



Motherhood and Academia: A Phenomenological Study of Tertiary-Level Student Mothers

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to investigate the lived experiences of tertiary studying mothers and identify the strategies they employ to cope with the challenges in their academic and personal lives. In this study, the research designed used is a phenomenological research design. There were five (5) participants on this study that were selected in Barangay Caucab, Almeria, Biliran.

Based on the study's findings, the experiences of tertiary studying mothers were challenging but they are still confident with their role and feel fulfilled. Also, the researcher noted that having time management and scheduling of student mothers made their child a priority than school duties. It is determined by the researcher that tertiary studying mothers feel at ease to balance their dual roles since their family help them on raising their child. In connection with this, challenges arise with student mothers, but they used coping strategies in order to surpass it such as seeing their child as an inspiration and motivation. Regardless of the negative situation they have, they were able to learn from their situation. The findings of this study can be used to inform programs that enhance students' time management skills and foster a positive school environment.

Keywords: *Tertiary studying mothers,*

1. Introduction

Tertiary studying mothers are people who play dual roles: student and mother in one. In addition, tertiary student mother refers to a woman who is simultaneously a mother and student at the tertiary level of education. A tertiary student typically refers to someone who is pursuing higher education in a college, university, or any other post-secondary educational institution.

Moreover, a tertiary student mother is someone who has the responsibility of raising and caring for a child while also pursuing her studies. She faces the unique challenge of balancing her academic commitments with the demands of motherhood. This includes managing her time effectively, seeking support systems, and navigating the various responsibilities associated with both roles. Moreover, tertiary student mothers demonstrate determination, resilience, and a strong desire to improve their education while providing for their children. They may seek assistance from academic institutions, support groups, and navigate these dual roles successfully.

Consequently, education is perceived as a fit-all remedy that solves all sorts of perennial issues of a society and giving it greater emphasis is just fitting. As a result, studying has become one of the hardest chores a person can ever achieve in his life. For half of the population who are enrolled from kindergarten to college, school connotes the words: study, homework, research, recitation, project, performance, and test which can be sources of their great burden.

With this, education plays a pivotal role in shaping individuals and societies, making it an essential pillar of progress and development. It equips individuals with knowledge, skills, and critical thinking abilities necessary for personal growth and success. Education empowers people to understand the world around them and engage in constructive dialogue. It fosters intellectual curiosity, creativity, and problem-solving skills, enabling individuals to adapt to the ever-changing demands of the modern world. Education also promotes social cohesion by fostering empathy, understanding, and respect for diversity. It enables individuals to communicate effectively, collaborate with others, and contribute meaningfully to their communities.

Moreover, education serves as a catalyst for economic prosperity, as it provides individuals with the tools and qualifications needed to access better job opportunities and contribute to the workforce. By investing in education, societies invest in their future by cultivating informed and empowered citizens who can shape a more inclusive, innovative, and sustainable world.

However, with the onset of the 21st century teaching and learning that the educational system of the Philippine is advocating, students become burdened with more requirements, steeper expectations, and more roles to perform. The once bright-eyed children, who eagerly wait for the ring of the bell that signals the end of the class, no longer exist. More students feel stressed and exhausted with all the tasks to be done at school resulting in some

cases of student- suicide. Studying has evolved through time. It is no longer a niche for day dreamers, instead it has become a venue for simulation of life.

Because of education, many tertiary studying mothers have been able to achieve remarkable accomplishments and break down barriers that previously limited their potential. With increased access to educational opportunities, these mothers can pursue their academic aspirations while simultaneously balancing their family responsibilities. Education equips them with knowledge, skills, and critical thinking abilities that empower them to make informed decisions for themselves and their children.

By pursuing higher education, these mothers set an aspiring example for their families, demonstrating the importance of lifelong learning and personal growth. Moreover, education provides them with a competitive edge in the job market, opening doors to rewarding careers and financial independence. Tertiary studying mothers also contribute to the diversification and enrichment, bringing unique perspective and life experiences to their academic pursuits. By promoting the inclusion of mothers in tertiary education, society recognizes and values their commitment to personal development and supports their journey towards a brighter future. Through education, these remarkable women prove that motherhood and scholarly pursuits are not mutually exclusive, but rather can coexist harmoniously, leading to personal fulfillment and the betterment of society as a whole.

