 17.54 million individuals, live in poverty, directly affecting children's educational opportunities (Shoebox Campaign, 2024). Without financial resources, many orphaned students struggle to afford transportation, school supplies, and even meals, further diminishing their ability to focus on their studies.

Geographical factors exacerbate these challenges. Many orphaned children reside in rural areas where access to educational facilities is limited. Schools are often located far from their homes, requiring long and physically exhausting commutes. The phrase "Gutos Para Mag-alam," a Hiligaynon expression meaning "a long walk to learn," symbolizes the daily struggles these children endure to obtain an education. The lack of nearby educational institutions and inadequate infrastructure further deter students from continuing their schooling, making them vulnerable to academic failure or early dropout (Shoebox Campaign, 2024).

Additionally, orphaned students face discrimination and stigmatization, particularly in underprivileged communities. Social exclusion due to their background may result in low self-esteem, anxiety, and a lack of motivation to excel in school (Aguilar et al., 2024). The combination of economic, geographic, and social factors creates significant barriers that prevent orphaned children from fully participating in the educational system.

Psychosocial Impacts

The loss of one or both parents profoundly affects the psychological well-being of orphaned children. A 2024 qualitative study explored the coping strategies of Filipino adolescents living in orphanages, revealing that these children experience social, emotional, mental, spiritual, and physical difficulties (Aguilar et al., 2024). The emotional distress caused by parental loss often leads to academic struggles, as students battle grief, loneliness, and a lack of familial support.

Orphaned students frequently suffer from mental health issues such as depression and anxiety, which negatively impact their concentration, memory retention, and overall academic performance. According to Aguilar et al. (2024), many orphaned students feel disconnected from their peers due to their circumstances, which further deepens their psychological distress. Moreover, the absence of parental guidance affects their decision-making skills and academic motivation, making it difficult for them to plan for their future education and career goals.

Educational institutions often lack sufficient resources to provide the necessary emotional and psychological support for orphaned students. Although some schools have guidance counseling programs, many remain underfunded or understaffed, limiting the effectiveness of these interventions. As a result, orphaned children are left to navigate their academic journey

without adequate support systems, further increasing their vulnerability to educational setbacks (Bai, 2021).

Resilience and Coping Mechanisms

Many orphaned children face significant challenges in their pursuit of education, yet they continue to display remarkable resilience. Aguilar et al. (2024) explored the coping strategies of Filipino adolescents living in orphanages and pointed out their ability to adapt despite overwhelming hardships. One key coping mechanism is building strong social connections with peers, teachers, and caregivers. These relationships provide emotional support and a sense of belonging, helping orphaned students manage feelings of loneliness and isolation while staying engaged in school. Another important factor is spiritual support, as many orphaned students find comfort in religious or spiritual activities. Prayer, meditation, and involvement in religious communities serve as emotional anchors that help them navigate difficult times. Additionally, developing a positive mindset through cognitive reframing allows orphaned students to view their struggles as opportunities for growth. By focusing on their aspirations and long-term goals, they cultivate resilience and motivation to continue their education.

While these coping mechanisms play a crucial role in helping orphaned students overcome educational obstacles, resilience alone is not enough. Institutional support is necessary to ensure their success. Schools, government agencies, and community organizations may must work together to provide financial aid, mentorship programs, and emotional support services. By addressing both personal and systemic challenges, orphaned students can have a greater chance of achieving their educational goals and breaking the cycle of poverty.

Interventions and Support Systems

Recognizing the unique challenges faced by orphaned students, various organizations and government programs have implemented initiatives to provide educational support. One such initiative is the Alternative Learning System (ALS) in the Philippines, which offers non-formal education to out-of-school youth. This flexible learning program allows orphaned students to continue their studies at their own pace, accommodating their unique circumstances (Bai, 2021).

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) also play a crucial role in supporting the education of orphaned children. The Philippines Orphanage Foundation, for example, collaborates with local orphanages to provide educational resources, develop school facilities, and supply learning materials to bridge the educational gap faced by orphaned students (Filipino Orphans Foundation, 2023). Through scholarship programs, mentorship initiatives, and life skills training, these organizations equip orphaned students with the tools needed for academic and personal success.

Another effective intervention is the establishment of community-based support systems. Schools, local governments, and private sectors can work together to offer financial assistance,

psychosocial support, and mentoring programs to orphaned students. By fostering a supportive learning environment, these initiatives help mitigate the impact of economic and emotional hardships, ensuring that orphaned children receive the education they deserve (Shoebox Campaign, 2024).

