

## From mountains to the city: A biographical description of Samantha's education

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### ***Abstract***

This study aimed to present, narrate and analyze the experiences of a student in schooling, life, success, goals and desires. This investigation intended to find out to which any community standard of living can affect the student's education in a community. This qualitative study employed a biographical narrative approach with qualitative response in which the researcher used in-depth interview in data gathering. This was done through a collection of data on the personal life of individual experience and views especially for sensitive matters. The result of the study revealed that the informant faced challenges in life and education such as financial problems, language, hunger and even being deprived with opportunities but he never let these challenges hinder his desires and goals to succeed in life. Instead, he used these challenges to strive harder. He learned to have a positive attitude, talk to his family and have proper time management in order to achieve his goals in life. Challenges can really affect a student's performance when it comes to life and school. But the informant always bears in mind that there are ways to overcome these challenges and help him achieve his goals in life. Obstacles are there to shape us and be a lesson to improve ourselves.

***Keywords:*** applied linguistics, poverty, education, biographical inquiry, Philippines

## **From mountains to the city: A biographical description of Samantha's education**

### **1. Introduction**

Poverty is a persistent and pervasive problem across the globe. The long-lasting effects of poverty are multifaceted. One of its effects is its impact on education. Education is said to be the key to success but poverty prevents many individuals from receiving a proper education. According to the US Census Bureau, approximately 30 million children are growing up in poverty today. One of the most direct effects that poverty has on education is reducing literacy. Additionally, children who live in poverty have higher absentee rates, reducing their ability to learn (Hunlock, 2010). As a matter of fact, children who live in poverty have lower test scores and are far less likely to attend college. It has been argued that one of the best ways to combat poverty is to invest in the education, reduce dropout rates and provide for higher education for all who want it (Kurt, 2013).

Almost everyone wishes they could do something to make a difference in the world. There are concerned about poverty who give money or serve food but still it's easy to feel helpless about such an enormous problem. In fact, ATD Fourth World visited the Philippines and talked about learning to understand more about the feelings of people living in poverty. They even used the words "bridges of hope" to describe the involvement in efforts to overcome poverty (Wresinski, 2018). Past studies and issues mentioned mainly on the effects of poverty. However, I have not come across a study that discusses how someone overcomes education despite poverty. I am interested on how this someone faced the challenges in life and education using a biographical inquiry.

#### *1.1 Purpose of the Study*

This biographical approach aimed to present, narrate and analyze the experiences of a student in schooling, life, success, goals and desires. This also tries to find out to which any community standard of living can affect the student's education in a community. Some teachers are surprised when it comes to evaluate performance of some students. Such teachers might find particular students in class performing extremely poor despite all kinds of skills employed in carrying out an effective teaching and learning process. This study also provides possible suggestion in enhancing or improving the student's linguistic performance by bringing out strategies to alleviate poverty.

#### *1.2 Research Questions*

This study sought answers to the following questions:

- What are the challenges faced by the informant in life and education?
- How does the informant face the challenges in life and education?

#### *1.3 Theoretical Lens*

This study is supported by the Reasoned Action Theory (Ajzen & Fishbein, 2005) which recognizes the complex relationship between cognitive learning and ultimate behavioral outcomes, and that behavior is mediated through both "behavioral intention" and "perceived behavioral control". According to Ajzen, behavioral intention is an immediate antecedent of behavior that provides a robust indication of an individual's readiness to perform a given behavior. In addition, this is also supported by Perceived Behavioral Control which refers to a person's perceptions of their ability to perform a given behavior, a function of the perceived ease or difficulty of the behavior as well as their capacity to undertake it. The more resources and opportunities individuals believe they possess, and the fewer obstacles or impediments they anticipate, the greater should be their perceived

control over the behavior and the greater their sense of "self-efficacy" (Bandura, 1986).

#### 1.4 Significance of the Study

The significance of the result of this study would identify some essential factors existing in the various level as they influence students in their school performance. The study would give solution on how to improve student's academic performance. *The national level.* This study will focus on the need for government to incorporate parents in planning for the students. *The community level.* This will also enable the community to do something to help the constituents in proper planning on how to properly educate their children. They serve as the instrument to help the parents in enlightening them on the value of education to their children which would benefit the community in return. And lastly the *home level or the family background* of the informant. Parents know best the environment under which students at home will learn and the other variable which affects their performance.

