



**BEHIND THE SILENCE: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL  
ANALYSIS OF LEARNERS' ACADEMIC  
CONDITION AND WELL-BEING IN  
THE PRESENCE OF FAMILY  
DISPUTES**

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**Abstract**

In contemporary education, learners often carry burdens beyond the classroom, particularly those arising from unresolved family disputes. These unspoken conflicts can profoundly affect both academic performance and emotional well-being. This study employed a qualitative phenomenological approach to explore and interpret the lived experiences of learners navigating academic challenges and emotional stress amidst family disputes in remote schools in Norala District, South Cotabato, during the 2025–2026 school year. Findings reveal that exposure to family conflicts significantly influences learners' emotional and academic functioning. Emotional distress—including anxiety, sadness, and mental exhaustion—interferes with concentration, motivation, and participation in school activities. Persistent domestic disputes reduce self-confidence, disrupt engagement in learning, and create a cycle where emotional strain undermines academic performance. Despite these challenges, learners employ adaptive coping mechanisms, such as structured academic routines, time management, self-care practices, mindfulness, and seeking support from peers, teachers, and family members, enabling them to balance emotional demands with academic responsibilities. Furthermore, learners assign constructive meaning to their experiences,

viewing challenges as opportunities for personal growth. They report increased resilience, perseverance, self-discipline, and emotional maturity. Education emerges as a source of stability and hope, providing motivation and a positive outlook despite family difficulties. The study concludes that learners' academic engagement cannot be separated from their emotional and family contexts, highlighting the need for supportive school environments, psychosocial interventions, and home-school partnerships. Integrating social-emotional learning and providing accessible mental health resources are essential for nurturing both academic success and holistic well-being.

Keywords: family conflict, emotional well-being, academic engagement, coping strategies

## Introduction

### Background of the Study

In today's learning environment, many students carry burdens beyond the classroom, particularly those stemming from unresolved family disputes, which often remain unspoken but are deeply impactful. Studies show that children exposed to high-conflict family situations suffer from heightened emotional distress, impaired cognitive function, and declining academic performance.

In an increasingly volatile global environment, international studies have consistently demonstrated that high-conflict family environments, such as domestic disputes and separation, exert severe psychological and academic repercussions on children—manifesting as anxiety, depression, diminished cognitive functioning, and poor school performance (Amato & Cheadle, 2008; Zare et al., 2018; Garriga & Pennoni, 2020).

Still, research in the Philippine context has been relatively underdeveloped. Notably, studies by Garcia and Alampay (2018) report that Filipino learners experiencing significant family stress are more prone to emotional distress, reduced motivation, and disengagement from learning, resulting in compromised academic outcomes.

Meanwhile, in South Central Mindanao, empirical investigations remain limited; no studies have examined the interplay between familial conflict and learners' well-being—creating a critical gap in the region's educational and psychosocial research landscape.

Furthermore, at the South Cotabato level, no known studies have emerged examining how domestic discord affects learners in local schools, particularly in terms of emotional and academic consequences, signaling a significant void in localized empirical data.

Aligned with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4-Quality Education and SDG 3-Good Health and Well - Being, the proposed study seeks to illuminate how family conflict shapes both the academic performance and holistic well-being of learners. By using a phenomenological lens, this research aims to amplify the "voices behind the silence"—capturing firsthand experiences of learners affected by domestic disputes—thus informing contextually grounded support systems.

This study aimed to uncover and interpret the lived experiences of learners navigating academic challenges and emotional stress amid family disputes in remote schools in Norala District, South Cotabato, employing a phenomenological methodology to reveal how these experiences shape their learning journey and sense of well-being amidst domestic conflict

## Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the following theories:

### Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory

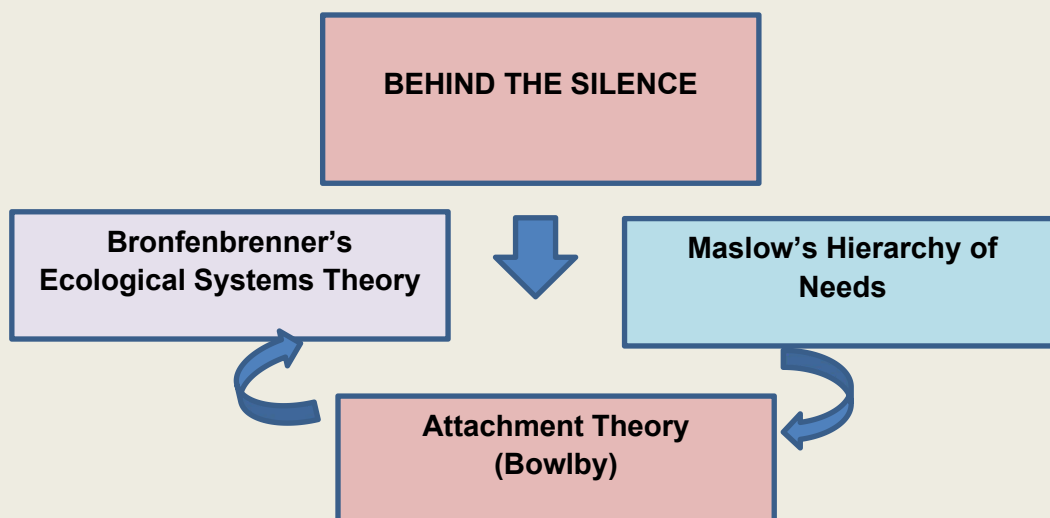
Bronfenbrenner (1979) emphasizes that various environmental systems, including the family, influence a child's development. This theory is highly relevant to the study as it situates learners within a nested system of influences, with the microsystem (family) playing a critical role. Family disputes fall within this immediate context and can significantly affect the child's emotional well-being, sense of security, and academic performance. The model helped explain how stressors affect learners' behaviors, learning engagement, and overall development.

### Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

According to Maslow (1943), individuals must satisfy their basic emotional needs before they can focus on higher-level needs such as academic achievement. Maslow's theory provides a foundational understanding of how emotional turmoil due to family conflict disrupts learners' basic psychological needs. If students lack emotional stability and safety at home, they are less likely to concentrate, be motivated, or perform well academically. This aligns with your exploration of well-being and academic condition as impacted by family disputes.

### Attachment Theory (Bowlby)

Bowlby (1988) posits that stable, secure attachments within the family are essential for a child's emotional and cognitive development. Attachment theory is instrumental in exploring how disrupted or insecure parent-child relationships due to family disputes can lead to anxiety, low self-esteem, and academic disengagement. This theory supports how strained family dynamics affect learners' sense of emotional security and capacity to thrive academically.



**Figure 1.** The Theoretical Framework of the Study

## Statement of the Problem

This research aimed to uncover and interpret the lived experiences of learners navigating academic challenges and emotional stress in family disputes in the remote schools of Norala District, South Cotabato, for the school year 2025-2026.

Specifically, the research problem revolved around understanding the following key questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of learners who are exposed to family disputes at home in relation to their academic performance and emotional well-being?
2. What are the impacts of domestic conflicts on their motivation, concentration, and participation in school activities?
3. In what ways do learners cope with academic responsibilities while dealing with emotional stress brought about by family disputes?
4. What personal meanings do learners assign to their experiences of balancing school life and family-related emotional turmoil?

## Scope and Delimitation

The study focused on the lived experiences of Junior and Senior High School learners in remote schools in Norala District, South Cotabato Division, during the school year 2025–2026, specifically those who were directly affected by family disputes. It sought to uncover how such disputes influenced their academic performance, classroom engagement, and emotional well-being through in-depth interviews and personal narratives, employing phenomenological analysis as its primary research approach. The participants were limited to learners who were willing to share their experiences, ensuring ethical considerations of confidentiality and sensitivity. The study was within the context of Norala District only, excluding learners from urban or neighboring districts, and was conducted in one academic year to capture timely and relevant insights. This scope was set to understand why family disputes impact learners' academic and personal lives and how schools and communities may respond with more targeted interventions and support systems.