Role of Teachers and School Support

Teachers play a crucial role in the educational success of orphaned students by providing emotional support, encouragement, and motivation. A study by Delos Santos and Ramirez (2023) found that teachers who act as mentors and second parents significantly impact the academic performance and emotional well-being of orphaned students. By fostering a nurturing classroom environment, teachers help build students' self-confidence and resilience. Additionally, schools that implement inclusive education strategies, such as peer mentoring and teacher counseling programs, create a sense of belonging and stability for orphaned learners (Bai, 2021). Schools must ensure that teachers receive training in handling students with challenging backgrounds, equipping them with the necessary skills to provide academic and emotional guidance. When schools actively promote a caring and supportive atmosphere, orphaned students are more likely to stay engaged in their studies and persist despite difficulties.

Economic Empowerment through Education

Education serves as a powerful tool for breaking the cycle of poverty, particularly for orphaned students facing financial hardship. A 2023 report by the Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS) highlights that providing financial literacy education and livelihood training for orphaned students can significantly improve their economic opportunities. Programs that teach vocational skills, entrepreneurship, and financial management equip students with the ability to generate income and support their education (PIDS, 2023). Additionally, scholarship programs and financial aid initiatives from government agencies and private organizations help alleviate the burden of school-related expenses. Studies show that students who receive financial support are more likely to complete their education and pursue higher learning or employment opportunities (Filipino Orphans Foundation, 2023). By integrating economic empowerment programs into the educational system, orphaned students can gain the skills and resources needed to achieve financial independence and build a stable future.

Synthesis

Orphaned students, particularly those in remote areas, face significant challenges in accessing education due to financial constraints, geographical barriers, and social stigma. Many struggle to afford transportation, school supplies, and meals, leading to irregular attendance or dropout. The lack of nearby schools further worsens their situation, forcing them to endure long and exhausting commutes. Beyond economic and logistical hardships, they also experience emotional distress, including anxiety, loneliness, and low self-esteem, which negatively impact

their academic performance. The absence of parental guidance and limited access to counseling services leave many without adequate support systems.

Despite these difficulties, orphaned students demonstrate resilience through strong social connections, spiritual support, and positive coping mechanisms. However, resilience alone is not enough to guarantee their success. Institutional support through programs like the Alternative Learning System (ALS), NGO-led scholarships, and community initiatives plays a crucial role in addressing their needs. Teachers also serve as key figures in providing emotional support and fostering a nurturing learning environment. To ensure equitable education, a multi-sectoral approach is necessary—strengthening school-based interventions, increasing financial assistance, and integrating vocational education programs. Addressing these systemic issues will empower orphaned students to overcome challenges and secure a brighter future.

II. Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design using narrative inquiry to explore the lived experiences of an orphaned student who endures the daily challenge of walking long distances (*gutos*) to attend school. Narrative inquiry is an effective approach for capturing personal experiences by situating them within their social and historical contexts, allowing for a deeper understanding of the participant's struggles, motivations, and resilience (Clandinin, 2021). This method was chosen as it provides rich, detailed accounts of how individuals make sense of their lives, revealing both their hardships and aspirations. Through storytelling, the study aims to shed light on the realities faced by orphaned students and advocate for stronger educational and community support. By emphasizing emotions, challenges, and coping mechanisms, this research gives voice to an often-overlooked group of learners.

Sampling and Setting

A purposive sampling technique was used to select the participant, ensuring that she could provide in-depth insights relevant to the study's focus (Etikan & Bala, 2020). The participant was an orphan who had lost her father and faced significant financial hardships, regularly walking long distances to attend school. These criteria ensured that her experiences aligned with the study's purpose of understanding the challenges faced by orphaned students in remote areas. The study was conducted in a rural setting where limited access to transportation and financial constraints posed significant barriers to education.

Data Collection

Data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews conducted in a safe and comfortable environment to encourage openness and authenticity in responses. Semi-structured

interviews allowed for flexibility while maintaining focus on key themes relevant to the study (Doyle et al., 2020). The interview guide consisted of open-ended questions that explored the participant's hopes, dreams, and fears regarding education, the challenges she faced daily, and the coping strategies she used. The interview was audio-recorded with the participant's consent, and field notes were taken to capture non-verbal expressions and contextual details. Follow-up questions were asked as needed to ensure clarity and depth in the responses.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using phenomenological analysis, focusing on understanding the participant's lived experiences by identifying the essence of her journey (Nowell et al., 2021). The analysis followed a systematic approach, beginning with bracketing, where the researcher set aside personal biases to fully grasp the participant's perspective (Doyle, Brady, & Byrne, 2020). This was followed by horizontalization, in which significant statements were identified and treated with equal importance (Clandinin, 2021). These statements were then clustered into meaningful themes, capturing the core of the participant's challenges, emotional resilience, and coping mechanisms. The essence of the participant's experience was synthesized to provide a holistic understanding of how orphaned students navigate educational challenges (Nowell et al., 2021).

