SURVIVING AND THRIVING: THE EDUCATIONAL JOURNEY OF JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL 4PS BENEFICIARIES

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ABSTRACT

In terms of the ongoing global dialogue on poverty, conditional welfare, and educational justice this study highlights the lived educational circumstances of Junior High School beneficiaries of the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) in the Philippines. 4Ps is a conditional cash transfer program. While studies in macro contexts identify improvements in school attendance, they have given little attention to the experiences of 4Ps students who are negotiating structural inequities at the micro level. Utilizing Bourdieu's theory of capital, Ungar's multisystemic resilience framework, and Freire's critical pedagogy, this phenomenological research study was conducted within a critical-interpretive paradigm. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with twelve 4Ps student-beneficiaries in Agusan del Sur, Philippines. The data were analyzed using reflexive thematic inquiry.

Findings reveal rich educational landscapes situated in a state of affective ambivalence, economic uncertainty, and moral commitment. The themes include: affective contradictions to schooling and scarcity; the 'hidden curriculum of poverty'; the dialectical tensions of the 4Ps as hope and as limit; and the development of informal solidarities and faith-based agency of students. Instead of defining resilience as an individual quality of grit, this study rearticulates resilience as always relational and systemic and has to do with familial relationships, spiritual practices, and peer collaboration to leverage resources.

Theoretically, this study has informed debates in political sociology, authoritarian studies, and educational policy studies by showing how conditionality and meritocratic frameworks reconstitute poverty as an individual deficiency. Practically, this study supports the need for comprehensive reforms that are participatory, trauma-informed, culturally relevant, and can draw from sociological perspectives that center marginal voices in policy contexts. This study has the potential to contribute to global conversations on the ethical reframing of educational governance bounded within neoliberalism.

Keywords: *educational equity, 4Ps, conditional cash transfer, resilience, Bourdieu, critical pedagogy, qualitative inquiry*

1. INTRODUCTION

The multi-generational transmission of poverty and education exclusion continues to be a prevalent challenge in the Global South where formal schooling -or at least in its conceptualization, formal education as a space for escaping deprivation- is plagued by systemic inequity (UNESCO, 2023). Educational access is binary and contingent and not alone enough to catalyze transformative outcomes in this context. One example of this effort for social mobility or to alleviate disadvantage for the most impoverished households, in the Philippines is a conditional cash transfer initiative, called Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps). 4Ps were designed to generate school attendance and

address structural disadvantage for the most impoverished households (Asian Development Bank [ADB], 2022). Sadly, while the macro-research on 4Ps evidences a positive link to enrolment and attendance (Fiszbein & Schady, 2019), the micro-phenomena in particular amongst the 4Ps student beneficiaries is sparsely researched, in particular in rural contexts like Agusan Del Sur, Philippines. In this study, we examine the educational experiences of Junior High School 4Ps beneficiaries by addressing the following research questions: (1) How do 4Ps beneficiaries articulate their lived educational experiences? (2) What barriers do 4Ps beneficiaries encounter in their academic lives relative to their socio-economic contexts (3) What coping mechanisms do they develop to recover from educational disappointments? (4) How might schools, communities, and policy-makers improve and sustain support for success in school?

At this time research related to cash transfer conditional programs acknowledges a bifurcation between the above-average policy standing of 'goodness' for them, while ongoing and predominantly evaluative research devises a flawed and erroneous, or simply uncritical, top-down understood stance, as all agents engage in uncritical, unbound behavioral change (Lai & Lee, 2022). Brazil's Bolsa Família and Mexico's Prospera, have findings that demonstrate measurable educational impacts with regard to educational enrollment. The impact of relying on material incentives is that they are only enough to unsettle socially constructed cycles of disadvantage and marginalization (Manzo & Marshall, 2021). In the Philippines, there are studies such as Reyes et al. (2023), that while enrolment is increased when students are 4Ps beneficiaries, the multiple tensions of stigma attached to 4Ps in education, and teaching and learning guidance that good-willed people often find don't do much to synthesize multiple paths of engagement or attends to the emotional-deprivation. Here, the evaluative literature runs the risk of generating invalidated measures (test scores, attendance rates) that displace the intricacies developing from the interactional, structural, and affective assemblage of schooling in poverty (Toren & Mandondo, 2020). Last, there are a number of late critiques that suggest that we need to be generating approaches based on voice, resilience, and critical agency (Patton et al., 2020; Ghaus et al, 2024), creating educational perspectives based on homeschooling. Valuing these perspectives support for educational policies and practices around the 4Ps, there has been little meaningful and qualitative inquiry in particular research initiated by students.

The lack of consideration is significant; both for analyses and equally for ethical reasons. Honestly, there is a continuing illusion of policy 'consideration' to poverty, with youth, to some extent, own views are simply washed in with macro-scale, top-down, and a blanket instrumentalist evaluative lens, that often includes ignoring some youth perspectives in favor of evaluative considerations for examples or 'anecdotal ultimates' (Bernardo et al. 2022). As a result, the subjectivities of youth navigating the painful work of poverty (the emotional work and toll on relationships) the structural barriers, and the existential entrapment of socially and culturally deemed unworthy opportunities to be visible and valued (or unvalued or dismissed so they can create their narratives) is severely undertheorized. In Caraga, where child poverty is higher than the national average (Philippine Statistics Authority [PSA], 2024), there are no studies to date that effectively examine the process of how (through formal schooling) the young beneficiaries are experiencing schooling through the multi-dimensional interactions of the aspirational values of education while also being confronted by the stranglehold of deprivation. The gap that this study will address provides a certain level of agency from the lived experiences of young people, whom it is preferred policy thinking completely disregards.