The study of the Moreau et al. (2013) also showed that student parents often described their experience of navigating academia as a struggle, in which time- related, financial, health and emotional problems prevail. With the data from the aforementioned literature, the researcher was inspired to determine the challenges that the students who are also mothers faced at the tertiary level of this university. Furthermore, tertiary student mothers often encounter difficulties in juggling childcare responsibilities, attending classes or lectures, completing assignments and exams, and maintaining a healthy work-life balance. They may also face financial challenges, as the cost of childcare and education can be significant.

In this light, the researcher would like to look into and explore the lived experiences of tertiary studying mother and their coping mechanisms in addressing the challenges they encountered as a tertiary studying mother.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

This study aimed to explore the lived experiences of tertiary studying mothers in Caucab, Almeria, Biliran for the School Year 2022-2023.

Specifically, it seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What are the experiences of tertiary studying mothers, in terms of:
 - 1.1 Being a student
 - 1.2 Being a mother
2. What are the challenges encountered?
3. What are the coping mechanisms employed in addressing the challenges encountered?

1.2 Methodology

Research Design

Phenomenological qualitative research was used in this study that can be useful in describing and interpreting collected data. Qualitative enables the researcher to develop a level of detail to highly involve and actual experience so it can be described as an effective method that occurs in natural settings (Cresswell, 2003). The researchers used qualitative study because it was the most suitable for this kind of research that seeks the experiences of an individual. The phenomenological method was used to understand how the co-researcher makes meaning of their living experiences (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001).

Research Locale

This study was conducted in Barangay Caucab, Almeria, Biliran and this place was selected to investigate the lived experiences of tertiary studying mothers. The researcher chooses the place of implementation because it gives the researcher the needed information for this study.

Research Participants

In this study, five tertiary studying mothers were considered as participants in the study. The researcher used purposive sampling. Purposive sampling, also known as judgmental or subjective sampling, is a non-probability sample that is selected based on specific respondent needed in the study (Crossman, 2020). The selection of the participants of this study was based on the purpose of research looking for tertiary studying mothers and was willing to share their experiences.

Research Instrument

In order to obtain the data and information needed, the researchers provided an open-ended survey question, wherein researchers are asked to answer certain questions with regards to the experiences they encounter and balancing their roles as tertiary studying mothers. It allows the researcher to freely

express herself on the subject. In-depth interviews are structured interviews whose aim is to discover participant's feelings, opinions and experience in connection with the particular research topic. The main advantage of personal interviews is that they involve face-to-face contact between the interviewer and interviewee. What is more, structured interviews allow a discussion with the interviewee rather than a straightforward question and answer format because some certain questions were prepared to guide the interview.

Data Gathering Procedure

This study utilized an interview guide sheet as one way in data gathering procedure. Before the researcher conducted this study, a letter asking permission was sought. After which, the interview will immediately follow.

Data Analysis

In analyzing the data, the researcher utilized Colaizzi's Method Data Analysis which follows certain steps to obtain valid and reliable results of the study. Sanders (2003) enumerated seven (7) phases of Colaizzi's strategy that were followed in the data analysis of this study. Then each transcript was read and re-read to obtain a general sense of the whole content. Significant statements pertaining to the phenomena under study were extracted for each transcript. These statements were recorded on separate sheets noting their pages and line number; then, meanings were formulated from these significant statements. The formulated meanings were then sorted into categories, clustered, and integrated into a detailed description of the phenomenon under study.

Furthermore, the findings of the study were integrated into an exhaustive description of the phenomenon under study. After which, the researcher described the fundamental structure of the phenomenon. Validation of the findings was sought by the research participants to compare the researcher's descriptive results in their actual responses. In cases where participants spoke in their mother tongue or any language, it was still made available. Finally, the researcher analyzed the transcribed proceedings. The identified dominant was the basis for conclusion and recommendations in the subsequent chapter.

Ethical Considerations

The anonymity and confidentiality of the participants was preserved by not revealing their names and identity in the data collection, analysis and reporting of the study findings. Before conducting the interview session with the participants, they are informed through letter requesting they are one of the participants on this study. Each interview was conducted individually in a private and quiet room without access by outsiders. The researcher personally made sure that she was the only one who could identify the participants and voice recordings. Informed consent is essential, with researchers obtaining explicit and informed consent from participants, explaining the purpose, procedures, and potential risks involved in the study (Smith & Osborn, 2007). Upholding these ethical considerations ensures the integrity and well-being of participants involved in qualitative research.