Ethical Considerations

Ethical guidelines were strictly followed at every stage of the research process to uphold the principles of respect, beneficence, and justice, in accordance with established ethical standards (World Health Organization, 2022). Informed consent was obtained before the study commenced. The participant was fully informed about the purpose, procedures, and potential risks of the study, ensuring that she could make a voluntary and informed decision to participate. This transparency guaranteed that she understood both the potential benefits and any risks involved in sharing her experiences.

To ensure confidentiality and privacy, the participant's identity was protected by using the pseudonym "Iza," preventing any unauthorized disclosure of her personal information. All data collected, including interview recordings and transcripts, were securely stored and accessible only to the researcher.

Participation in the study was strictly voluntary, and the participant was assured that she could withdraw at any time without consequences. This approach reinforced her autonomy and right to discontinue participation if she felt uncomfortable.

To minimize emotional distress, particular care was taken in handling sensitive topics. The interview was conducted in a safe and comfortable setting, allowing the participant to express her thoughts freely. Additionally, emotional support was made available, ensuring that any distress experienced during the interview was addressed appropriately. These ethical measures ensured

that the research was conducted with the highest level of care and respect for the participant's well-being.

III. Results and Discussion

This study examined the experiences of an orphaned student. Empirical data were collected and analyzed using thematic analysis. As a result, the following themes emerged from the data:

Table 1
Themes Generated from the Empirical Data Gathered:

<i>A. Lived Experiences of Iza's Hopes, Dreams, and Fears as an Orphaned Student</i>	
Theme # 1. Aspirations for a Better Future	<i>Despite financial hardships, Iza remains hopeful that education will be her key to breaking free from poverty. Her dream of becoming a flight attendant fuels her determination.</i>
Theme #2. Fears and Uncertainties	<i>The loss of her father left her feeling uncertain about achieving her goals due to financial constraints and the weight of family responsibilities.</i>
Theme #3. Motivation Rooted in Family	<i>Her ambition is not just for personal success but also to support her mother and younger siblings, ensuring they have a better life.</i>
<i>B. Lived Experiences of Iza's Challenges and Struggles as an Orphaned Student</i>	
Theme #1. Financial Hardships and Daily Sacrifices	<i>Iza experiences extreme financial difficulties, often going to school without an allowance, skipping breakfast, and enduring long walks to school.</i>
Theme #2. Physical Struggles and Harsh Conditions	<i>Walking on muddy, unpaved roads, facing extreme weather conditions, and crossing flooded rivers add to her daily challenges.</i>
Theme #3. Emotional Burdens and Vulnerability	<i>Encountering drunk individuals, facing fears of stray dogs, and recalling memories of her late father contribute to her emotional struggles.</i>
<i>C. Lived Experiences of Iza's Resilience and Coping Mechanisms</i>	
Theme #1. Endurance and Self-Discipline	<i>Despite hardships, Iza remains an honor student, believing that perseverance and hard work will lead to success.</i>
Theme #2. Faith and Positive Mindset	<i>She finds strength in her belief that sacrifices today will lead to a better tomorrow, keeping her motivated to push forward.</i>
Theme #3. Support from Family and Community	<i>While her financial support is limited, the encouragement from her family and teachers strengthens her resilience.</i>

Discussions

Orphaned students in the Philippines face significant challenges despite efforts to make education accessible. Financial struggles, emotional distress, and lack of familial support often hinder their academic progress, putting them at risk of dropping out. Without proper guidance, their well-being and future opportunities are affected.

This study examined the experiences of an orphaned student, emphasizing her hopes, dreams, and fears, as well as her challenges, struggles, resilience, and coping mechanisms. A pseudonym was used to protect her identity, and excerpts from interviews provided insight into her perseverance. The findings emphasized the importance of strong support systems such as school programs, peer networks, and community aid in helping orphaned students succeed.

LIFE STORY OF AN ORPHAN STUDENT

A. Iza's Hopes, Dreams, and Fears as an Orphaned Student

Theme # 1. Aspirations for a Better Future

Iza's ambition is to become a flight attendant. During her younger years, she wanted to ride on a plane and visit other countries. That motivates her to become a flight attendant someday. Iza wanted to help her family as well, especially her mother, to experience a better and prosperous life.

