

## Insights into the academic-life balance of student-teachers as single mothers

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### ABSTRACT

Preparing student-teachers to become globally competitive, productive, and resilient K-12 educators in the future was an arduous task. Adding pressure to their academic life was the reality that some simultaneously performed various roles and responsibilities. With that insight, the study presents insights into the academic-life balance of student-teachers as single mothers. The study utilizes the phenomenological design of qualitative research, specifically the DPA (Descriptive Phenomenological Analysis) to six female student-teachers who are selected using the stratified sampling technique from the College of Education (COEd) of the BPSU-Balanga Campus, Bataan, Philippines. The qualitative data are gathered using the semi-structured interview guide, and the data are treated using the DPA model proposed by Edmund Husserl. The study reveals significant challenges for single mother student-teachers in balancing academic and personal lives, including time management conflicts and impacts on academic performance. Support systems, such as family assistance, peer support, flexible scheduling, and counseling services, along with effective time management and self-care, are also identified as crucial for their success.

**Keywords:** *Academic-Life Balance, Student-Teachers, Single Motherhood*

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### INTRODUCTION

Preparing student-teachers to become competitive and resilient K-12 educators is challenging, especially for those juggling multiple roles, such as students, workers, partners, and parents. The phrase "*Nanay na, tatay pa!* [Mommy and daddy at the same time!]" underscores the extensive responsibilities of single mothers who face additional difficulties as student-teachers.

Single parents face numerous challenges, including financial struggles, childcare difficulties, family responsibilities, academic hurdles, and emotional stress (Kruvelis et al., 2017). Prolonged separation from their children can cause emotional pain, making it difficult for single parents to start or continue college programs.

While a higher education degree can alleviate some of the strain and is considered a "success ticket" (Duquaine-Watson, 2017), many single parents find it

financially and logistically challenging to pursue and complete a degree. The benefits can be substantial, but so are the obstacles (Kruvelis et al., 2017).

Higher education systems often do not support single-parent students, as they are designed for traditional students who are neither employed nor parents (Lewis, 2021). Single mothers face considerable challenges that hinder their persistence in education. To promote graduation rates and long-term benefits, institutions should offer tailored assistance and programs for single parents (Kruvelis et al., 2017). Additionally, campus policies, such as attendance rules, often do not accommodate the unique needs of single parents, presenting further barriers (Graham & Bassett, 2012).

While existing literature focuses on general student difficulties (Eyster et al., 2014; Beeler, 2016), few studies address the unique challenges of student mothers (Bruening et al., 2017; Dankyi et al., 2019). This study, aligned with SDG 4 (Quality Education), examines the experiences of student-teachers who are single mothers, highlighting their struggles in balancing academic and parental responsibilities.

In the Philippines, despite laws like Republic Act No. 11861 (Expanded Solo Parents Welfare Act) promoting single parents' rights, these student-teachers still need support. The high expectations associated with internship programs, a crucial requirement for graduation, further exacerbate their challenges. Additionally, social stigmas and prejudices complicate their roles as students and parents.

The study aims to provide insights for effective interventions, including instructional and life-coaching support. By understanding the unique difficulties faced by student-teachers who are single mothers, the research seeks to inform the development of comprehensive guidance and resources. This includes offering counselling services to address emotional and psychological stressors and creating an inclusive and supportive environment within the College of Education (COEd).

Ultimately, the study contributes to the broader goal of SDG 4 by promoting an educational environment that recognizes and supports the diverse realities of individuals. By addressing these issues, the research fosters a lifelong love for learning and empowers all to reach their full potential.

## **METHOD**

This study utilized the phenomenological design of qualitative research, specifically the Descriptive Phenomenological Analysis (DPA), to understand and describe the lived experiences of student-teachers who were single mothers regarding their academic-life balance. The research, conducted among 4th-year education students from the College of Education at BPSU-Balanga Campus deployed in secondary schools in Bataan, involved six female participants identified through stratified sampling. Data were collected using a semi-structured interview guide, validated by experts, which explored the participants' experiences, perceptions, and challenges in balancing academic pursuits and parenting responsibilities. The data were analyzed using Edmund Husserl's DPA model, involving epoché (bracketing preconceived notions), intuition and reflective variation (exploring different aspects of experiences), and eidetic analysis (identifying

essential structures). The narratives were coded and categorized to develop themes and categories, ensuring the authenticity of the participants' experiences. The study provided a deeper understanding of the unique challenges faced by single mother student-teachers and contributed to the broader knowledge of supporting them in their pursuit of education.