## Research Methodology

### Research Design

In this study, qualitative research, specifically the phenomenological approach, was employed to uncover and interpret the lived experiences of learners navigating academic challenges and emotional stress in family disputes in the remote schools in Norala District, South Cotabato, for the school year 2025-2026.

Phenomenological research is a method that aims to delve into individuals lived experiences to gain deeper insights into how they interpret these experiences. It assumes that individuals employ a universal structure or essence to derive meaning from their encounters. This research involves participants' emotions, perceptions, and beliefs to shed light on the

fundamental phenomenon under investigation. An essential aspect of the phenomenological research design is the researcher's obligation to set aside any preconceived assumptions about the experience or phenomenon (Delve & Limpaecher, 2012).

### Participants of the Study

Table 1 presents the participants' qualifications, determined by the researcher's criteria before selecting eligible informants for the study. The study involved a total of fifteen (15) learners from Grades 5 to 6, with the consent of their parents or teachers in DepEd Norala District, division of South Cotabato. The researcher used a specified set of inclusion criteria in the selection as follows:

**Table 1. Participants' Inclusion Criteria**

#### Qualifications

Qualifications
<i>Participants: 15 Learner</i>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Grade Level Enrollment</b> – The participants must be officially enrolled as <b>Grade 5 or Grade 6 learners</b> in the identified remote schools of Norala District, South Cotabato, for the school year 2025–2026.</li> <li>2. <b>Exposure to Family Disputes</b> – The learners should have <b>direct experience of living in households affected by family disputes</b> (e.g., parental separation, conflict, or domestic issues) as identified through school records, teacher referrals, or guidance counselor recommendations.</li> <li>3. <b>Willingness to Participate</b> – The learners must demonstrate <b>voluntary willingness to share their lived experiences</b>, with the approval of their parents/guardians and in alignment with ethical research protocols for minors.</li> <li>4. <b>Communication Ability</b> – The learners must possess <b>basic communication skills in English or Filipino</b> (or local dialect if needed) to articulate their thoughts, feelings, and experiences during interviews or discussions.</li> </ol>

#### Sampling Technique

Purposive Sampling Technique was intentionally utilized to carefully select a total of fifteen (15) learners from Grades 5 to 6 level in DepEd Norala District, South Cotabato Division, during the school year 2025-2026, who met the specific inclusion criteria established by the researcher.

Purposive sampling, also referred to as judgmental, selective, or subjective sampling, constitutes a variant of non-probability sampling. Within this approach, researchers exercise acumen in participants to partake in their survey endeavors (Alchemer, 2021). This sampling mandates that researchers possess prior knowledge of the objectives underpinning their study to contact eligible participants through online survey platforms. Researchers resort to purposive sampling to secure access to a distinct subgroup of individuals, in which all survey respondents are chosen based on their alignment with a specific demographic or criterion.

#### Locale of the Study

This research was conducted in selected elementary schools in the DepEd Norala District, Division of South Cotabato, during the school year 2025–2026. The inclusion of

learners from Grades 5 and 6 is deliberate, as children in upper elementary levels are at a stage of developing higher cognitive, emotional, and social awareness, making them capable of articulating personal experiences with family-related challenges (Eccles & Roeser, 2019). Targeting learners who experience family disputes ensures that the study focuses on those most affected by psychosocial stressors that often influence both academic performance and overall well-being (Wang et al., 2020).

Furthermore, learners' willingness to participate, with the approval of their parents or guardians, is essential to ensure ethical compliance in conducting research involving minors (American Psychological Association [APA], 2020). Since phenomenological studies rely on the articulation of lived experiences, participants must also possess basic communication skills in Filipino, English, or their local dialect to effectively share their perspectives (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Conducting this research in remote schools within Norala District allows for an in-depth understanding of marginalized learners' voices, aligning with DepEd's commitment to inclusive and context-responsive education in rural and disadvantaged areas (DepEd, 2021).

### **Research Instruments**

In this study, a semi-structured interview was used as an exploratory instrument during both in-depth interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) to uncover learners' lived experiences navigating academic challenges and emotional stress in family disputes in remote schools in Norala District, South Cotabato, for the school year 2025-2026.