"I want to become a flight attendant someday. When I was a child, I always dreamed of experiencing air travel and visiting other countries. That dream motivates and inspires me to achieve it someday. Aside from that, I also want to help my family, especially my younger brothers and sisters and my mother, so we can escape poverty and experience a prosperous and better life."

Iza dreams of becoming a flight attendant, inspired by her childhood desire to travel and her hope of providing a better life for her family. Her ambition aligns with Bandura's self-efficacy theory, which emphasizes how belief in one's abilities drives perseverance (Bandura, 1997). Despite financial hardships, her strong sense of purpose fuels her determination to succeed.

Theme #2. Fears and Uncertainties

Iza and her siblings live with their mother, as their father passed away when she was in the 4th grade. His sudden death made her fear that she might not be able to finish her education due to poverty.

"My father already died because of lung cancer when I was 10 years old. At that time, our youngest was just 6 months old. Because of the sudden death of my father, I lost hope to fulfill my dreams. We were all dependent on my father because he is the sole breadwinner of the family. And my mother had to take care of my younger siblings."

The loss of Iza's father at a young age left her fearing she might not finish school due to poverty. This reflects the struggles of orphaned students, whose education is often at risk due to financial instability and lack of parental support (UNESCO, 2015). Ryan and Deci's (2000) self-determination theory underscores how external hardships can threaten motivation, requiring strong support systems to sustain engagement in learning.

Theme #3. Motivation Rooted in Family

Iza believes that her sacrifices will lead to a better future. Her struggles motivate her to achieve her dreams, not just for herself but also to support her family, especially her mother and younger siblings, in overcoming poverty. She is determined to create a brighter future where her own children will not have to endure the same hardships she has faced.

"I believe that all my sacrifices will be worth it in the future. They serve as my inspiration to achieve my dreams so that I can help my family, especially my mother and younger siblings, escape poverty. I also want to ensure that my future children will not have to experience the same hardships I have gone through."

Iza's sacrifices are driven by her commitment to helping her family escape poverty. Her resilience aligns with studies showing that intrinsic motivation and family responsibility serve as powerful drivers of academic persistence among disadvantaged youth (Deci & Ryan, 2000). However, personal determination alone is not enough interventions like the Alternative Learning System (ALS) and NGO-led programs play a critical role in ensuring that orphaned students receive the necessary support to achieve their goals.

B. Iza's Challenges and Struggles as an Orphaned Student

Theme #1. Financial Hardships and Daily Sacrifices

Iza faces financial struggles that prevent her from having an allowance for school. Despite this, she remains determined, walking long distances every day, both morning and afternoon, just to continue her education. Her sacrifices reflect her strong commitment to achieving her dreams despite hardship.

"Because of poverty, I go to school nga wala balon (without an allowance). I sacrifice by walking (gutos) from home to school and back every day for about an hour or more, both in the morning and afternoon."

The experiences mirror studies showing that economic difficulties significantly impact students' access to education, often leading to irregular attendance or dropouts (UNESCO, 2015). Bandura's self-efficacy theory (1997) highlights how personal resilience helps students persevere despite adversity, as seen in Iza's unwavering commitment to her studies.

Theme #2. Physical Struggles and Harsh Conditions

Iza's experiences as a student pointed out the struggles she faces due to poverty. She goes to school without an allowance and often without breakfast, relying only on packed meals. Every day, she walks for over an hour, enduring harsh conditions such as muddy roads during the rainy season and extreme heat due to a lack of transportation fare. She has also experienced having her school supplies damaged by heavy rain and attending classes in wet clothes. Despite these hardships, she remains committed to her education and determined not to miss classes as an honor student.

I sacrificed by just walking (gutos) from home to school every day for about an hour or more in the morning and afternoon. I experienced walking in a muddy road during rainy season, "daw pwede na gani matamnan sang palay ang karsada kay ang lutak grabe gid ka tama..daw indi gid maagwintahan indi pa dabi sementado ang dalan nga amon ginaagyan" (rough road-way home). I am walking under the heat of the sun, kay wala ako inugpamasahi sa motor (fare for motorcycle). I also experienced that may school things got damage (school shoes, note book and paper) due to heavy rain. Sometimes, I attended classes wearing wet clothes/uniform.