2. Results and Discussion

This chapter presents the gathered data from each statement of the problem. The description of analysis, interpretation and theme of the research findings are also part of this chapter.

Theme 1. Challenges and Balancing Dual Roles faced by Tertiary Studying Mother

The researcher collected the following answer by asking some of the tertiary studying mothers in Barangay Caucab. To begin with, the researcher asked if they found it easy to balance their dual roles. In addition, they have shared some of their explanations on what inspired them to strive for success. Below are some of their statements:

"It is difficult to balance because as a student mother, based on my experience, from early in the morning as soon as you wake up, you have to prepare food for the child and take care of yourself. It's very challenging and being a mother who goes to school is tough for me."

"If at home I am a mother, at school I am a student."

"For me...When it's time for school, go to school...and in the afternoon like that. In the evening...there are no classes. Then it's time to act like a mother again, ^."

"What is balance, right? It's not like in college where classes are only half a day, so there's still time to be a mother and a student, ^...right? But if we talk about experience, this is something else. In terms of being...financially stable, it's twice as difficult to balance. You can't just say you can do it...as long as you have that level, right?"

"As for now, it's really difficult...because she has a child who goes to school, and you can't balance things well, especially if she gives you an activity now and her child causes a mess, tell her that you can also watch over your child like that, so you really need to understand time management."

"In my difficult experience, there were instances...when I had exams and at the same time, I had a lot of projects to work on. Unfortunately, my child fell ill, making it extremely challenging...because your mind is not focused on your studies but on taking care of your child. It was difficult because your thoughts are not at school due to the concerns about your child."

"Financially, of course, I have a student who needs financial support every day."

"Yes, when Laben maybe around 6 months ago, Laben was still small. He used to breastfeed, you know, and of course, whenever you breastfeed, you get hungry for breast milk. As long as you can't breastfeed again, you'll always come back here no matter what class you belong to. The

class doesn't matter as long as you can breastfeed, and you always come back every time you want to breastfeed. There's no specific time for breastfeeding, it's just whenever you feel like it, you do it and have fun, ^^."

"Uh, so yeah, the first thing is the financial aspect, and next is when your child gets sick, it's difficult to go to school, right? ^^... What a situation, ^^... It's difficult to go to school when you also have to think about your child. Yes, exactly. It's really like that because I feel embarrassed there because of the gossip, and then Marites again, right? Isn't Marites annoying?"

"Difficult because you can't focus on what I'm doing, that's why it's difficult."

The researcher found out that their participants while juggling their dual responsibilities as students and mothers, tertiary studying mothers, have many difficulties. They must balance childcare commitments and academic obligations while juggling time restraints, financial limits, and emotional tiredness. Despite these difficulties, these resilient people exhibit incredible tenacity, resilience, and flexibility. They work to achieve a harmonious balance between their academic ambitions and parenting responsibilities by setting priorities, looking for support networks, and encouraging self-care. Their ability to overcome problems and achieve success in both fields is a monument to their unwavering commitment and serves as motivation for others facing comparable difficulties.

Theme 2. Time Management and Scheduling

These statements below are the response of our participants, answer the question about the time management and scheduling of tertiary studying mothers. Below are some of their statements:

"I have still managed it...because since I started school in my first year, I have now reached the third year. I have been able to manage it because of the support of my family and my mother-in-law, who has always been there to help me."

"Time Management."

"Just continue to manage...just continue to be my answer, ^^ kidding."

"As I said, ^^...so I can manage in the morning, I have my class, then I'll return in the afternoon, that's it."

"As for now, it's really difficult...because she has a child who goes to school, and you can't balance things well, especially if she gives you an activity now and her child causes a mess, tell her that you can also watch over your child like that, so you really need to understand time management."

"It is difficult to balance because as a student mother, based on my experience, from early in the morning as soon as you wake up, you have to prepare food for the child and take care of yourself. It's very challenging and being a mother who goes to school is tough for me."

"If at home I am a mother, at school I am a student."

"For me...When it's time for school, go to school...and in the afternoon like that. In the evening...there are no classes. Then it's time to act like a mother again, ^^."

"What is balance, right? It's not like in college where classes are only half a day, so there's still time to be a mother and a student, ^^...right? But if we talk about experience, this is something else. In terms of being...financially stable, it's twice as difficult to balance. You can't just say you can do it...as long as you have that level, right?"

