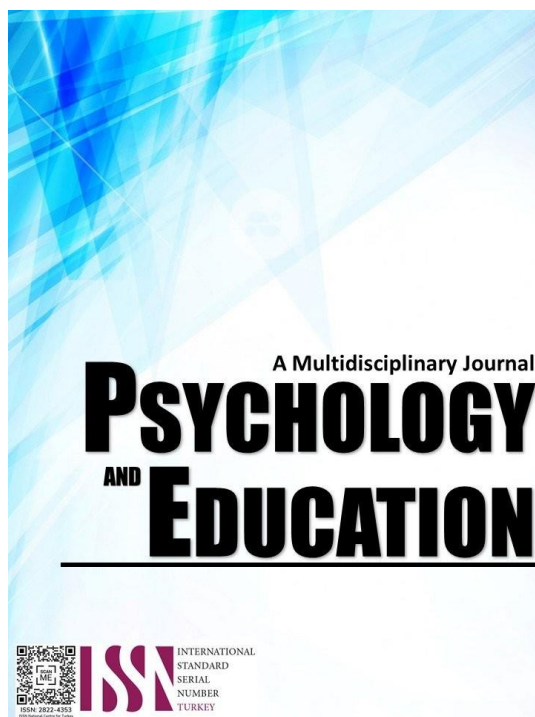


# **BALANCING ACTS OF RESPONSIBILITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION: THE CHALLENGES AND SUCCESSES OF STUDENT-PARENTS IN THE PHILIPPINES**



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## Balancing Acts of Responsibility in Higher Education: The Challenges and Successes of Student-Parents in the Philippines

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### Abstract

In college, education should not end when you become a parent. This study explicated the lived experiences of those college education students who became parents before graduation. The struggles and unheard voices of the student-parent are essential in creating recommendations and a management plan that can assist them in continuing what they started. This study utilized Heideggerian Phenomenology. This design is a qualitative study that explicates the lived experiences of the participants who are student-parents of the university. The sampling design utilized in this study was purposive sampling following established inclusion criteria to identify the participants of the study. The participants should be bonafide education students at Cebu Technological University – Moalboal Campus, should have a child or children, and should be living within Moalboal. 5 participants were interviewed. The data gathered were analyzed and interpreted using the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) popularized by Moustakas and modified by Van Kaam. There were three emerging themes generated after the analysis. These are (Theme 1) The Pillar of Tenacity, (Theme 2) The Pillar of Tranquility, and (Theme 3) The Pillar of Inspiration. These themes are the reflection of the student-parents' lived experiences. It is highly recommended that support programs be instituted to tailor-fit the needs of the student-parents in finishing their journey in college.

**Keywords:** *education college student-parents, Heideggerian phenomenology, emerging themes, lived experiences*

### Introduction

Being a student and a parent at the same time could be very challenging. The responsibilities at home and in school can pose significant challenges that affect both academic performance and personal well-being (Anaya, 2023). However, when parenthood intersects with the pursuit of higher education, a unique set of challenges emerges. Student-parents face a delicate balancing act as they navigate the demands of academic life alongside the responsibilities of raising a family (Althaus, 2021). In the literature, student-parent difficulties can be categorized into three sub-themes: school and family responsibilities, management of priorities, and financial constraints (Cabulay et al., 2023). This means that student-parents encounter different challenges related to school and family responsibilities, balancing priorities, and financial difficulties (Baddley, 2021). However, they apply coping techniques that include drawing inspiration from their children, seeking consideration from teachers, and practicing proper time management (Blanton, 2021). Understanding these sub-themes and coping strategies can help student-parents balance their academic pursuits and parental responsibilities.

According to researchers, student-parents face significant challenges balancing their academic pursuits and parenting responsibilities. Myriad student-parents report feeling overwhelmed by the demands of juggling schoolwork, childcare, and other obligations, leading to increased stress and decreased academic performance (Coronel, 2020). In addition, student-parents may face financial difficulties, including the costly necessities for childcare and limited financial aid options. Researchers suggest that student-parents may benefit from support programs and policies that provide resources such as childcare, subsidies, academic advising, and flexible scheduling options (Esau, 2022). Furthermore, peer, family, and community support can play a significant role in helping student-parents overcome their challenges (Beriawel et al., 2023).