She added: *I have also encountered drunk people along my way going home from school. And sometimes, damo pa ido sa dalan (dogs) because I am scared of dogs. Nagakadanlog ako kon kis-a sa lutakon kay perti gd kadanlog pasulod sa amon (muddy road). Nagalangoy ako sa patabok sa amon kay gabaha ang sapa. (crossing in a flooded river)".*

These hardships reflect the broader challenges faced by students in remote areas, where geographical and infrastructural barriers hinder educational access (World Bank, 2018). Ryan and Deci's (2000) self-determination theory emphasizes that despite such obstacles, intrinsic motivation and personal goals can sustain persistence in learning.

Theme #3. Emotional Burdens and Vulnerability

In difficult moments, Iza deeply misses her father, wishing he were still alive to support and protect her. She longs for his presence, believing that if he were there, she would feel safe and secure despite the hardships she faces.

"And in these moments, I can't help but remember my father. If only he were still alive (teary-eyed), he would be there to meet me in this situation, and I know for sure that I would reach home safely."

The emotional impact of losing parental support has been shown to affect students' well-being and academic performance, making them more susceptible to stress and anxiety (UNICEF, 2016). This underscores the need for psychological and social support systems to help orphaned students cope and succeed in their education.

C. Iza's Resilience and Coping Mechanisms

Theme #1. Endurance and Self-Discipline

Iza's strong determination to achieve her dreams drives her to overcome hardships. Despite life's challenges, she remains committed to finishing her studies. She is willing to make sacrifices, such as walking long distances daily, to maintain her grades and secure a brighter future.

"Yes, ma'am, I will do everything to achieve my dreams, no matter how hard life gets. I am deeply determined to finish my studies. I am willing to sacrifice by walking (gutos) from home to school and back every day just to maintain my grades, as I am an honor student."

The unwavering determination to succeed despite financial struggles aligns with Bandura's self-efficacy theory, which emphasizes that belief in one's abilities fuels perseverance. Her willingness to endure hardships, such as walking long distances daily to maintain her grades, also reflects Ryan and Deci's (2000) self-determination theory, emphasizing the role of intrinsic motivation in overcoming adversity.

Theme #2. Faith and Positive Mindset

Iza has strong determination and faith in striving for a better future. She believes that all hardships and sacrifices will eventually lead to success. Her desire to help her family, especially in overcoming poverty, serves as a powerful motivation. Additionally, she emphasizes that with perseverance and determination, achieving one's dreams is possible.

"I believe that all my sacrifices encountered will be paid off in the future. This will serve as an inspiration to achieve my goals so that I can help my family, especially my mother and my younger siblings, escape poverty. I also believe that a person with determination will succeed."

The faith in a better future and belief in the value of perseverance align with studies emphasizing how optimism fosters resilience in students facing socio-economic hardships (UNICEF, 2016). Her mindset supports the idea that internal motivation, combined with a strong sense of purpose, is essential for long-term academic success (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Theme #3. Support from Family and Community

Iza's siblings contribute to her education despite having unstable jobs. However, their financial assistance is limited, making it challenging to fully cover her educational expenses. This reflects Iza's financial struggles and the sacrifices she makes. It also emphasizes the importance of financial support in pursuing her education.

"My two siblings are also helping me by giving me an allowance, but their jobs are not yet stable enough to sustain our studies. My other siblings cannot help with our needs because they already have their own families"

The siblings contributed to education despite financial instability, underscoring the importance of family support in educational persistence. The World Bank (2018) indicates that even minimal financial assistance can significantly impact students' ability to continue their studies. This also connects to UNESCO (2015), which emphasizes that community and family support play a crucial role in preventing dropouts among financially struggling students.

IV. Conclusion

The respondent's story exemplifies the hopes, dreams, fears, challenges, experiences, resilience, and determination of an orphaned and indigent student striving for education despite overwhelming financial hardships. Walking (gutos) long distances in severe weather, lacking basic resources, and facing emotional struggles, remains committed to her academic success. Her perseverance underscores education as a powerful tool for breaking the cycle of poverty and emphasizes the need for stronger support systems for students facing similar adversities. Her journey reflects the harsh realities that many underprivileged students endure, yet it also demonstrates the strength of the human spirit in overcoming obstacles through sheer willpower and dedication.

This case shows the crucial role of educational institutions, government agencies, and communities in providing financial aid and emotional support to ensure that all students, regardless of their circumstances, have the opportunity to succeed. Addressing these barriers requires a collective effort from stakeholders to develop targeted policies, create scholarship programs, and establish mentorship initiatives that cater to the specific needs of students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Strengthening these support systems is essential for fostering equitable access to education and empowering students to overcome poverty, ultimately enabling them to build a brighter future for themselves and their families.

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