#### 1.5 Definition of Terms

The following terms used in the study were conceptually and operationally defined. **From mountains to the City.** This refers to the transition of life experiences of the informant from living in a remote place to living in the city with the corresponding challenges that he faced in order to survive. **Samantha's education.** This refers to an individual to whom a biographical narrative and story of experiences in life and education were all about.

#### 1.6 Delimitation and Limitation of the Study

The result of this study is merely based on the interviewed informant in the process of in-depth interview. This study does not cover the state or standing in life of the participant along with his personal state and some personal state and some personal issue that is not related with the study.

## 2. Review of related literature

This section covers the review of literature related to this study to provide basis for theoretical framework, deeper analysis and support of the phenomenon under inquiry.

**Language, Dialect and Varieties** - Language is many things; it can be a system of communication, a medium for thought, vehicle for literary expression, a matter for political controversy and a catalyst for nation building (O'Grady & Dobrovolsky, 2008). The existence of language can't be separated from human life. It can be seen from the fact that all activities related to interaction among people necessitate language. Language reflects thinking and obviously we cannot say a sentence until we have first thought of it. The terms of language variety are emerged due to different systems reflecting different varieties of the human condition. Variety is a specific set of 'linguistic items' or 'human speech patterns' (presumably sounds, words, grammatical features, etc) which we can connect with come external factors apparently a geographical area or a social group (Hudson, 1996; Fergusson, 2002; & Wardhaugh, 2006). Languages can be at variance in lexical, grammatical, phonological and other ways depends on different social, geographical and other circumstances determine what elements will be needed and developed, and for that reason, sociolinguistics believe that such unique sets of items or patterns do exist.

**Poverty and Education** - The relationship between poverty and language learning shows the student's level of cognitive readiness. The physical and social-emotional factors of living in poverty have a detrimental effect on student's cognitive performance. Some children have short attention span, some are highly distractible and some cannot actively monitor the quality of their own work. Even the lack of physical activity in students who live in poverty affects their concentration (Roberts, 2017). In fact, by 1999, it was estimated that more than 70% of Nigeria lived in poverty. In recent years, it has been a controversy through the mind of the people that if the poor status of any society or nation, even family can really have an impact on the student's educational

performance.

Goldstern (2006) admitted this concept when he said that the fact that much of youth educational development takes place in a circle or home, the child begins to attend school in psychological tourism, an attempt would be made to determine the influence or parents' socio-economic performance and the poverty impact on students' education. Although children raised in poverty rarely choose to behave differently, poverty still affects learning because they face challenges their affluent counterparts never see. Their brains have adapted to suboptimal conditions in ways that undermine good school performance (Jensen, 2016). He added that children from low-income families suffer from parental inconsistency, frequent childcare changes, lack of adult supervision and lack of role models. Thus, the child does not receive the stimulation or learns the social skills necessary to maximize their academic performance.

In order to reverse how poverty affects learning, researchers suggest that schools focus support services that aid in a child's cognitive and social skill development. The High/Scope Educational Research Foundation concluded that children who receive proper intervention services were more likely to graduate secondary school, have higher employment and income rates and have lower crime rates by the time they reached 40 (Leon, 2016). Based on the gathered related literature, it can be concluded that there really is a big connection between poverty and the academic performance of the students since their learnings are greatly influenced by the status they are in. If only the parents are knowledgeable enough to teach their children about proper way of pronouncing, proper way of speaking and even writing, there will be a great chance for their children to excel in school.

### 3. Methodology

This section contains methods and procedures by which the entire qualitative study objectives are systematically and possibly achieved. It describes the research design used followed by the role of the researcher in the conduct of the study, then the research participant including the process and the criteria used in selecting the informants. The remaining portion of this chapter presents the data collection process, how the data were being analyzed and the methods employed to establish trustworthiness and credibility. Finally, the ethical consideration is emphasized to protect the right of confidentiality and respect for the participant.