Student-parents face multiple responsibilities across the different aspects of their life. One has a long, bumpy path to go through and as a student-parent, one has an extra role to play (Jones-Foster, 2022). They have to navigate their way in balancing the demands and obligations in their academic life such as how they interact with their classmates, and how to focus on their studies while raising a child at the same time (Cabulay et al., 2023). This study examined student-parent experiences at Cebu Technological University- Moalboal Campus, illuminating light to their lived experiences from coping with the various challenges of being a student and a parent to achieving the rewards of their hard work and determination to succeed. Giving value to the struggles and successes of a student-parent can encourage and inspire struggling students and individuals to thrive and achieve their full potential in balancing responsibilities from different areas of their lives.

Student-parents often fear social stigma, financial difficulties, and lack of support from family and friends (Anaya, 2023). This can lead to putting their educational and career goals on hold to care for their children. Thus, being a parent and a student at the same time can present emotional and practical challenges (Baddley, 2021). Yet despite being said, student-parents also have their own unique merits. Having a child offers them a profound sense of purpose and direction in life, and their love for their child is unmatched (Rammell, 2023). Their child serves as their driving force to continue striving to achieve delicate success.

It is undeniable that being a student and a parent at the same time is like an extra weight on your load (Jovellanos et al., 2022). It doubles the responsibilities and difficulties a person may face. Balancing both academic responsibilities and parenthood obligations is a big challenge (Lacerna et al., 2022). Hence, it is recommended to offer these college student-parents a healthy environment. An environment where they can feel acknowledged and supported thus encouraging them to strive not just for themselves, but also for the family that they built. It is essential to recognize that being a student-parent does not determine one's future, and with dedication and support, it is possible to achieve both personal goals and provide a loving and nurturing environment for the child's well-being.

## Research Questions

This study explicated the lived experiences of the student-parents in higher education at Cebu Technological University – Moalboal Campus, Moalboal Cebu for the school year 2023 – 2024. Specifically, this study answered the following questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of the student-parent in the university?
2. What are the challenges encountered by the participants of the study?
3. What are the learning experiences of the participants?
4. What are the student-parent coping mechanisms for the challenges they faced?
5. What is the meaning of the student-parent lived experiences?

## Literature Review

Balancing academic responsibilities alongside parenting is challenging for college student-parents as they must handle both educational obligations and childcare (Lin, 2022). Despite these obstacles, they embark on a journey where joys and sorrows lie, where every single day provides opportunities for tenacity and success (Love, 2020). The unique needs of student-parents in schools and provided recommendations for educators to support their success (Mbuyazi, 2022). It highlights the importance of teacher empathy, flexibility, and collaboration with parents to create a supportive and inclusive educational environment (Nagaddya et al., 2023). Below are studies conducted by different researchers to support our positive envision towards inspiring people, most especially student-parents, who are doubting themselves whether they can or cannot survive the life of being both a parent and a student.

College life is challenging because it serves as a crucial preparation for the future and the responsibilities that come with adulthood (Nikiforidou & Holmes, 2023). To focus on training and career preparation, individuals often have to make sacrifices and prioritize certain aspects of their lives over others. The challenge of time management is compounded when individuals choose to engage in romantic relationships for reasons such as finding inspiration for school, easing the challenges of college life, and seeking potential lifelong partners (Peters, 2021). All of this seems acceptable until the relationship becomes more intimate or sexual, and things change when a new life (a child) is created. Raising a child is considered a full-time commitment (Rauh et al., 2023). And being a mother and a student at the same time is a very demanding role. Having babies is another life-changing leading individuals to adjust their behavior and activities. Without family support, a student entering parenthood is inevitably compelled to prioritize one aspect of their life over another.

The benefits of pursuing higher education are widely recognized; however, students who are also parents encounter numerous challenges that can hinder their success at this level (Todd, 2023). Balancing caregiving responsibilities with academic requirements places significant demands on the time and energy of student-parents, many of whom also have job commitments (Torres et al., 2020). Financial limitations further exacerbate these challenges, particularly affecting young parents, single parents, and those from low socio-economic backgrounds. The traditional structure of higher education may not effectively accommodate the unique circumstances of student-parents. Enhancing support systems and implementing more flexible processes could encourage more parents to pursue higher education as a means of acquiring knowledge, enhancing employment opportunities, and achieving greater independence (Andrewartha et al., 2022).

Student-parents often find themselves balancing multiple roles, including their responsibilities as parents and their obligations as employees, with many holding down full-time or part-time jobs in addition to their studies. Researchers have explored the concept of role strain, which is commonly experienced by student-parents who are juggling the demands of parenthood, employment, and academics simultaneously (Gault et al., 2020). Many student-parents report feelings of guilt over missing important moments in their children's lives and being away from home. Studies, such as that by Dolson et al. (2020), have highlighted the heightened risk of burnout among student-parents due to the strain of managing multiple roles and responsibilities. Moreover, research has shown that student-parents often face discrimination based on their parental status. The emotional toll of guilt over time spent away from their children, the sacrifice of personal interests, and the strain of balancing various roles were key themes identified in this research."