Theoretically, this study will draw from Bourdieu's (1986) capital and habitus, Ungar's (2021) theoretical stance on multi-systemic resilience, and Freire's (2020) critical pedagogy. Additionally, by conducting theme analysis in the thinking relationships of Bourdieu, Freire, and Ungar, we will be contextualizing how institutionalized inequalities interject between types and forms of personal and collective agency. From a methodological perspective, we will be using reflexive thematic analysis as a means to understand patterns, shapes, and contradictions based on the accounts of student participant's narratives. This study adds the dimension of both educational sociology and poverty studies, but the findings may also provide some further considerations of 're-engineering' policy and practice and ways of thinking about school-based supports and alternatives based on academic context with reliance on the engaged community as a constraint. The study is an attempt to reclaim narrative space in a world of omission of space for marginalized learners and to create further equitable, context-responsive interventions beyond retention that also include educational dignity and empowerment.

1.1 Theoretical Framework

This research uses an integrated theoretical framework to investigate how beneficiaries of the Junior High School 4Ps program deal with the experiences of poverty, policy, and pedagogy in a dynamic intersecting reality. Although

state-sponsored interventions such as the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) are developed to increase access to education, the complexity of the lived experiences of student beneficiaries is not theorized in ways that account for the contingent nature of structural inequality and youth agency. In this way, the study uses three theorists: Bourdieu's theoretical work on capital and habitus (Bourdieu, 1986), Ungar's (2021) multisystemic resilience model, and Freire's (2020) critical pedagogy. At the intersection of these frameworks, we are provided with a rigorous analysis of both constraint and resistance or structure and subjectivity.

First, Bourdieu's theorizing offers much of the structural base for the conceptual framework, revealing how schooling, often taken as a leitmotif of neutrality and meritocracy, enacts the social reproduction of inequalities through privileged transactions of dominant forms of cultural capital (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). Many 4Ps students, enter school systems that fail to acknowledge the potential value of home-based knowledge, misrecognize their dispositions, and re-inscribe them as "deficient" (Reay, 2021; De Leon & Reyes, 2022). The habitus of 4Ps students often misaligns with the norms of the institution leading to experiences of symbolic violence and systemic exclusion.

To further nuance structure in the deterministic nature of Bourdieu's framework, the study employs Ungar's (2021) multisystemic resilience theory, which provides an understanding of resilience as a co-occurrent outcome, where the role of personal traits is minimized, and the access to relational and institutional supports are explored such as peer networks, teachers, and routines (Masten, 2021; Medina & Francisco, 2021). This construct is used to think about how individuals cope with and persist against precarity in their lives as 4Ps students.

Freire's (2020) conceptualization of critical pedagogy further provides a notion of transformative potential, whereby student narratives are treated as moments of resistance and voice. This framework provides support to analyze how marginalized students contend with oppressive educational processes by exercising agency through reflection, dialogue, and critique of the structures (Kincheloe et al., 2019; Del Mundo, 2024). This enables students not only to contend with exclusion but also opportunities to re-imagine or reconstruct educational possibilities.

In sum, these frameworks collectively inform the reflexive thematic analysis of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2021) and assist in reading critically about how students engage, negotiate, and transcend imposed structural constraints. The analytical approach encourages a contingently flexible framework in theorizing lived experiences and rather than formulating a specific theoretical lens, these theories map a contested space that holds at its analytical center the tensions between social reproduction and educational transformation.

1.2 Conceptual Framework

In this study's conceptual framework, the researcher triangulates Bourdieu's (1986) theory of capital, Ungar's (2021) multisystemic resilience, and Freire's (2020) critical pedagogy to study the educational experiences of fourth stream (4Ps) beneficiaries who are located within systemic poverty. The design of the framework is intended to disentangle misrecognized habitus, social precarity, and emergent student agency (De Leon & Reyes, 2022; Masten, 2021) without entrenching deterministic barriers or overly subjective interpretations. How cultural incongruence and institutional inequity re-entrench symbolic violence is of particular interest, and consider resilience and potential as co-produced in relational ecologies. This lens is operationalized through reflexive thematic analysis, where student voice is still held in recognition as an epistemically legitimate form of data. By putting lived experience at the centre, and placing it among broader structural realities, the study aims to re-orient education research towards justice-oriented, structurally informed interpretations of persistence in marginalized contexts (Serrano & Reyes, 2023).

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The objective of this study is to investigate the lived experiences of Junior High School students who are participants of the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps). This study intends to examine the educational journey of 4P students, the challenges they face, the impediments to their educational journey, and what coping strategies they use to overcome these challenges. It will employ qualitative methods such as in-depth interviews and thematic analysis to report on their lived experiences. The results from this study will contribute to the formation of policy recommendations and intervention strategies which will help to better support 4Ps students.

More specifically, it seeks to answer the following questions:

1. How do 4Ps beneficiaries articulate their lived educational experiences?
2. What barriers do 4Ps beneficiaries encounter in their academic lives relative to their socio-economic contexts?
3. What coping mechanisms do they develop to recover from educational disappointments?
4. How might schools, communities, and policy-makers improve and sustain support for success in school?