The validity and appropriateness of this tool were substantiated through a rigorous evaluation conducted by a panel of experts who possess expertise in the development of relevant research instruments.

### **Data Gathering Procedure**

To ensure the research's reliability, strict adherence to a predefined set of procedures was maintained. The primary objective of this study was to unveil the lived experiences of learners navigating academic challenges and emotional stress amidst family disputes in the remote schools of Norala District, South Cotabato, during the school year 2025–2026.

In the initial phase, the researcher diligently sought formal authorization from both the Superintendent of DepEd–South Cotabato and the Dean of the College of Graduate Studies (CGS). This authorization was essential in obtaining the necessary permissions to conduct the study and in emphasizing the importance of ethical considerations.

Subsequently, a secondary authorization letter was sent to the District Supervisor, explicitly requesting access to the specific data required for the research. A meticulously crafted survey questionnaire was developed, evaluated, and subsequently administered to the targeted participants.

The researcher employed a purposive sampling technique to select secondary school teachers as participants in the study. Upon strict adherence to the established EWMCI–Research Ethics Committee guidelines, the researcher conducted face-to-face interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs).

Finally, the data collected from the interviews and FGDs were systematically organized, comprehensively analyzed, and interpreted using the thematic analysis approach. This approach provided a deeper understanding of the issues under investigation.

### **Data Analysis**

In this study, which focused on uncovering the lived experiences of learners navigating academic challenges and emotional stress amidst family disputes in the remote schools of Norala District, South Cotabato, during the school year 2025–2026, a content or thematic analysis approach was employed to examine the collected data. This methodology, as described by Flick (2014), Ngag (2023), and Braun (2009), involved the systematic categorization of textual components, including statements, phrases, and words, into organized groupings or categories. These categories were either derived from established frameworks or custom-developed to align with the study's specific objectives.

To execute this analytical process, a series of essential steps was diligently followed. Initially, all data sources, such as interview transcripts, notes from Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), and relevant documents, were meticulously organized and prepared for analysis. This phase ensured the systematic arrangement and accessibility of the data.

Subsequently, the researcher deeply engaged with the data by conducting a thorough review of interview transcripts and FGD notes. This immersive process facilitated a comprehensive understanding of the content and context embedded within the collected information.

The third step initiated a systematic coding process. Initial codes were generated by identifying meaningful segments or patterns within the data. These codes captured essential concepts, ideas, or themes related to the learners' experiences in managing academic responsibilities amidst family-related emotional stress.

Following coding, the identified codes were grouped into preliminary themes based on shared meaning or relevance. This step established an initial structure for organizing the data. Next, the emerging themes and their corresponding codes were reviewed and refined. The researcher ensured the consistency and clarity of these themes, making necessary adjustments. Each refined theme was assigned a descriptive name that succinctly represented the content, facilitating easy identification and interpretation.

Relevant data excerpts, such as quotes or segments extracted from interviews and FGDs, were selected and associated with the respective themes. These excerpts served as supporting evidence for the identified themes. Finally, the thematic analysis extended beyond surface-level identification. The researcher interpreted the meaning and implications of each theme within the context of the study's objectives, seeking patterns, connections, and variations to provide a comprehensive understanding of the learners' lived experiences.

This meticulous, structured process of thematic analysis enabled the researcher to systematically explore and comprehend the lived experiences of learners navigating academic challenges and emotional stress amidst family disputes in the remote schools of Norala District, South Cotabato, during the school year 2025–2026.

## **Ethical Considerations**

In preparation for this study, all plans were presented to East-West Mindanao Colleges Inc. to ensure compliance with prescribed procedures and protocols. Before commencing the study, the following ethical principles were observed:

### **Informed Consent:**

Before participation, consent was obtained from all school heads involved in the study. They must possess a comprehensive understanding of the study's objectives, methodologies, potential risks, and benefits. Furthermore, participation remained entirely voluntary, allowing the participants to withdraw from the study at any juncture without adverse consequences.

### **Anonymity and Confidentiality:**

To safeguard the identities and responses, rigorous measures were put in place to ensure anonymity and confidentiality.