Student-mother and father are already juggling considerable duties, and lots of them additionally preserve jobs, with a few running full-time and others running part-time. It explored the idea of position strain, which is usually encountered by college students balancing their roles as mother and father and personnel simultaneously. Also, it tested the belief of position elimination, wherein student-mother and father are forced to forgo hobbies, private pursuits, and expert increase possibilities on the way to deal with the considerable duties of parenting, studying, and running. Numerous moms additionally conveyed emotions of guilt for being absent for the duration of key moments of their kids' lives and for spending time far from them. Dolson et al. (2020) observed that student-mother and father face

accelerated degrees of burnout because of dealing with several roles and duties simultaneously. It cited that several student mothers and fathers encountered discrimination due to their parental status.

Another significant consideration when juggling the roles of parent and student involves the aspect of health and well-being. Research conducted by Schneider (2023) revealed that student-parents often experience notably high levels of stress and symptoms associated with stress. However, they are less likely to seek out support services, often due to accessibility issues. Additionally, the students who felt a stronger sense of belonging and had access to social support networks within their academic institution were better equipped to manage stress. These findings suggest that establishing student-parent support groups on campus could serve a valuable purpose in enhancing students' sense of belonging and overall well-being.

Additional existing research on the experiences of student-parents has highlighted common obstacles such as the search for affordable childcare, limited access to financial aid, feelings of not belonging, and challenges in accessing institutional resources. Navarro-Cruz et al. (2023) conducted a study focusing on Latina mothers during their college journey, revealing that difficulties in securing childcare often led to missed classes among student-parents, impacting their academic performance. Similarly, research by Davila et al. (2021) underscored that student-parents face significant hurdles related to childcare, sense of belonging, and faculty understanding of their circumstances. In response to findings like those from Davila et al. (2021), California Polytechnic State University, Pomona, implemented various initiatives such as establishing a children's area in its library, increasing funding for on-campus childcare, appointing a student-parent liaison, and forming a campus team dedicated to addressing the needs of student-parents. Both society and higher education institutions must prioritize support for the student-parent population and develop comprehensive support systems tailored to their needs.

The character views of determined students, alongside the wider help systems available, emerge as carefully linked whilst navigating the demanding situations of balancing those twin roles and the accompanying uncertainties. Research performed with the aid concerning 398 student-mother and fathers, it becomes found that the self-assurance they held of their potential to efficiently manipulate each of their instructional hobbies and parental duties (called self-efficacy) became a sturdy predictor in their perceived functionality to meet the necessities in their diverse roles and their average lifestyles pride. Fascinatingly, as consistent with this look, the extent of pride in the own circle of relatives mediates the relationship between balancing instructional research and own circle of relatives' duties and the general pride in lifestyles. Hence, it is vital to pay attention to the views of student-mother and father to benefit perception into how they interpret and realize fulfillment in each of their instructional endeavors and parental duties.

When you're both a parent and a student, a new identity forms – the student parent. Your roles as a parent and student mix and constantly change each other, shaping who you are through ongoing understanding and adjustment. Student-parents rely on commonly understood cultural discussions to make sense of, articulate, and enhance their roles and identities as student-parents. They value their identities as parents and students separately and aim at being a 'good parent' and a 'good student' through their dual identities. Additionally, the expectations set by institutions and cultural norms regarding parenthood and student life shape how student-parents strive to navigate the complexities of juggling these interconnected identities. Nevertheless, this ongoing process might be met with struggles, uncertainties, and opportunities (Schneider, 2023).

According to Goodman and Reddy (2019), numerous single student-parents are driven by a strong desire to enhance their families' lives and serve as positive role models for their children, motivating them to pursue education. The presence of their children consistently motivates these student-parents to persevere in their educational and career aspirations. It indicates that the median debt among undergraduate student-parents surpasses that of individuals without children. This is mainly attributed to insufficient familial assistance/support. They further noted that teenage pregnancies result in various adverse effects on young women's education, livelihoods, and health. Additionally, they pointed out that teenage pregnancies have diverse detrimental effects on young women's academic pursuits, financial stability, and overall health.