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Design

The current study used a qualitative phenomenological case study design grounded in an interpretive-constructivist paradigm that also exhibits a critical realist orientation. The design aligns closely with the study's aim to explore how Junior High School 4Ps beneficiaries have made sense, navigated, and responded to their educational experiences in the context of enduring socioeconomic constraints. Phenomenology can reveal lived experience, including both the first-person accounts of experience and the second-person experiential "textures" (van Manen, 2021). The case study approach facilitates inquiry in more contextualized, bounded cases to the extent that those cases (e.g., institutions, geographic specificity like a public school district in Agusan del Sur, Philippines) unfold and develop.

Philosophically the study is based on the conditioned belief that reality is co-constructed, mediated by context, and known through experience, informed by a constructivist understanding that students' educational realities are shaped by both individual meaning-making and structural conditions. The interpretive paradigm affirms student voices as the primary data source, and critical realism allows the study project to interrogate the generative mechanisms (e.g., poverty, symbolic violence, policy restrictions) that may not be observed in real-time but play a critical role in shaping students' educational lives (Bhaskar, 2020). This triadic stance complements the integrated theoretical framework (Bourdieu, Ungar, Freire) and views agency and structure as dynamically co-constituted.

2.2 Research Participants

Junior High School students (aged 13–17) identified as active 4Ps beneficiaries for one (1) academic year and could adequately describe participants' lived educational experiences in a semi-structured interview format comprised the participant pool. A purposive sampling approach was employed to categorize participants via criterion sampling. Three inclusion conditions were considered for participant selection: (a) participants were currently enrolled in a public Junior High School, (b) participants were included in the documented numbers for those enrolled as 4Ps beneficiaries and at least to have received monthly cash benefits for one (1) academic year and (c) participant was to confirm their willingness and ability to verbally articulate the lived experiences as discussed housing through the semi-structured interview approach. Exclusion criteria included being cognitively or communicatively impaired and restricting to self-reporting.

The researcher identified participant numbers totaling twelve (12) that were appropriate consistent with Guest, Bunce, and Johnson's (2006) use of thematic saturation to determine initial sample size for phenomenological studies. The number of respondents, as well as the adequate depth and variation provided by 12 participants, allowed for the exploration of convergences and divergences in lived experience. The researcher sought to increase maximum variation and analytic generalizability (Patton, 2015), of male-to-female representation, geographies within the district, and socio-economic profiles in family demographics, defined during the purposive sampling process.

2.3 Research Instruments

The main data collection instrument utilized for this study was a semi-structured interview guide that was carefully constructed in thinking through the research questions and theoretical concepts of habitus, resilience, and critical agency. The semi-structured format allowed the researcher to have a consistent approach across participants while providing space to explore deeper context-based stories. The interview guide was piloted with two non-participant 4Ps students and was remodeled for conceptual clarity, language, and cultural appropriateness.

The interviews were conducted in Filipino or Bisaya depending on the participant's preference, and provided the opportunity for the participants to discuss their educational experiences in their voices. The interviews were scheduled for 45-60 minutes, audio-recorded, transcribed, and then translated using care to maintain the idiomatic and contextual meanings of the narratives. This approach ensured that the instrument would be able to authentically capture the lived experience of the 4Ps beneficiaries, while also ensuring rich and sufficient data that could be examined and analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis (Terry et al., 2017).

By privileging student voice and integrating questions within the tenets of Bourdieu's social theory, Ungar's definition of resilience, and Freirean pedagogy, the instrument was, as I have noted in this chapter, not merely an instrument of data collection, but a tool of epistemic justice (Tully 2002)—a way of amplifying narratives that are often absent from governmental, policy discussions.

2.4 Data Gathering Procedure

Semi-structured interviews were the primary form of data gathering, supplemented with informal conversations, my field notes, and analytic memos. I produced an interview guide aligned with the research questions and the research positions of habitus, resilience, and critical agency. The interview guide was piloted with two (non-participating) 4Ps students and subsequently revised for clarity, cultural relevance, and clarity of concept iteration.

Interviews were conducted in Filipino or Bisaya, depending on preference, and later translated (and transcribed) with consideration for idiomatic expression. Each interview was approximately 45-60 minutes in duration and was conducted in private spaces provided by the participants' school, recognizing it would afford participants comfort and confidentiality. Verbal and written informed consent was gained from participants and their guardians, following the ethical protocols approved by the Institutional Research Ethics Board. To mitigate potential harm to well-being, I made available psychological first-aid referrals and gave participants the option to withdraw from the interview, recognizing the emotional burden of discussing issues of poverty, stigma, and failures in education.

2.5 Data Analysis

The data were analyzed utilizing Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA; Braun & Clarke, 2021) due to its epistemological flexibility, and its utility as a framework for guided analysis that resonates with interpretivist, critical, and constructivist stances. The analysis was iterative and gained traction through the following six stages (Braun & Clarke, 2021): (1) familiarization with the data; (2) inductively generating codes; (3) identifying themes; (4) reviewing and refining themes; (5) naming and defining the themes; and (6) writing a sufficient narrative that integrated the research questions and theoretical frame in the interpretation.

NVivo 14 was employed to code and organize the data to achieve transparency and consistent and systematic iteration. Trustworthiness was ensured through a variety of triangulation methods,
Member checking with five participants (i.e., providing integrity checks for the summaries of their transcript and thematic interpretations)

Peer debriefing with two fellow qualitative researchers who reviewed the codes to confirm my coding decisions
Reflexive journaling was used to track my evolving assumptions and analytic tensions.
Theoretical triangulation, where the emergent codes were mapped against concepts from Bourdieu (capital, habitus), Ungar (multisystemic resilience), and Freire (voice, critical agency).