Rather than using actual names, pseudonyms or codes were used to uphold the participants' privacy. The collected data was securely stored with access restricted solely to the research team.

### **Avoiding Harm:**

Delicate subjects, such as the challenges inherent in their roles, were discussed with meticulous consideration for the potential emotional and psychological impact on the participants. Strategies were in place to minimize distress, and a support system was readily available to assist participants should the need arise.

### **Researcher–Participant Relationship:**

The researcher maintained a professional and respectful rapport when engaging with the school heads. Any actions that may harm the participants were scrupulously avoided, ensuring their utmost dignity and respect throughout the research process.

### **Data Protection:**

Adherence to data protection regulations and laws was followed to safeguard the participants' personal information. Stringent measures were employed to ensure the secure storage and transmission of data.

### **Voluntary Participation:**

Participants were assured that their involvement in the study was voluntary, devoid of any coercion or external pressure.

**Researcher Bias:**

The researcher remained vigilant regarding potential biases that might influence data collection and analysis, upholding objectivity and transparency throughout the research endeavor.

**Institutional Approval:**

Before initiating the study, the researcher sought ethical clearance from the pertinent institutional review boards or ethics committees.

**Honesty and Integrity:**

The research findings were reported truthfully and accurately, free from manipulation or distortion to align with preconceived notions or biases.

**Beneficence:**

The potential benefits of the research in educational practices and policies were thoughtfully considered, ensuring that the study contributes to the education system.

**Cultural Sensitivity:**

The researcher demonstrated cultural sensitivity by respecting local customs, beliefs, and practices within the research setting and refrained from imposing external values on the participants.

**Inclusion and Diversity:**

The study prioritized inclusivity and diversity, encompassing a wide spectrum of learners lived experiences navigating academic challenges and emotional stress amidst family disputes in the remote schools of Norala District, South Cotabato, during the school year 2025–2026.

**Results and Discussions**

In today's learning environment, many students carry burdens beyond the classroom, particularly those stemming from unresolved family disputes, which often remain unspoken but are deeply impactful. In this study, qualitative research, specifically the phenomenological approach, was employed to uncover and interpret the lived experiences of learners navigating academic challenges and emotional stress amidst family disputes in remote schools in Norala District, South Cotabato, for the school year 2025-2026.

The findings reveal that learners exposed to family disputes experience significant emotional and academic challenges that are closely interconnected. Emotional distress, such as anxiety, stress, sadness, and mental exhaustion, emerges as a dominant experience, which in turn disrupts learners' ability to concentrate and perform effectively in school. Persistent family conflicts reduce students' motivation and self-confidence, making it harder for them to engage in class activities and meet academic expectations. Moreover, emotional difficulties originating at home often spill over into school life, affecting participation, focus, and overall

well-being. Collectively, the results indicate that an unstable family environment creates a cycle in which emotional strain undermines academic functioning and school engagement.

Further, the results indicate that domestic conflicts have a substantial negative impact on students' motivation, concentration, and participation in school activities. Learners exposed to frequent conflicts at home experience emotional exhaustion that weakens their academic drive and enthusiasm for learning. At the same time, heightened emotional stress interferes with cognitive focus, leading to distraction, forgetfulness, and difficulty sustaining attention during lessons. These emotional and cognitive challenges also contribute to reduced participation in both academic and social school activities, as students tend to withdraw, avoid interaction, and disengage from group tasks. Overall, domestic conflicts create an emotional burden that disrupts multiple dimensions of students' school functioning.

Furthermore, the results show that learners exposed to family disputes actively use various coping mechanisms to manage their academic responsibilities despite emotional stress. Structured academic strategies such as time management, task organization, and routines help learners sustain focus and productivity. Emotional regulation and self-care practices, including relaxation, mindfulness, hobbies, and reflective or spiritual activities, enable students to manage stress and prepare emotionally for learning. Additionally, seeking social and institutional support from friends, classmates, teachers, and family members plays a crucial role in reducing emotional burden and providing both emotional reassurance and academic guidance. Together, these coping mechanisms enable learners to balance emotional challenges at home with the demands of school.