The hard nature of balancing both parenting and academic responsibilities presents several difficulties for college students who become parents early in life (Syuraini et al., 2022). For student-parents, who frequently find it difficult to prioritize one over the other, balancing the demands of being a parent and their studies, poses a serious challenge. A mother may become so consumed with motherhood that she loses focus on her education, which might result in competing obligations. Furthermore, emotional strain and external judgment are potential challenges faced by student mothers. Notwithstanding these challenges, there are advantages to being a parent and a student, including respect, motivation, producing well-adjusted children, educational accommodations, and priceless life lessons (Sicam et al., 2021).

The diverse literature examined emphasizes the significance of understanding research methodologies. It brings together various studies on the lived experiences of student-parents, revealing a diverse range of challenges, resilience, and unique stories. These findings not only shed light on the delicate balance between academic pursuits and parenting responsibilities but also emphasize the need for personalized support systems within educational institutions. Navigating the complexities of being a student-parent highlights the importance of comprehending these experiences to cultivate a more inclusive and compassionate educational environment. Acknowledging and addressing the nuanced challenges faced by student-parents lays the foundation for a more empathetic and supportive approach to higher education.

## Methodology

### Research Design

This study used the Heideggerian Phenomenology. This design is a qualitative study wherein it explicated the lived experiences of the participants who are student-parents of the university. This design can delve into the challenges and highlights they experience as the participants survive and thrive in college.

### Participants

The sampling design utilized in this study was purposive sampling following established inclusion criteria to identify the participants of the study. The participants should be bonafide education students at Cebu Technological University – Moalboal Campus, should have a child or children, and should be living within Moalboal. 5 participants qualified to be part of the study.

### Instruments

The main instrument in this study is the researchers, themselves. It is supported by a semi-structured questionnaire which is content-validated to explore the lived experiences of the student-parents in their quest of balancing their responsibilities as a student and at the same time, as a parent (Cabello & Bonotan, 2021).

### Procedure

The researchers asked permission from the Campus Director and College Dean. After the permission is secured, they send the letter to all prospects or possible participants of the study to acquire their consent. After that, they scheduled an interview. After the interview, the data gathered were treated using the analysis established in this study.

### Data Analysis

In treating and analyzing the gathered data, the researchers opted to use the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) popularized by Moustakas and modified by Van Kaam. These are the steps in analyzing the data. The following steps are horizontalization, Reduction and elimination, Thematize the Invariant Constituents, Checking the Themes Against the Data, Creating the Individual Textural Descriptions, Creating Individual Structural Descriptions, Creating Composite Textural Descriptions, Making the Composite Structural Descriptions, and the Creation of the Composite Structural-Textural Description.

## Results and Discussion

The narratives of student-parents enrolled at Cebu Technological University Moalboal Campus merge around four distinct yet interconnected themes, each offering significant insight into the complex journey of their lived experiences. These themes are, “The Pillar of Tenacity”, “The Pillar of Tranquility”, “The Pillar of Inspiration”, and “The Pillar of Versatility”. These themes capture the dynamic interaction between educational aspirations and family obligations, shedding light on the numerous obstacles and successes experienced by these individuals as they strive to balance their roles as students and parents within the campus.

### Theme 1. The Pillar of Tenacity

The Pillar of Tenacity symbolizes the resilience and determination of student-parents as they navigate the intricate balance between academic ventures and familial obligations. Acting as a source of strength, it embodies an enduring unwavering resolve and fortitude that propels them forward through the hurdles they encounter (Blanton, 2021). This pillar serves as a reminder of their inner strength and dedication to triumph, notwithstanding the obstacles encountered along the way. It signifies their commitment to achieving their academic goals while effectively fulfilling their responsibilities as parents, cultivating a sense of resilience, and perseverance in the face of challenges (Anaya, 2023).

Research highlights that student-parents face significant challenges, including time management, financial stress, and emotional strain, which necessitate the development of effective coping strategies and robust support systems (Rammell, 2023). Institutional support, such as flexible scheduling and on-campus childcare, combined with strong personal networks, plays a crucial role in fostering their resilience. Personal narratives and empirical studies emphasize that student-parents unwavering resolve and strategic approaches enable them to persevere and achieve their academic goals while fulfilling their parental duties. This tenacity, as a source of inner strength, underscores their commitment to overcoming obstacles and maintaining a sense of purpose and dedication amidst adversity (Althaus, 2021).

Participant 1 said that,

*“I have to have advantages and strategies to cope up with the challenges.”*

This participant described the need to possess specific benefits or strengths and methods or plans to effectively deal with the difficulties she was facing. As a student-parent who has dual responsibilities, it is important to have a source of great strength, courage, and resilience. Just as a fountain continually supplies water, a “fountain of fortitude” implies a continuous and abundant supply of inner strength and determination that helps her face and overcome challenges.