Themes were analyzed as patterned meanings across the narratives, rather than cutoffs in how many times a theme was articulated. Based on my constructivist epistemological position, the analysis was oriented towards depth, nuance, and contradiction; wrestling with the urge to produce a coherent story in the analysis, the analysis rejected coherence and instead honored the complexity of student experiences through their narratives.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section discusses dominant themes identified from the lived experiences of 4Ps beneficiaries. The findings are reported through reflexive thematic analysis, which emphasizes how students navigate through educational

impediments created by poverty, policy impositions, and informal supports. These narratives are interpreted through the theoretical lens of the study in order to gain a deeper understanding of how resiliency, marginalization, and institutional gaps, co-construct their schooling experiences.

3.1 Lived Educational Experiences of 4Ps Beneficiaries

Table -1: Thematic Analysis of Lived Educational Experiences of 4Ps Beneficiaries

Generated Themes	Codes / Key Concepts	Actual Statements (Vernacular with English Translation)
Unstable Happiness: Educational Promise in an Environment of Structural Inequality	-mixed affect in school routines- school enjoyment in the midst of exhaustion- valuing peer relationships and classroom experience- a tension between excitement and exhaustion	SP2: "Usahay malingaw ko, pero kapoy gyud kung daghan buluhaton sa balay ug tun-anon."("Sometimes I enjoy it, but it's really tiring when there's a lot of housework and schoolwork.")SP8: "Okay ra man, medyo challenging pero malingaw gihapon ko."("It's okay, a bit challenging, but I still enjoy it.")SP11: "Excited ko pirmi kay makita nako akong mga classmates, malingaw sad mi usahay."("I'm always excited because I get to see my classmates, and sometimes we have fun.")SP12: "Excited ko sa buntag pero usahay kapoy pud kaayo."("I feel excited in the morning, but sometimes I feel very tired.")
Economic Insecurity as Implicit Curriculum	- transportation barriers- academic challenges tied to low-income status- added burden of contributions to group work- math and English as symbolic barriers	SP1: "Lisod gyud kung walay kwarta, labi na kung kinahanglan na sa eskwelahan."("It's really hard when there's no money, especially when it's needed for school.")SP3: "Lisod sakyanan, kapoy sab English nga subject."("Transportation is difficult, and English is a hard subject.")SP9: "Lisod ang reporting ug group work kay kinahanglan man og contribution."("Reporting and group work are difficult because contributions are needed.")SP10: "Ang pinaka-lisod ang bayad sa eskwelahan."("The most difficult part is paying school fees.")
4Ps as a Conditional Lifeline of Hope and Restraint	- 4Ps enabling going to school- conditionality of support- family competing priorities- the principal-agent problem of being dependent on the government	SP1: "Tungod sa 4Ps, makapalit nami sa school supplies ug shoes."("Because of 4Ps, we can now buy school supplies and shoes.")SP3: "Dili man igo, kay ang uban sa akong igsoon nga naa sa college."("It's not enough because some go to my sibling in college.")SP11: "Ginahatag sa akong mama ang uban nga kwarta sa 4Ps isip allowance ug pangpalit og gamit."("My mom gives me part of the 4Ps money as allowance and for school supplies.")SP12: "Dako kaayo'g tabang, apil sa pagkaon ug groceries."("It helps a lot, including for food and groceries.")

The thematic analysis above distills three interwoven narratives emerging from the lived experiences of 4Ps beneficiaries: the tension between joy and exhaustion in schooling, the hidden pedagogy of economic struggle, and the dual nature of 4Ps as both support and constraint. These themes are not discrete categories but intersecting discourses that map the affective, material, and institutional textures of life for students navigating poverty and policy.

Theme 1: Unstable Happiness: Educational Promise in an Environment of Structural Inequality

Some participants spoke about the emotional duality of their experiences, like SP2 and SP12, and the repeated ebb and flow of their engagement and exhaustion. Students described school as both energizing and exhausting, as a

place to connect with peers and reinforce their aspirations, but also as a site of the material conditions required for a healthy habitable existence. SP11 was excited to see her classmates after a long summer (which she described as "a long haul"), while SP2 often recalled the fatigue of being at school with classmates and teachers. This exemplifies the embodied contradictions in learning under conditions of precarity. Ahmed's (2014) concept of "affective economies" is relevant here: emotions enter social relations in a fluid circulation whereby they can sustain attachments to the exhausting conditions of confinement. It also pushes us to think of schooling as not only an academic turf but most importantly an emotional and social space - a space where systemic inequities bleed into the rhythms of joy.

Theme 2: Economic Insecurity as Implicit Curriculum

Although education claims to be a right, these narratives illustrate how it is most often felt to be a transactional process based on economic capital. SP1's remark, "Lisod gyud kung walay kwarta," captures not only an acknowledgment of hardship, but is also a critique of the school system based on systems of commodification. Contributions, transportation, and even subject mastery (Math and English) became class-embedded barriers. This aligns with Apple's (2019) characterization of "hidden curriculum" where socio-economic inequalities are reproduced under the guise of neutrality. Examining education through the economic substratum of academic life, reveals that policies which make little or no attempt to address structural poverty are successful at rendering the formal promise of education void.