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The researcher found out that their participant's mothers who are enrolled in tertiary education must navigate the difficult task of juggling their academic goals with their parental obligations. These mothers need effective time management and scheduling as essential tools to complete their tasks successfully. These women can maximize their productivity and keep a healthy work-life balance by carefully organizing their study hours, allotting specific time for childcare, and prioritizing assignments. They can improve their time management abilities by putting techniques into practice like making realistic calendars, using technology for reminders and task monitoring, and asking for help from family and friends. Mastering time management and scheduling enables tertiary studying mothers to successfully traverse their academic journey while guaranteeing their children's wellbeing and personal development, even if it may demand more effort and commitment.

Theme 3. Positive Impacts and Enhanced Emotional/ Psychological well-being experienced by tertiary studying mothers.

These statements below are the response of our participants tertiary studying mothers often experience numerous positive impacts and enhanced psychological well-being. Here are some statements highlighting these benefits:

"As a student mother, I don't just dwell on negative thoughts that we can't handle. For me, I focus on everything for the future of my child and for our future."

"Even in difficult times, I will not give up."

"The positive mind-set is to always focus on your goal, especially when you have children. You shouldn't think or act like a lazy person or something like that. You know, back then, your parents didn't have the opportunity to have children, so everything you do, make an effort. Study hard because your children might end up in the same situation."

"Positive that you experienced in your life. My perspective on my future is straight and clear, ^^". Remember back in high school, I used to be like that. Our thoughts used to be all over the place, cutting and drunk, especially when I had that child, it's like my perspective on the future has become straight, ^^..."

"Uhm, just like when you're stressed after school, when you see your child, you'll be happy to see her relieved of your stress, you're happy when she is happy, just laugh ... Okay, let's go, let's just be happy."

"As a student mother, I don't just dwell on negative thoughts that we can't handle. For me, I focus on everything for the future of my child and for our future."

"It's difficult because I have to spend on my mother, I have to spend on myself, I have to spend on my children, and there are also financial obligations in our household."

"I don't have any children who are currently attending school, ^^."

"Advantages... Not advantages^^... Because if you say there are advantages, there are many. If she is studying and I am also studying, it's hard for me to concentrate. Oh, advantages really, because if there are disadvantages, my time gets divided, and every time I go home, I am already tired. I can't focus on her anymore, but sometimes I still try to teach her. But what advantages are there? Maybe none, let's just leave it without advantages."

"Uhm, just like when you're stressed after school, when you see your child, you'll be happy to see her relieved of your stress, you're happy when she is happy, just laugh ... Okay, let's go, let's just be happy."

The researcher found out that most of the participant's mothers who pursue higher education benefit greatly and have improved psychological well-being. Higher education allows students to develop their knowledge and abilities while also boosting their self-confidence and enabling them to pursue their academic and professional ambitions. A high sense of self-worth and contentment is fostered by the sense of accomplishment and personal improvement received from juggling their responsibilities as mothers and students. Additionally, the tertiary education's intellectual challenge and social contacts give a priceless source of support and connection, lowering feelings of loneliness and improving general wellbeing. In the end, the transformative experience of being a mother who studies has many good effects, giving her children the skills and fortitude they need to succeed in both their academic and personal lives.

Theme 4. Improved Self-Esteem and Personal Growth

These statements below are the response of our participants, answering the question about the improved self-esteem and personal growth of tertiary studying mothers. Below are some of their statements:

"My partner is not only supportive of my education, but also guides and advises me. Maybe with my friends, yes, their time is limited. But with my family, they are always there to assist and support me, especially in taking care of my child."

"Nope."

"Yes, it affected me a little, that time when your friend said, "Let's go out," I just replied, "Not now, because I need to study and work on that project."

"No, financially, yes, it will be affected because, you see, you have a child and still need to support their schooling."

"Ahh none, my friends increased even more when what happened to me, just like my confidence, I am no longer shy."

"My tertiary education gave me opportunities to connect with people who share my situation. In my classes and student groups, I participated in events that strengthened my ability to build relationships, communicate, and share needs and concerns, which are common among student mothers. This fostered my skills in empathy, patience, and collaboration with others."

"I will study in order to obtain a good job for my family."

"Being a mother, my success lies in you. You have to do well, no slacking off, no going astray, as if your education or your life depends on it. You need to finish it to be able to work and help your family, ^^... Just kidding ^^."

"^^, this, uhm, is the downside of my family ^^ ..."

"That made me more mature, and now I have more confidence that I can succeed on my own terms with more effort."