**Research Design** - This qualitative study employed a biographical narrative approach with qualitative response in which the researcher used in-depth interview in data gathering which is a convenient and ideal collection method of personal life of individual experience and views especially for sensitive matters (Creswell, 2003). Biographical study or research refers to the study of life of an individual that narrates the life experiences, history based on reliable documents, events and information. In a narrative approach, the researcher studied the life of an individual or group of individuals to gather and narrate the story of their life. This is a method of interview and inquiry. The researcher can narrate the data in systematic chronological sequence (Creswell, 2003).

In this study, qualitative method is appropriate to use in discussing the interest, experiences and how they gave meaning to their lives. This is the kind of research in which the informant is being observed as part of the process of the study in events and practices. The researcher must focus in discovering the interpretations about the social activities of the studied person (Parkinson & Drislane, 2012). This qualitative method of research aimed to understand a particular event in a person or organization. Through this, the researcher can synthesize the general picture or description of an event (Tripoli, 2014). This also aimed to understand, describe, develop, discover and give focus on the experiences and events in life of a person or organization (Creswell, 2013).

**Role of the Researcher** - In a qualitative design of study, the role of the researcher is an important matter to be considered in the successful pursuit of investigation of any social phenomena. It is important to consider the confidentiality of the informant and his statements that only I knew the success of the research. The welfare of the informant is in my hands because he trusted his whole story in this research. With regards to my basic roles, I followed the principles which state that qualitative inquiry is for the researchers who are willing to commit

extensive time to collect data, engage in data analysis, does reflexivity, and write long passages by themselves. Hence I played many roles such as interviewer, transcriber, translator, analyst and encoder. As an interviewer, I established first rapport and friendship with my participant. I used personal empathy to make the informant feel more willing to tell his stories. During the interview and observation, I applied some techniques like listening and thinking, then asking probing questions to get deeper level of conversation. As a transcriber and encoder, I transcribed all the recorded interviews and translated correctly and organized them into standard English statements. Lastly, as an analyst, I employed suitable analysis methods and procedures fitted for a qualitative research such as thematic analysis. Based on the concept of Corbin and Strauss, it is the duty of the researcher to interpret the meaning of hidden data because he is a primary instrument for data collection and analysis (Creswell, 2013; Corbin & Strauss, 2014; Miller, et al., 2012).

**Research Participant** - This section describes the participant and stipulates the criteria for selection and number of participants, type of sampling and recruitment strategy. One of the most important tasks in the study design phase is to identify appropriate participants because informants are the very people who can best provide information on their lived experiences, culture, awareness, knowledge and expertise regarding the phenomenon under inquiry. Decision about selection was based on the research questions and theoretical perspectives. Creswell explains that purposive sampling considers a particular group of people when the desired population for the study is rare or very difficult to locate, it may be the only option (Creswell, 2007; Creswell, 2013; Lingard, Albert & Levinson, 2008). The informant of this study is a 4th year BEED- Generalist student in one of the biggest universities in Tagum City, Davao del Norte. The said informant was chosen by the researcher because his experiences in life, how he faced the challenges in life, desires goals and success in life and schooling can be a model for people with the same experience despite the judgments, criticism, and insufficiency of resources. His experiences in life are described, narrated, shared and documented. However, it is a confidential process because there are some issues which are sensitive and only the two sides must know. The result is based only with the response of the informant in his experiences.

**Data Collection and Analysis** - Data gathering is a process in which information from the chosen informant was gathered, evaluated and weighed. First step made by the researcher was the preparation of the interview guide which was composed of two questions: What are the challenges faced by the informant in life and school and How did he face the challenges in life and school. I used to choose open-ended questions in the interview. It is a method to get the story of an individual and his experiences in life (Creswell, 2013). Next step was the asking of approval from the informant and the interview followed. The researcher, together with the informant set the place and date of the interview. Before the interview started, I explained the objectives of the study first and ensured to the informant that his identity is highly confidential. To complete the gathered data from the informant, the researcher used audio recorder/ cellphone to record the information needed.