Theme 3: 4Ps as a Conditional Lifeline of Hope and Restraint

The 4Ps program is celebrated as a way to retain students in school, but as the participants show, they see a more conflicted position. For example, although SP1 is talking about shoes and supplies thanks to 4Ps, SP3 and SP11, raise the issue of enough money and taking care of siblings, with the added complexity of competing with their family's immediate needs. These issues illustrate the biopolitics of contingent cash transfers: citizenship and support are made conditional (Ferguson, 2015). On one hand, the program offers economic resources, but it also acts as a disciplining tool—dictating how families must negotiate state compliance with managing household economies.

Theoretical and Policy Implications

Together, these themes highlight how increasing educational access does not necessarily lead to equity. They reveal the potential for even the best intentions (including access programs like 4Ps) to act in ways that reinforce state-sanctioned surveillance and dependence if not accompanied by ongoing structural change. Educational governance must take seriously the lived experiences of students and articulate these experiences to address a broader agenda of economic justice and effective care that underpins the support offered by schools (Sellar & Lingard, 2021).

Future research should highlight how conditional welfare shapes the ways in which individuals understand themselves, their aspirations, and their engagement with school, in a context where outcomes are evaluated on a statistical basis. There should be no doubt that participatory policymaking, responsive budgeting, and trauma-informed schooling are not a here and there notion, it is compulsory for systems that claim to work on behalf of the socially disadvantaged to adopt and implement those constructs.

3.2 Academic Challenges Faced by 4Ps Beneficiaries

Table -2: Thematic Analysis of Academic Challenges Faced by 4Ps Beneficiaries

Generated Themes	Codes / Key Concepts	Actual Statements (Vernacular with English Translation)
Economic Deprivation as a Structuring Force of Delayed Academic Participation	- delayed submission due to poverty- inability to purchase materials-reliance on borrowing-transportation as barrier	SP1: "Madugay ko mahuman og project kay wala mi ikapalit sa materials."("I get delayed in completing school projects because we don't have money for materials.")SP5: "Usahay di ko kasulod kay wala mi plete, di sad ko kapasa requirements kay walay kwarta."("Sometimes I miss school

		because we don't have fare, and I also can't submit requirements because we have no money.")SP3: "Lisod mahuman requirements, manghulam lang mi og kwarta."("It's hard to finish school requirements, so we borrow money.")SP4: "Lisod musulod kung maguba ang motor, lisod sab humanon ang requirements kung walay kwarta."("It's hard to attend school when the motorcycle breaks down, and to complete requirements without money.")
Internalized Shame and the Hidden Curriculum of Otherness	- shame- social comparisons and lack of inclusion- opting out of group work- emotional exhaustion from economic precarity	SP11: "Lisod humanon ang tasks kay maulaw ko kung di ko ka-contribute sa grupo."("I struggle to finish tasks because I feel ashamed when I can't contribute to group work.") SP10: "Lisod kay wala pa mi kabayad, kapoy sad sa huna-huna."("It's difficult because we haven't paid fees yet. It's mentally exhausting.") SP12: "Lisod kaayo magpokus kay kabalo ka nga ang uban humana na ilang requirements."("It's hard to focus because I know others have already finished their requirements.")SP9: "Usahay, mokuwang ang kwarta, manghulam lang mi aron makabayad sa eskwelahan."("Sometimes we run out of money and have to borrow just to pay school fees.")
Stories of Endurance: Hope, Resistance, and Family Aspirations	- unwillingness to give up- family motivation- dreams as a coping mechanism- hope in the future despite adversity	SP5: "Bisan lisod ang kinabuhi, di ko gusto muundang. Gusto ko makatabang sa pamilya."("Even if life is hard, I don't want to quit. I want to help my family.") SP4: "Nagpadayon ra gihapon ko kay gusto nako makab-ot akong damgo."("I still continued because I want to reach my dreams.")SP12: "Usahay gusto nako muundang pero ingnan ko sa akong mama nga ipadayon lang gyud ang eskwela."("There were times I wanted to quit, but my mom always tells me to just continue school.")SP2: "Wala, naningkamot lang gihapon ko."("No, I just keep trying my best.")

The thematic analysis demonstrates the presence of constraints, vulnerabilities, and resistances that define the academic experiences of 4Ps beneficiaries in three parts. These findings invite us to think critically about the educational inequity not exclusively in terms of economic inequality, but one that is also constructed discursively through shame, institutional neglect, and ideological constructs of resilience.

Theme 1: Economic Deprivation as a Structuring Force of Delayed Academic Participation

The participants' narratives expose the systemic roots of poverty in the rhythm of their academic lives. SP1 and SP5 explicitly note how a lack of basic materials and transportation delays their academic work. These situations are not examples of academic failure but rather what Reay (2018) has coined as the "institutionalized misrecognition of working-class constraints." The mundane nature of not having fare or material for a school project unearths forms of structural violence as an embedded social and economic reality within a meritocratic school culture. Poverty is not an obstacle to furthering education; it is constituted within socially constructed mechanisms.

The normalization of borrowing to meet school-related demands (SP3, SP4) also illustrates how students internalized and compensated for failure on behalf of the state and the institution. This mirrors Ball and Vincent's (2021) critique of neoliberal responsibilization whereby it is disadvantaged families who are implicitly required to shoulder the burden of structural scarcity.