Participant 1 added that,

*“Before, I was very dependent. But now that I have my personal responsibilities, I learned to be independent. I also experienced having mental health problems but I managed to survive. I created a scheduling and I also built my self-esteem.”*

This participant display “inner strength” as she went through difficulties being a student-parent. Moving from dependence to independence demonstrates significant personal growth and resilience. Experiencing and managing mental health problems highlights her strength in facing and overcoming difficult circumstances. Surviving these issues indicates inner resilience and courage.

Participant 2 mentioned that,

*“For me, those are just tests or challenges in my life that tested how strong and eager I am to achieve success or finish my studies no matter how hard it is.”*

This participant describe the importance of challenges in strengthening one’s faith to continue achieving her dreams and aspirations in life. Viewing challenges as tests that measure and enhance strength and eagerness underscores a process of continuous self-improvement. Her statement reflects an understanding that these experiences are not just obstacles but also lessons that contribute to personal and academic development.

Participant 5 also said that,

*“I learned to fight despite the challenges not just for myself but for my child as well.”*

The participant’s statement demonstrate an “unyielding resolve” through her unwavering commitment to both personal growth and her child’s well-being. This dual motivation strengthens her determination, as she driven not only by personal goals but also by the desire to provide and protect her child. Emphasizing the responsibility she feel for her child adds a layer of purpose to her resolve.

In conclusion, the Pillar of Tenacity is built on a foundation of resilience, unwavering determination, and a deep sense of purpose. The participant’s journey from dependency to independence, ability to overcome mental health challenges, and their steadfast commitment to personal growth and responsibility illustrate the core elements of tenacity. Through facing life’s tests and challenges with unyielding resolve, especially for the well-being of their children, they have demonstrated a profound inner strength. This tenacity not only enables them to achieve their goals but also serves as a powerful example of perseverance and fortitude. Through self-discipline, endurance, and a relentless pursuit of success, you embody the true essence of tenacity, showcasing that with the right mindset and motivation, any obstacle can be overcome. Studies and personal narratives show that student-parents steadfast resolve and strategic approaches enable them to overcome obstacles, achieve academic goals, and fulfill parental duties, highlighting the importance of resilience and support in their journey toward success.

## Theme 2. The Pillar of Tranquility

The Pillar of Tranquility symbolizes the intricate balancing act undertaken by student-parents as they maneuver through the interconnected domains of academics and parenthood. Student-parents encounter the dual responsibilities inherent in their roles. Balancing their academic endeavors with their parental obligations requires a careful integration of these two facets (Blanton, 2021). This essential pillar calls for constant adaptation, as individuals must continuously realign their attention and efforts to effectively manage the demands of both aspects of their lives. Despite the challenges of dividing their attention, student-parents approach this responsibility with determination and grace, guided by the aim of attaining a harmonious blend (Coronel, 2020). By strategically managing their time and priorities, they foster an atmosphere of stability and tranquility, ensuring that neither academic nor parental obligations take precedence over the other, thus nurturing a sense of equilibrium in their lived experiences (Dolson, 2020).

This balance requires constant adaptation and strategic management of time and priorities to address both areas effectively. Studies show that despite the challenges, student-parents strive to maintain a harmonious blend of their responsibilities, fostering stability and tranquility (Gault et al., 2020). By realigning their efforts and attention, they ensure neither obligation dominates, thus achieving a sense of equilibrium and enhancing their overall well-being.

Participant 1 said that,

*“I am the class mayor and I also have responsibilities at home as a single parent.”*

This participant is balancing these two demanding roles (being the class mayor and a parent) showcasing her ability to manage and prioritize multiple significant commitments. These roles require a different set of skills and strengths. As a class mayor, she needs leadership, organization, and decision-making skills to guide her classmates and fulfill her duties. As a single parent, she must provide emotional support, nurture, and care for her child. Excelling in both roles demonstrates her versatility and capability. Her statement becomes a “two-fold responsibility” by highlighting the simultaneous demands of being a class mayor and a single parent. It reflects her capacity to lead, care, manage time effectively, and remain dedicated to fulfilling your obligations in both areas of your life.

Participant 2 said that,

*“Every time my child gets sick and I have my classes, I get confused about what to prioritize. Should I prioritize my ill child or my*

studies?”