During the interview, I also noted and recorded his body expressions and emotions, including the atmosphere of the venue. I even made him recall everything that happened in his life in the past. As the interview ended, I gave him gratitude and appreciation for the time, effort and generosity for providing me information related to the study and reassured to him full confidentiality and respect for the data received (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Before the data were analyzed, all the interviews, observations and documents were transcribed and translated in English. The process of transcribing allowed me to become acquainted with the data. In a biographical approach, data were analyzed in a thematic way and were organized to find out the dominant themes.

**Trustworthiness** - One author proposes four criteria that should be considered by qualitative researchers in pursuit of a trustworthy study (Shenton, 2003). These are the following: **Credibility** in an evaluation of whether or not the researcher findings represent a credible conceptual interpretation of the data drawn from the participant's original data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To ensure the credibility of this research, I have made a very careful scrutiny in choosing the most appropriate participant who could give meaning to this research. The information given by the participant is needed to ensure the quality of the research win which credibility

concerns with the extent on how the viewpoints of the participant correspond with the description of the researcher. Ample time to interview the participant was facilitated with interview questions as guide.

**Transferability** is the degree to which the result of this research can be used for the future researchers (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I included the references of other studies gathered that are related to this research which will serve as the basis for the future researchers for further studies. **Dependability** is the consistency of the data that can be used for future research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To ensure the dependability of the study, I made it sure that the method is consistent on gathering and analyzing the data. This was also guaranteed by keeping track of the data through documentation of the research process undertaken in the data collection and analysis, the recorded interviews and the utilization of the exact transcripts. Copies of all transcripts and drafts were kept intact. This is in accordance with the belief of Bond & Ramsey (2010). **Confirmability** is the degree to which the results could be confirmed or collaborated by others (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This means that the participants in future studies like this will be selected reasonably.

**Ethical Consideration** - There are considerable ethical issues and concerns that have specific ramification for this qualitative study. The researcher observed and followed the ethical standards in the conduct of the study following the study protocol assessments and standardized criteria. **Respect for persons** needs an obligation of the researcher not to exploit the weakness of the research informant. Self-sufficiency was avoided in order to maintain friendship, trust and confidence between the informant and the researcher. Beforehand, I asked permission to the informant before conducting the research (Creswell, 2012). This was done to pay respect for the individuals concerned in the study. **Consent** is another most important way of showing respect to persons during research (Creswell, 2012). This is to let the informant became aware on the purpose and objectives of the research study he/she is going to involve. Written consent was provided to get their approval. After getting his/her nod, the informant has actively participated in the in-depth interview. He/she was also informed on the results and findings of the study.

**Beneficence** requires a commitment of minimizing risks to the research participants rather than maximizing the profits that are due to them. Anonymity of the interviewee was kept in order not to put each participant into risk. At all times, the participant was protected, so every file of information was not left unattended or unprotected (Bricki & Green, 2007). **Confidentiality** towards the results and findings including the safeguard of the participant, coding system was used. It means that the participant's identity was hidden (Maree & Van Der Westhuizen, 2007). As recommended, all materials including videotapes, encoded transcripts, notes and others should be destroyed after the data were being analyzed. The informant was hesitant to be interviewed at first because he was afraid what to say but I have given him reassurance with regards to the confidentiality of his responses. He later gave me the chance and showed comfort in answering the interview questions. I was extra careful with my questions and due respect was given importance to this study. **Justice** requires a reasonable allocation of the risks and benefits as results of the research. It is important to acknowledge the contribution of the participant as he generally becomes part of the success of the research. He must be given due credits in all his endeavors (Bloom & Crabtree, 2006).

#### 4. Results

In this section, the experiences of the informant of the study both positive and negative as well as his social understanding of being an economically poor student are presented which was gathered through in-depth interview. With the following research questions, data production from the participant was directed.

##### 4.1 Research Question #1. What are the challenges faced by the informant in life and education?

Being able to send himself to school despite financial constraints is actually the major challenge faced by the informant. He knows that it is very impossible but all he has is his passion and determination to overcome all these.