Theme 2: Internalized Shame and the Hidden Curriculum of Otherness

The psychological burden of poverty is a presence in the participants' feelings of shame, as well as participants' disengagement with school. Consider SP11: the participants' ability to situate group work to make it comfortable

was expressed with reluctance, contingent on the lack of resources to contribute, a manifestation of a hidden curriculum, one that is not observable in formal or informal schooling practice, yet is an expected and revered form of knowing one's worth which can be characterized by what we can bring (physically) to groups. SP10 and SP12 expressed feelings of emotional exhaustion suggesting that academic precarity is emotionally affective as much as it is materially based.

Burke and Collett (2016) show in their research how educational spaces can be compounded and fortified in discourses of social symbolic violence wherein working-class students feel as if they do not belong. Within this framework, shame can be understood as both personal and political, hence it can serve as the interpersonal affective product of exclusion. Freire's (2014) critical pedagogy would remind educators that these dynamics are not anomalies, but rather part of the discourse of power within classrooms.

Theme 3: Stories of Endurance: Hope, Resistance, and Family Aspirations

Amidst the challenges, the participants were articulating counter-narratives of resilience and hope. Statements from SP5 and SP4 put schooling forward as a means not only for self-identity but also for family upliftment. Reflections about the family at the center of these dreams demonstrate collectivist values, but also the emotional investments students make to remain hopeful.

For instance, SP12's illustration of maternal encouragement is a particularly prominent example of what Luttrell (2020) describes as "narratives of worthy struggle," where the student's ability to persist is supported socially and emotionally. However, that narrative of resilience cannot be romanticized. Rather, it should prompt inquiry into why such resilience is needed in the first place, and what it costs in terms of emotional and developmental resources.

Theoretical and Policy Implications

These findings are problematic for dominant policy narratives that treat poverty as an individual obstacle, instead of a systemic and institutional failure. They demand we think about policy for education - even the meaning of access - in light of the intertwining economic, emotional, and cultural dimensions of marginalization (Thomson et al., 2021). Policies should displace token ways of supporting students with transformational support systems (free transportation, subsidized projects, trauma-informed teaching practices, participatory budgeting) aimed at dismantling educational inequity rather than accommodating it. Additional research should consider how the normalization of economic hardship impacts students' identities, self-efficacy, and futures.

3.3 Coping Mechanisms Among 4Ps Beneficiaries

Table -3: Thematic Analysis of Coping Mechanisms Among 4Ps Beneficiaries

Generated Themes	Codes / Key Concepts	Actual Statements (Vernacular with English Translation)
Faith-informed agency and spiritual coping	- prayer and spirituality - trust in God in uncertainty - moral perseverance under duress	SP1: "Nag-ampo gyud ko ug moasalig sa Ginoo ug sa akong pamilya."("I pray sincerely and rely on God and my family.")SP5: "Mag-ampo ko, likayan ang dili importante nga gasto, ug magtuon gyud ko sa lisod nga subjects."("I pray, avoid unnecessary spending, and study hard—especially on difficult subjects.")
Adaption within Resourcefulness and Pragmatism	- time management and prioritization - peer and parental support - tutoring, budgeting and informal work	SP3: "Maningkamot gyud ko. Nagtutor ko sa silingan para naay allowance ug magtinabangay mi sa classmates kung lisod ang subject."("I work hard, tutor neighbors for allowance, and collaborate with classmates in hard subjects.")SP8: "Magbudget gyud ko ug manage sa time kay daghan pud ko buhaton sa balay."("I budget strictly and manage my time because I also do chores at home.")SP11: "Manghulam mi og kwarta para bayranan. Naa pud koy classmate nga pangutan-on kung lisod ang lesson."("We borrow money to pay for expenses. I also ask my classmate for help when lessons are hard.")

Familial anchoring and relational motivation	- family as moral and emotional anchor - dreams of socioeconomic uplift - intergenerational motivation and solidarity	SP6: "Ang akong ginikanan ug mga auntie ug ang akong damgo nga mahimong piloto or seaman."("My parents, aunts, and my dream of becoming a pilot or seaman.")SP9: "Akong pamilya ug mga amigo nga pirme mosuporta ug moingon nga padayon lang."("My family and friends who always encourage me to keep going.")SP12: "Akong ginikanan, pirmi sila magpahinumdum nga magtuon ko aron maka-graduate ug makatabang sa among kahimtang."("My parents always remind me to study so I can graduate and help improve our situation.")

The table shows a descriptive account of how Junior High School 4Ps beneficiaries mobilized agency and resilience given that structural poverty is a longstanding feature within their lives. The 4Ps program would have afforded a material basis for help, but the coping strategies that were reported here appear to create a wholesale, affective economy of survival, where spirituality, flexible support, and relational ties coalesce agency into resilience infrastructuring.

Theme 1: Faith-Informed Agency and Spiritual Coping

For participants such as SP1 and SP5, prayer is depicted as a way to manage one's mind, attention and meaning making, rather than a religious act. This aligns with Koenig (2020) conceptualization of spiritual coping in marginalized contexts, that works as structural scaffolding and bulkheads. The spiritual reference provides a psychological and socio-cultural rationale - it provides a morally-inflected willingness to engage with the world on a materially precarious footing, but it also frames one's action not just as inherently devotional, but in relation to a spiritual moral order.

The theme critiques a normative background rationalism of the policy space that diminishes spiritual possibilities in the coping literature. As Ungar and Theron (2020) write, resilience has to be understood contextually, and therefore it applies equal weight to the spiritual, relational, and cultural, even when those aspects are largely missing in the literature which seeks a universal and Western frame. Within this study, and as participants took refuge in God, this creates a way of situating agency - in a way to claim authority in conditions that are more restricting from a structural mobility perspective.