This participant has experienced a “priority puzzle” that involves deciding between two important and often conflicting responsibilities: caring for an ill child and attending classes for her studies. Both responsibilities are crucial but demand her time and attention simultaneously. Her child’s health and well-being are paramount, especially when they are ill. On the other hand, her studies are important for her personal and professional development and have long-term benefits. The decision involves emotional considerations and practical ones. Deciding how to allocate her limited time and resources is the core of the puzzle.

Participant 3 also mentioned that,

*“It is not easy to be parents at such an early age, my responsibilities are divided between my academic duties and my parental duties. There are instances where I forgot to do my schoolwork because I focused more on my responsibilities with my child.”*

This participant highlights the challenge of balancing multiple significant responsibilities that require effort. In her case, being a parent at a young age means she has to manage both academic duties and parents simultaneously. Each of these responsibilities demands time, focus, and energy, which can lead to situations where one duty is prioritized over the other. As she mentioned, concentrating on one duty (like caring for her child) might lead to forgetting or missing out on schoolwork, and vice versa. This inherent conflict in trying to fulfill both roles effectively often leads to feelings of stress and inadequacy.

Participant 4 said that,

*“I can really say that because of my child, I strive even harder.”*

This participant embodies the essence of a nurturing navigator. This phase reflects the deep motivation and commitment that often comes from a parental or caregiving role. She provides guidance, support, and care while also pushing themselves to achieve more for the benefit of her child. In this case, the child’s presence and well-being inspire her to work harder and aim higher, demonstrating how nurturing responsibilities can drive personal growth and determination. This aligns with the nurturing aspect, where the participant’s primary focus is on the well-being and future of her child. The child becomes a central source of inspiration, prompting her to strive harder.

The research underscores the dual responsibilities inherent in their roles, necessitating a seamless integration of academic pursuits and parental duties. This pillar emphasizes the continual need for adaptation, as student-parents must consistently adjust their focus and efforts to effectively manage the demands of both spheres. Despite the challenges of dividing their attention, student-parents approach their responsibilities with determination and grace, striving to achieve a harmonious equilibrium. Through strategic time management and prioritization, they cultivate an environment of stability and tranquility, ensuring that neither academic nor parental obligations overshadow the other. This pursuit of balance nurtures a sense of equilibrium in their lived experiences, fostering resilience and enhancing overall well-being (Althaus, 2021).

### Theme 3. The Pillar of Inspiration

The Pillar of Inspiration stands as a beacon of light for student-parents as they navigate on their challenging journey of balancing academic obligations with their parental duties. It provides the drive needed to overcome challenges and pursue their goals with unwavering determination (Love, 2020). This pillar embodies the personal journey of student-parents, reflecting their lived experiences and as well as their strive for excellence, not just as a student, but also as a parent. With a forward-looking perspective, they remain focused on creating a better future for themselves and their families, empowered by resilience and perseverance to conquer all the hurdles in their lives as student-parents. Jones-Foster (2020) emphasized that student-parents often pursue higher education to achieve personal growth and fulfill long-term academic and career aspirations. The desire for self-improvement and setting a positive example for their children are powerful intrinsic motivators.

Participant 1 said that,

*“My motivation is that I always set it in my mind that I have to graduate not just for myself but also for my baby. And also for my family and relatives who looked down on me that I can graduate.”*

This shows that her motivation to graduate is driven by a robust Inspirational Engine powered by personal ambition, love for her baby, and the determination to prove her doubters wrong. The desire to succeed for herself is complemented by the powerful motivation to secure a better future for her child, while the skepticism of her family and relatives fuels her resolve to prove them wrong. These combined forces create a multifaceted source of inspiration, ensuring that when one motivation wanes, another reinforces her determination, keeping her consistently focused and driven to achieve her goals despite any challenges.

Participant 4 on the other hand stated that,

*“Mental health, being a new mother and recovering from childbirth makes me very emotional.”*

This exemplifies the Pillar of Inspiration’s “Heart’s Odyssey” by highlighting a deeply personal and emotional journey. Navigating these significant life changes involves intense emotions and struggles that profoundly shape their motivation and resilience. The

challenges of dealing with mental health issues, the transformative experience of becoming a mother, and the physical and emotional recovery from childbirth create a journey marked by growth and self-discovery. This Heart's Odyssey is not merely about enduring hardships but about the transformative process that comes with them, contributing to a stronger, more resilient mindset. Enduring and overcoming these challenges provides profound strength and a deep sense of purpose, which are essential elements of the Pillar of Inspiration, driving Participant 4's actions and motivations.