**Table 1**

*Themes and Core Ideas on the Challenges Faced by the Informant in Life and Education*

Themes	Core Ideas
Financial Problem	<p>I always worry about what would I spend for my tuition fee.</p> <p>I can't buy what I want especially what I need.</p> <p>My parents can't support me financially since I have many siblings to feed and support as well.</p> <p>Every time there are requirements, I really double my effort in looking for part time job just to pay for the school expenses.</p>
Language	<p>I have difficulty in pronouncing words because I don't have exposure to English language</p> <p>I really find time learning on my own because there's no one that can help me except myself.</p>
Hunger	<p>We don't have books at home so I don't have sources to learn how to speak fluently</p> <p>I always feel hungry because I can't afford to buy delicious foods in the canteen</p> <p>Instead of buying food, I just keep the money so that I can lend it to my parents.</p> <p>I can't concentrate to the discussion because my stomach aches</p>
Deprived with Opportunities	<p>My classmates sometimes share food with me because they know I oftentimes go to school having no breakfast, lunch or dinner.</p> <p>I can't join field trips because it's too expensive.</p> <p>I want to join some activities but I prefer to work to support for my expenses.</p> <p>I want to go out and have fun with my friends and classmates but there are things that need to be prioritized like earning money.</p> <p>Even going to the mall, window shopping is very impossible because I can't afford to buy stuffs that are not that important.</p>

**Financial Problem** - The very first and major problem that the informant faced is financial problem. Samantha said that other students are lucky enough because they have parents who support them financially but to him, it's different because his family even depends on what he can offer to them. Students have to pay for the tuition fee as well as purchase new uniforms and books which is very difficult for the informant because he is the only one who supports himself to school. Student's life is considered as poor life because this is supposedly the time that they have to rely on their parents since they don't have direct source of money (Kelly, 2009).

**Language** - The informant considered language as one of the challenges he encountered in school. Most of his classmates come from a middle and even rich family so they have all the access of books and learning materials that aid them to learning. But the informant doesn't have any that is why he found it difficult to learn at home. He just helped himself to be exposed with the language because he has no one to depend to at home. As supported by Lynn (2010), most students cannot understand what is written in their books that is why they find it difficult to learn.

**Hunger** - One of the challenges faced by the informant is hunger. There were countless days that he often comes to school without having breakfast and even goes to sleep without eating dinner. Instead of buying food, he prefers to send money to his family in their place because he knows they have nothing to eat as well. He emphasized that he can take eating nothing rather than seeing and hearing his family in hunger.

**Deprived with Opportunities** - In addition, Samantha also experienced being deprived with opportunities such as being not able to pay for co-curricular or other extracurricular activities that might expand his experience. There were also times when he missed school activities because instead of participating, he used his time looking for part time jobs for additional income. He can no longer mingle with his classmates due to his desperate need to earn for extra money.

4.2 *Research Question # 2. How does the informant face the challenges in life and school?*

Challenges can really affect a student's performance when it comes to life and school. But the informant always bears in mind that there are ways to overcome these challenges and will help him achieve his goals in life. Obstacles are there to shape us and be a lesson to improve ourselves.

**Table 2**

*Themes and Core Ideas on How the Informant Faced the Challenges in Life and Education*

Themes	Core Ideas
Having a Positive Attitude	I learned to be optimistic. Do I have a choice? (laughs)  I just consider every hardship as a storm that later on will just pass.  There's always a rainbow after the rain.
Talk to Parents and Siblings	I will not succeed in life if I will take everything negatively.  My family is my source of inspiration.  If ever I feel like quitting, I just talk to my family and I feel renewed and energized.
Proper Time Management	I prefer talking to my family because I know their love and concern for me is genuine. I really have to balance my time equally in school and work.  Everything can be accomplished if time is managed carefully  Set each activity with its proper time allotment.

**Having a Positive Attitude** - Having a positive attitude is the first and foremost thing to consider to face challenges in life and school. Being optimistic helps the informant feel less worried and start looking forward to the future. A negative mind or thinking will not give us a positive life. According to the informant, life can make us feel discouraged and lonely but always keep in mind that it will all get better in the end. Life can be really hard but there is always a light at the end of the tunnel. One thing he learned is to focus on the things that are important and will make him achieve his dreams in life.