The researcher found out that most of their participants, those who pursue further education as tertiary students grow personally and have stronger self-esteem. These women receive a sense of success, increase their knowledge and skills, and discover a fresh confidence in their abilities through their educational endeavors. The difficulties they have when balancing motherhood and academics help them to become more resilient and

determined, which promotes personal development in many areas of their lives. These women model for their children how to manage their responsibilities as students and mothers, encouraging them to pursue their own educational objectives and creating a healthy home environment that values education and personal growth.

Theme 5. Goals

These statements below are the response of our participants, answer the question about the goals of tertiary studying mother:

"For me, it is important to be able to work and find a good job that can help support my family, especially my child's future education."

"I will achieve my dreams and provide for the needs of my family."

"My goals, I have many goals, you know, like having a stable job, financially stable, and then going out anywhere with family for bonding, always with the family, because of course, in difficult times, when you don't have money, that's all you have, bonding."

"It is said that one should save for future goals. Oh my goodness, saving is important. Work, look for a job, save, start a business. And when everything is financially stable, there's no more family bonding. I will pay off all the debts of my family. What are the goals and inspiration? I will help them, and then they can pay off their debts. They have a lot of debt, which is difficult."

"I have Inday's needs, and that thing, ^^... I don't want to have needs like others, like what they call this, oi ^^, like my mother taking care of me, uh... uh... well, ^^... Oh my, I wasn't able to focus, ^^... Anyway, that's how it is, oh my..."

The researcher found out that most of their participant's mothers who are enrolled in tertiary education have a range of objectives, including expectations for themselves and their family' futures both personally and professionally. These objectives can include advancing their jobs by learning new skills and knowledge, going back to school to increase their earning potential, and setting an example for their kids by exemplifying the value of education. Mothers who are pursuing higher education may also aim for personal development, boosting confidence, and a sense of fulfilment from attaining their scholastic goals. In the end, their objectives show a commitment to juggling motherhood and school while actively working to improve the futures of themselves and their families.

Theme 6. Networking and Supports

These statements below are the response of our participants, answer the question about the networking and supports of tertiary studying mother:

"Strive to pursue education. For someone who wants to study, you should never discourage them from seeking support because education is our reward in life, something that will never fade away until we leave this world."

"Supportive husband, financial, supportive children Translate: A supportive husband, financial stability, and supportive children."

"Physically support and that financially because that's the first and foremost difficult thing financially, it's really hard to go to school without money."

"First and foremost, financial ^^... wait, there's another one, I forgot the term, it requires support ^^... financial support, family support, yes, there, what else, okay, so the most important thing is family support."

"I need some support from them, but I don't get the support I need. I also need support to cheer me up."

The researcher found out that most of their participant's tertiary studying mothers often face numerous challenges in balancing their academic pursuits with their parental responsibilities. However, networking and support systems play a crucial role in mitigating these difficulties and promoting their overall success. By actively engaging in networking opportunities, such as joining student organizations, attending workshops, or connecting with fellow parents, these mothers can build meaningful relationships and gain access to valuable resources, advice, and encouragement. Additionally, support systems, including family, friends, and academic institutions, can provide practical assistance, such as childcare options or flexible scheduling, as well as emotional support, fostering a sense of belonging and motivation. Through effective networking and robust support systems, tertiary studying mothers can navigate the complexities of their dual roles and achieve their educational goals while nurturing their families.

3. Conclusion

The conclusions are drawn based on the findings of the study. The researcher concluded that the experiences of tertiary studying mothers were challenging but they are still confident with their role and feel fulfilled. Also, the researchers noted that having time management and scheduling of student mothers made their child a priority than school duties. It is determined by the researchers that tertiary studying mothers feel at ease to balance their dual roles since their family help them on raising their child.

In connection with this, challenges arise with student mothers but they used coping strategies in order to surpass it such as seeing their child as an inspiration and motivation. Regardless of the negative situation they have, they were able to learn from their situation.

4. Recommendations

Based on the conclusions, the following recommendations are forwarded.

1. Universities should provide more flexible course scheduling, online class options, or extended deadlines for assignments when student mothers face conflicts due to their parental duties.
2. Universities should provide specialized counseling services for student mothers to address the mental and emotional challenges they may encounter while juggling their academic and family responsibilities.
3. Encourage ongoing research and advocacy on the unique needs and challenges faced by student mothers in higher education. Policymakers and institutions should collaborate to develop policies that provide additional academic and financial support.

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