Participant 5 said that,

*"I am motivated to continue amidst the difficulties for my child's brighter future."*

This signifies the Pillar of Inspiration's "Forward Vision." This concept involves having a clear and compelling view of the future that drives present actions and decisions. For student-parents, the vision of a better life for their child serves as a powerful motivator, providing direction and purpose. This forward-looking perspective helps them navigate current challenges with resilience and determination, as they are inspired by the potential positive outcomes and the desire to secure a brighter future for their child. This vision not only fuels their persistence but also gives meaning to their efforts, aligning their present struggles with a hopeful and purposeful future.

Participant 5 also added that,

*"I think the meaning of my lived experiences is to continue and strive hard for the family and for a better future."*

This shows her belief that their life's purpose lies in persistently striving for their family's well-being and a brighter future encapsulates the essence of the Pillar of Inspiration known as "Everlasting Strive." This principle embodies the relentless pursuit of goals and unwavering determination in the face of adversity. Driven by their commitment to provide for their loved ones and create a better tomorrow, Student-parents demonstrate an enduring dedication that stems from their lived experiences. Their continuous efforts reflect a profound sense of purpose and resilience, underscoring the enduring nature of their journey toward a brighter future. In embracing the Everlasting Strive, they find both motivation and meaning, as their persistent pursuit of improvement is fueled by the desire to uplift their family and achieve lasting fulfillment.

In conclusion, the Pillar of Inspiration stands as a beacon of strength and guidance for student-parents on their challenging journey of balancing academic commitments with the demands of parenthood. This pillar embodies their resilience, determination, and forward-thinking mindset, empowering them to overcome obstacles and pursue their goals with unwavering resolve. Through their individual experiences and motivations, student-parents demonstrate the transformative power of perseverance and the profound impact of striving for a brighter future not only for themselves but also for their children and families. The Pillar of Inspiration serves as a constant reminder of the importance of resilience, purpose, and vision in navigating the complexities of student-parent life, guiding them toward success and fulfillment amidst the trials they encounter.

Goodman and Reddy (2019), many single student-parents pursue their education due to powerful motivation to improve the lives of their families and to be a positive example for their children. Their children serve as a consistent motivation for these student-parents to persist in their education and career goals. They might face different barriers including emotional pressures and negative feedback from others. Despite these hurdles, there are benefits acquired from being a student and a parent, including the source of inspiration, respect, and a well-raised child, school excuses, and the lessons acquired (Sicam et al., 2021).

#### **Theme 4. The Pillar of Versatility**

The Pillar of Versatility epitomizes the adaptability observed in the lived experiences of student-parents as they balance their parenting responsibilities with their scholastic pursuits. It fosters personal growth that allows them to continuously evolve in response to the demands of being a student and a parent (Sicam et al., 2021). This pillar shows how student-parents navigate their challenges swiftly, adjusting carefully as they encounter various barriers. With effective time management, they handle the complexities of scheduling, making sure that they meet both academic and parental obligations efficiently. Despite facing significant challenges, this pillar empowers student-parents to overcome these obstacles with perseverance and determination, emerging stronger in their quest for success. Goodman and Reddy (2019) emphasized the importance of prioritization and scheduling for student-parents. By identifying the most critical tasks and allocating time efficiently, student-parents can manage their dual responsibilities more effectively.

Participant 3 said that,

*"I became strong because of my experiences as a student-parent. I realized everything, how beautiful it is and how difficult it can be. I just have to stay strong."*

This reflection on becoming strong due to their experiences as a student-parent resonates deeply with the Pillar of Versatility, particularly the concept of "Soul Evolution." This principle emphasizes personal growth and transformation through diverse experiences and challenges. By navigating the complexities of balancing academic works with parenthood, student-parents have undergone a profound evolution of the soul. They have gained strength and resilience, recognizing the beauty amidst the difficulties they have faced. Through these experiences, they have cultivated a deeper understanding of life's complexities and the importance of perseverance. Their journey exemplifies how facing diverse challenges can lead to spiritual growth and a more versatile, resilient soul,



embodying the essence of the Pillar of Versatility.

Participant 4 stated that,

*“Based on my experience, I can say that it is not easy, and since it’s all new to me, its hard for me to adjust to being a mother and a student.”*

Participant 4's acknowledgment of the challenges in adjusting to the roles of both a mother and a student reflects the essence of the Pillar of Versatility, particularly the concept of "Challenge Chameleon." This principle underscores the adaptability and flexibility required to navigate diverse and unfamiliar situations. Her experience exemplifies the need to continuously adjust and adapt to changing circumstances, embodying the role of a Challenge Chameleon. As they navigate the complexities of balancing motherhood with academic pursuits, student-parents demonstrate resilience and willingness to confront and overcome new challenges. Their journey highlights the transformative power of versatility, as they evolve and grow in response to the demands of their dual roles, embodying the essence of the Pillar of Versatility.