**Talk to Parents and Siblings** - Whenever he's struggling at school, what the informant did is to talk to his parents and siblings. The informant believed that his family knows him better than anyone else. His family can give him the right advice and will support him in what he is doing. Their support alone can encourage him enough to conquer any obstacles he faces in school.

**Proper Time Management** - Lastly, the informant believed that he can never do all these if he cannot manage his time well. Balancing his time well can be a big help in doing his school work and part time jobs at



the same time. He does not let his work and study take over all of his time. He also makes it sure that he doesn't lose sight of doing well in school especially when he has goals in life.

## 5. Discussion

This section discusses the challenges faced by the informant in life and education in general and how he faced those challenges. There were four themes that emerged in the first research question What are the challenges faced by the informant in life and education. These were: financial problem, language, hunger and deprived with opportunities.

One of the challenges faced by the informant is *financial problem* which he thinks really hinders him to succeed because there are many expenses that he needs to give attention to especially in his education. Students have to pay for the tuition fee as well as purchase new uniforms and books which is very difficult for the informant because he is the only one who supports himself to school. Student's life is considered as poor life because this is supposedly the time that they have to rely on their parents since they don't have direct source of money (Kelly, 2009).

Another challenge faced by the informant is learning the *language*. The informant doesn't have any that is why he found it difficult to learn at home. He just helped himself to be exposed with the language because he has no one to depend to at home. As supported by Lynn (2010), most students cannot understand what is written in their books that is why they find it difficult to learn.

One of the challenges faced by the informant is *hunger*. There were countless days that he often comes to school without having breakfast and even goes to sleep without eating dinner. Instead of buying food, he prefers to send money to his family in their place because he knows they have nothing to eat as well. He emphasized that he can take eating nothing rather than seeing and hearing his family in hunger.

Lastly, Samantha also experienced being *deprived with opportunities* such as being not able to pay for co-curricular or other extracurricular activities that might expand his experience. There were also times when he missed school activities because instead of participating, he used his time looking for part time jobs for additional income. He can no longer mingle with his classmates due to his desperate need to earn for extra money.

With regards to the second research question How does the informant faced the challenges in life and education, there were three themes that emerged: having a positive attitude, talk to parents and siblings and proper time management.

*Having a positive attitude* is the first and foremost thing to consider to face challenges in life and school. Being optimistic helps the informant feel less worried and start looking forward to the future. A negative mind or thinking will not give us a positive life. According to the informant, life can make us feel discouraged and lonely but always keep in mind that it will all get better in the end. Life can be really hard but there is always a light at the end of the tunnel. One thing he learned is to focus on the things that are important and will make him achieve his dreams in life.

Whenever he's struggling at school, what the informant did is to *talk to his parents and siblings*. The informant believed that his family knows him better than anyone else. His family can give him the right advice and will support him in what he is doing. Their support alone can encourage him enough to conquer any obstacles he faces in school.

Lastly, the informant believed that he can never do all these if he cannot *manage his time well*. Balancing his time well can be a big help in doing his school work and part time jobs at the same time. He does not let his work and study take over all of his time. He also makes it sure that he doesn't lose sight of doing well in school especially when he has goals in life.

### 5.1 Implication for Practice

This would enlighten the minds of the teachers to listen to the students since they need a strong relationship with a trustworthy individual in order to succeed. Teachers can also be the instrument that can boost the self-esteem of students who live in poverty by praising their simple and little success instead of looking at what they own. With this research, teachers are given insights to value the students for their character and not for their possessions.

### 5.2 Concluding Remarks

After having an in depth interview with the informant, there were many realizations that came up on my mind especially on how he faced the challenges in his life. I have seen how dedicated and passionate he is in what he is doing. All of us face challenges but one thing I learned is that it all depends on how we face it. Challenges can really affect a student's performance when it comes to life and school. But the informant always bears in mind that there are ways to overcome these challenges and help him achieve his goals in life. Obstacles are there to shape us and be a lesson to improve ourselves.

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