Finally, the results indicate that learners assign meaningful and constructive interpretations to their experiences of balancing school life with family-related emotional turmoil. These experiences are commonly viewed as opportunities for personal growth, resulting in resilience, perseverance, and inner strength. Learners also associate their challenges with the formation of self-discipline, responsibility, independence, and self-reliance, as they learn to manage emotions and academic demands simultaneously. Emotional maturity and empathy emerge as important outcomes, with learners becoming more patient, compassionate, and emotionally aware. Additionally, education is perceived as a source of stability, control, and hope, providing learners with motivation, purpose, and a positive future orientation despite ongoing family difficulties.

## **Conclusion**

The following conclusions were made considering this study's findings:

When family disputes remain unresolved, students carry emotional burdens that hinder both learning and personal growth. This underscores the need for stronger support systems within schools and families to help learners manage emotional stress, build resilience, and maintain academic motivation. Addressing learners' emotional well-being alongside academic demands is essential in fostering a more supportive and responsive educational environment.

Students' academic engagement cannot be separated from their emotional and family contexts. When domestic conflicts persist, learners struggle not only with schoolwork but also with meaningful participation and social connection in school. This highlights the importance of fostering supportive home-school partnerships and providing psychosocial support within schools to help students cope with emotional stress.

By developing structured routines, practicing self-care, and reaching out for support, students demonstrate adaptive strategies that help protect their academic engagement and well-being. This underscores the importance of nurturing supportive school environments and encouraging healthy coping skills to empower learners to manage stress effectively and succeed academically despite challenging family circumstances.

By viewing education as an anchor and their struggles as formative experiences, learners demonstrate resilience and emotional depth beyond academic achievement. This underscores the importance of supportive school environments that recognize students' emotional journeys and nurture not only academic success but also character development, hope, and holistic well-being.

## **Recommendations**

With the findings of the study, the following were recommended:

1. The Department of Education (DepEd) may institutionalize school-based mental health and psychosocial support programs, especially in public schools. This includes increasing Plantilla positions for guidance counselors, training teachers on basic mental health first aid, and integrating trauma-informed practices into school operations. DepEd may also develop clear referral pathways connecting schools with local health units, social workers, and child protection desks to support learners experiencing severe family-related stress.
2. School Administrators are encouraged to establish child-friendly spaces or wellness corners where learners can pause, reflect, or talk to a trusted adult when emotionally overwhelmed. Administrators may also schedule regular guidance check-ins, peer support programs, and school-wide activities that promote emotional awareness and resilience. Flexible academic policies—such as reasonable deadlines, make-up work options, or alternative assessments—can help learners who are emotionally distressed but still motivated to succeed.
3. Curriculum planners are encouraged to intentionally embed social-emotional learning (SEL) competencies into the curriculum across grade levels. Lessons that develop emotional regulation, coping skills, empathy, resilience, and self-awareness can directly address the emotional struggles identified in the findings. Curriculum materials may include reflective activities, journaling tasks, collaborative problem-solving, and real-life scenarios that help learners process stress constructively.
4. Teachers are encouraged to practice empathetic classroom management, offering encouragement, reassurance, and understanding rather than punishment for emotionally driven behaviors. Simple strategies such as flexible participation options, check-in questions, short mindfulness breaks, and structured routines can significantly help learners maintain focus and engagement. Teachers may also encourage positive coping strategies already used by learners—such as planning, self-care, and peer support—while coordinating closely with guidance counselors when concerns persist.
5. Future researchers are encouraged to further explore the long-term academic and emotional outcomes of learners exposed to family disputes, particularly through longitudinal and mixed-methods studies. Research may also examine the effectiveness of specific school-based interventions, such as counseling programs, SEL integration, or teacher training initiatives, including parents, teachers, and school administrators as participants, can provide a more comprehensive understanding of family–school dynamics.

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#### **Declaration AI Tools Declaration**

I do hereby declare the use of AI tools, such as Chat GPT and Grammarly for grammar checking and sentence organization purposes only.

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