Participant 4 also added that,

*“The main lesson I learned is time management. From doing my school works to taking care of my child. For me the lesson is that I have no right to give up, so I strive even harder.”*

Her reflection on learning the importance of time management while juggling schoolwork and childcare underscores the Pillar of Versatility, specifically the concept of "Time Mastery." This principle emphasizes the skillful allocation and utilization of time to effectively balance multiple responsibilities and pursuits. By recognizing the necessity of efficient time management in their dual roles as a student and a parent, they demonstrate an understanding of the importance of maximizing productivity and minimizing procrastination. Their determination to persevere and strive even harder reflects a mastery of time, as they prioritize tasks and responsibilities to achieve their goals. Her journey as a student-parent exemplifies how mastering time leads to greater adaptability and success in navigating diverse challenges, embodying the essence of the Pillar of Versatility.

Participant 4 also concluded that,

*“The challenges of being a student-parent is immense.”*

This resonates with the Pillar of Versatility, particularly the concept of "Mountainous Trials." This principle embodies the idea of facing monumental challenges that require resilience, adaptability, and perseverance to overcome. By recognizing the enormity of the obstacles they face, student-parents illustrate the uphill battle they confront in balancing the demands of academics and parenthood. Their journey reflects the arduous climb of navigating steep and daunting challenges, embodying the essence of the Pillar of Versatility. Despite the formidable nature of these trials, their willingness to confront them head-on demonstrates their resilience and determination to overcome even the most mountainous obstacles.

In summary, the Pillar of Versatility embodies the remarkable adaptability and resilience shown by student-parents as they navigate the delicate balance between academic studies and parental duties. Through their real-life experiences, they embody this pillar by continuously evolving to meet the demands of their dual roles. From mastering time management to facing formidable challenges, student-parents exemplify versatility in action, demonstrating their ability to adapt swiftly and overcome obstacles with determination. Their journey reflects not only personal growth but also spiritual transformation, showcasing the power of confronting diverse challenges. Ultimately, the Pillar of Versatility serves as a guiding principle for student-parents, empowering them to embrace their journey with bravery and resilience as they strive for success in both academic and parental realms.

College students who are involved in early motherhood are facing various challenges as these dual roles (parenting and schooling) is not an easy task (Syuraini, 2020). Student mothers need to balance their time as a parent and as student as well. Combining motherhood and studying without settling the activities over the other is a great dilemma for student mothers. For instance, when a woman experiences a motherhood role, her behavior may contrast with this, instead of focusing all her attention on her studies (Visick, 2019).

## Conclusions

In conclusion, the narratives of student-parents at Cebu Technological University Moalboal Campus reveal the interplay of four pillars: Tenacity, Tranquility, Inspiration, and Versatility. These pillars illuminate the challenges and triumphs of balancing academic goals with parental duties. Tenacity showcases their resilience and determination, while Tranquility emphasizes balance and adaptation. Inspiration guides them with unwavering resolve, and Versatility highlights their adaptability. Despite significant challenges, student-parents exhibit remarkable strength and perseverance, embodying these pillars on their journey to success. Their experiences underscore the importance of support, resilience, and determination in navigating both academic and parental responsibilities simultaneously.

Based on the narratives, several recommendations can be made to better support and empower this demographic.

Institutions should prioritize enhanced institutional support tailored to the needs of student-parents. This could involve providing flexible scheduling options, on-campus childcare facilities, and financial assistance programs to alleviate logistical and financial

burdens.

Universities should prioritize the development of comprehensive counseling and mental health services specifically tailored to student-parents, recognizing the unique challenges they face and providing a supportive environment for seeking assistance.

Establishing peer support networks for student-parents can also foster a sense of community and belonging, offering opportunities for sharing experiences and accessing resources.

Universities should explore flexible learning options such as online courses or hybrid formats to accommodate the scheduling constraints of student-parents without compromising the quality of education.

Promoting awareness and utilization of existing parental accommodations, such as parental leave policies and childcare subsidies, is essential to ensuring student-parents feel supported in balancing their academic and parental responsibilities.

By implementing these recommendations, universities can create a more inclusive and supportive environment for student-parents, empowering them to thrive academically while fulfilling their parental duties.

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