Theme 2: Adaption within Resourcefulness and Pragmatism

Data indicated a nuanced and sophisticated reparation of adaptation that included, informal work, peer tutoring strategies, budgeting, and time management. SP3's engagement in tutoring for an allowance and SP8's self-governed budgeting practices illustrated a practical agency that resists deficit narratives attached to the poor. These practices embodied what de Certeau (1984) calls "tactics of the weak": everyday acts of improvisation that counter structural disadvantage through creativity and collaboration.

The participants engaged in actionable agency by collaboratively co-constructing their academic viability, as discussed in Mendenhall et al. (2021), who assert that educational resilience for the marginalized is constructed through micro-practices of resource-sharing and collective problem-solving. The clear implication for schools is to work with them in building on and amplifying these organic strategies rather than employing top-down interventions that are typically one-size-fits-all.

Theme 3: Familial Anchoring and Relational Motivation

Familial support acts as both emotional ballast and an aspirational anchor. The statements by SP6, SP9, and SP12 show that when they dream, they do not do so as individualists, rather they do this as a collectivist with intergenerational strength. This is consistent with research by Serafica and Reyes (2022), on the centrality of family in Filipino understanding of success and motivation.

However, the theme also identified a tension. Familial anchoring is motivated, but for some, it also adds pressure, in terms of success as moral obligation to lift the family out of poverty. The emotional burden of this responsibility is worthy of additional inquiry. Ridge (2019) argues that young people from families with low income have an "emotional economy of debt" to the family whereby achievement is understood as paying it back.

Theoretical and Policy Implications

These findings support a reframing of resilience as not an individual trait but a relational, embedded process. Coping, in this study, is inherently moral, spiritual, and social. Policies and pedagogies that overlook these layers can perpetuate their misrecognition.

Educational interventions must be culturally responsive, trauma-informed, and relationally situated. Program design must embed psychosocial support, spiritual literacy, and family engagement as essential features of student well-being. Finally, additional research should interrogate how resilience is valorized in educational contexts, and ultimately how this impacts the expectations and pressure placed on students.

3.4 Support Systems for 4Ps Beneficiaries in Education

Table -4: Thematic Analysis of Support Systems for 4Ps Beneficiaries in Education

Generated Themes	Codes / Key Concepts	Actual Statements (Vernacular with English Translation)
Accounts of Care in Informal Solidarity (Generative micro-alliance without institutional safety-web's)	Peer-led support, teacher care and compassion, discretionary generosity, emotional touchscreen-as-education support, informal credit	SP3: "Mutabang ang classmates ug teachers bayad sa contribution. Tagaan ug pagkaon sa teachers kung wala ko."("Classmates and teachers help pay contributions. Teachers give me food when I have none.")SP5: "Gi-allow ko sa teachers na malate sa PTA payment, gi-encourage ko nga mo-perform."("Teachers allowed me to delay PTA payments and encouraged me to do my best.")
Structural vs State Welfare (4Ps policy goals = end-goal vs 4Ps framework in practice, policy objectives on the ground)	Not enough cash assistance, logistical issues, delayed funds/transfers, little cash assistance, was not enough to afford multiple meals each day; emergency food bank support wasn't enough either to help provide for other basic needs	SP12: "Ang cash assistance sa 4Ps kulang gyud. Dapat i-permanent, maghatag pa unta ug scholarships ug feeding programs."("The 4Ps cash assistance is really not enough. It should be permanent, and there should be scholarships and feeding programs.") SP3: "Nindot unta naa free boarding house ug pamasahe."("It would be good to have free boarding houses and transportation.")
Policy Blindness and Failure to Honor Holistic Education Obligations (A disconnect with policy design vs actual reality when viewed as learner-centered)	Externally mandated asks of a project, no material/food or other assistance, no enrichment programs to help them, still naturalized doing well academically as "success"	SP1: "Mahal kaayo mga project. Dapat tagaan mi ug dugang cash assistance."("Projects are very expensive. We should be given more cash assistance.")SP10: "Ang allowance kulang kaayo. Dapat maghatag ug school supplies."("The allowance is too small. They should provide school supplies.")
Hidden Curriculum of Resilient, Moral Strength (Negotiating dignity through moral resilience amidst scarcity, when everybody is forced to act in small, bold ways to become moral agents of	Values education, welcomed/reaching out, who-to-reach-out to be perseverant, being motivated, self-worth, provided emotional scaffolding	SP1: "Ginaingnan ko nga mo-paninguha ug mo-study hard."("I'm told to work hard and study.")SP6: "Gina-acknowledge sa teachers akong pagka-bright, makatabang siya nga mo-padayon ko."("Teachers acknowledge my intelligence; it helps me continue.")

care)		
Digital and Pedagogical Divide (Extended frontiers of inequity is a tech exclusion)	No edtech, no tech programming, multiple literacies all via the digital divide, city and rural divide	SP4: "Nindot unta naa educational games gamit ang technology."("It would be good to have educational games using technology.")SP10: "Dapat naa pud mga fun learning activities gamit ang technology."("There should also be fun learning activities using technology.")
Calls for Participatory Governance and Student Voice (bottom-up accountability mechanisms with regard to the design of student support services)	All things the students asked for, community present, logged policy suggestions, community inclusive planning processes, co-designed student supports from the places where the co-designing action occurs (postsecondary programs) with students.	SP3: "Dapat monthly monitoring sa gobyerno ug feeding program sa eskwelahan."("There should be monthly government monitoring and a school feeding program.")SP8: "Dapat sabton gyud ang lesson, dili lang tapos-tapos lang."("Lessons should really be understood, not just rushed through.")