## **FINDING AND DISCUSSION**

The following are the insights gathered from the narrative of experiences of student-teachers as single mothers in balancing their academic and personal lives:

### **4.1. Theme 1: Balancing Academic Demands and Parental Responsibilities**

#### 4.1.1. Time Management Challenges

**Scheduling Conflicts.** Participants often need help managing their time effectively between academic obligations and parental duties. This included scheduling conflicts between classes, assignments, and childcare responsibilities.

**Prioritization.** Many had to prioritize their children's needs over academic tasks, leading to delayed submissions or reduced study time.

#### 4.1.2. Academic Performance

**Impact on Grades.** The constant juggling of responsibilities often affected participants' academic performance, with some reporting lower grades or difficulty keeping up with coursework.

**Study Habits.** Changes in study habits were noted, with participants often studying late at night or during their children's nap times, leading to fatigue and reduced productivity.

### **4.2. Theme 2: Support Systems and Academic Success**

#### 4.2.1. Family and Social Support

**Role of Family.** Participants who had strong family support systems found it easier to manage their academic-life balance. Family members often helped with childcare, allowing student-teachers to focus on their studies.

**Peer Support.** Support from fellow student-teachers, especially those in similar situations, was crucial in providing emotional support and practical advice on managing academic and parental responsibilities.

#### 4.2.2. Institutional Support

**Flexible Scheduling.** Institutions that offered flexible scheduling options, such as online classes or evening courses, were highly valued by participants. These options allowed them to balance their academic and parental roles better.

**Counseling Services.** Access to counselling services was important for participants to manage the stress and emotional challenges that come with balancing academic life and parenthood.

### **4.3. Theme 3: Strategies for Academic-Life Balance**

#### 4.3.1. Time Management Techniques

Planning and Organization. Participants employed various time management techniques, such as using planners, setting reminders, and breaking down tasks into manageable chunks.

Multitasking. Effective multitasking was a common strategy, with participants often completing academic tasks while attending to their children's needs.

#### 4.3.2. Self-Care and Well-being

Mental Health. Participants emphasized the importance of self-care and mental health in maintaining their academic-life balance. This included taking breaks, engaging in stress-relieving activities, and seeking professional help when needed.

*Physical Health.* Maintaining physical health through exercise and proper nutrition was also noted as important for sustaining the energy needed to balance academic and parental responsibilities.

The thematic analysis reveals the significant challenges faced by student-teachers who are single mothers in balancing their academic and personal lives. The struggle to manage time effectively, prioritize responsibilities, and maintain academic performance is a common theme. However, support systems, both from family and institutions, play a crucial role in helping these student-teachers succeed. Additionally, the adoption of effective time management techniques and a focus on self-care and well-being are essential strategies for achieving a healthy academic-life balance.

The thematic analysis reveals significant challenges for student-teachers who are single mothers in balancing their academic and personal lives, aligning with findings from the listed literature. Key issues include time management conflicts, prioritization of parental duties, and impacts on academic performance. Support systems, such as family assistance and institutional support, are crucial for managing these challenges (Chase-Lansdale & Brooks-Gunn, 1995; Barling & Hamilton, 2010). Despite laws promoting single parents' rights, these student-teachers still need support. Higher education systems often need to accommodate single-parent students, as they are designed for traditional students (Lewis, 2021). To promote graduation rates and long-term benefits, institutions should offer tailored assistance and programs for single parents (Kruvelis et al., 2017), and institutional policies should accommodate their unique needs (Graham & Bassett, 2012).

## CONCLUSION

The study highlights the significant challenges faced by single mother student-teachers in balancing their academic and personal lives. Key issues include time management conflicts, prioritization of parental duties over academic tasks, and the impact of these struggles on academic performance and study habits. Support systems, such as family assistance and peer support, are crucial for managing these challenges. Institutional support, including flexible scheduling and counselling services, also plays a vital role in helping these student-teachers succeed. Effective time management techniques and a focus on self-care and well-being are essential strategies for achieving a healthy academic-life balance.

To better support student-teachers who are single mothers, educational institutions should implement flexible scheduling options, such as online classes and evening courses, to accommodate their unique needs. Additionally, the university and the student-teacher cooperating schools may forge a partnership to provide accessible counselling services to help manage stress and emotional challenges. Also, encouraging the use of time management techniques and promoting self-care practices can further enhance their ability to balance academic and parental responsibilities. Finally, family and peer support networks should be fostered to provide emotional and practical assistance. By addressing these areas, institutions can create a more supportive environment that enables single-mother student-teachers to thrive academically and personally.

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*Republic Act No. 11861. An act granting additional benefits to solo parents, amending for the purpose Republic Act No. 8972, entitled "an act providing for benefits and privileges to solo parents and their children, appropriating funds therefor and for other purposes. June 04, 2022.*