This thematic summary articulates the lived educational experiences of 4Ps beneficiaries and their entanglements in both informal networks and institutional inaction, showing not just a representation of the systems provided but a critical mapping representing how care, neglect, and voice are distributed across educational spaces and policy fields.

Theme 1: Accounts of Care in Informal Solidarity

Participants described the experience of discretionary acts of compassion from teachers and fellow students as a kind of temporary antidote to an underfunded welfare world. SP3 noted the contributions from fellow students and teachers to cover their school fees, and SP5 noted teachers allowing them to pay late, as two small examples of micro-alliances generated by a lack of institutional support. These acts fit into Fraser's (2021) conceptualization of "interstitial solidarities," where care labor and emotional economies emerge to fill in the systemic gaps left by neoliberal governance practices.

While informal alliances are sustaining for participants, they have the potential to normalize ongoing state withdrawal and create an over-reliance on moral economies of care. This begs the question of whether state neglect and structural violence are dressed up as benevolence (Ferguson, 2015).

Theme 2: Structural vs State Welfare

SP12 and SP3 stories highlighted material deprivation present in the 4Ps program. From the tenor of the program, it is not helping to ensure educational equity, and as it exists now, the program is inconsistent and insufficient. Students, as with (SP12), asked for free boarding, and expanded scholarship offers - requests that demonstrate the spatial and logistical realities of poverty. The theoretical implication here reverberates with Peck and Theodore's (2019) critique of "roll-out neoliberalism," when social protections are only extended to sufficiently mitigate systemic collapse, but not enough to counter poverty. The ethicality and viability of conditional cash transfers for development programs have been raised as an issue.

Theme 3: Policy Blindness and Failure to Honor Holistic Education Obligations

Students' requests for more school resources and relief from costly project demands (SP1, SP10), illustrate a disconnect between the design policies and what happens in the classroom. As education is less inclusive when the assumption of resourcing. This aligns with the concept of "policy myopia" articulated by Lingard and Sellar (2021) when top-down reforms fail to account for the mundane struggles of educators and learners.

This theme highlights the need for policy design to be contextually and relationally situated—policies that listen to the embodied voices of those who occupy the receiving end of its logic.

Theme 4: Hidden Curriculum of Resilient, Moral Strength

Cases like SP6 offered a hidden pedagogical script that endorsed grit, effort, and perseverance as worthwhile. These narratives are powerful, but can just as easily be persuasive devices built from false meritocratic beliefs, under structural inequity. Resilience as an individual and a virtue can obscure the institutional factors that require resilience in the first place (Brown, 2019).

Resilience should, therefore, be reconceptualized not as heroic perseverance, but as a demand for structural change that forgoes the need for emotional labor.

Theme 5: Digital and Pedagogical Divide

Technological exclusion is a significant theme of SP4 and SP10's recommendations for adjusting digital learning tools. The call for "educational games" both suggests a desire to keep with relevance and implies that analog-dominated pedagogy is less valuable and progressive. This theme situates itself alongside the growing body of critical literature surrounding digital equity (Selwyn, 2020) where the digital divide is no longer just access, but as much, meaningful participation and culturally relevant EdTech.

Theme 6: Calls for Participatory Governance and Student Voice

The final theme offered reveals an increasing solicitation for horizontal governing means— student-led feedback to policy co-creation. The desire of SP3 for "monthly government monitoring" and the call for further depth of learning by SP8, expresses an oppositional-hegemonic understanding of educational planning. Such bottom-up discourse bears resemblance to Gaventa's (2019) concepts of participatory accountability where the legitimacy of governance improves when those most affected by a policy engage in outlining its contours.

4. CONCLUSIONS

This qualitative exploration of the lived educational experiences of Junior High School 4Ps beneficiaries provides a nuanced understanding of how poverty, policy, and institutional practice co-construct the educational trajectories of marginalized youth. The study identifies six conceptually overlapping themes: (1) educational aspiration and structural constraint, (2) economic struggle as a hidden curriculum, (3) ambivalence about the impact of 4Ps, (4) the layers of resilience and support systems, and (5) emotions as (socio)historical representations of survival. These findings collectively reveal a complex topology of schooling in conditions of precarity.

Theoretically, the study has implications for discourses on educational administration. It draws from the ecological/contextual perspective to deconstruct resilience as a collective systemic, relational phenomenon. Broadly, it dismantles access-centered paradigms in favor of a contextual approach informed by notions of emotional labor, digital equity, and participatory governance. This conceptualization elaborates the moral and affective dimensions of education policy and subsequently positions features neglected in technocratic approaches to education policy.

Practically, this research motivates a redesign of support systems by integrating trauma-informed pedagogies, relational care infrastructures, and community-based feedback loops while co-constructing support systems with students responsible for conceptualizing their needs. The student narratives were filled with vulnerability but also dignity that demonstrated epistemic agency.

Limitations include reliance on self-reported information, and the geographically specific focus of the study highlights the need for comparative or longitudinal studies. This research raises a more critical question, what would education look like if it did not form an unreasonable expectation of resilience in the poorest students? This question extends not only to local debates but also global discussions on the prioritization of policy, equity, and ethics in education governance during a time of increasing inequality in education.

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