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Challenges and Coping Mechanisms of Student-Teacher Mommies

Alice T. Rivera *, Lodyvina G. Angeles and Jomar M. Urbano

Nueva Ecija University of Science and Technology, Philippines

* For correspondence: alicetonidorivera@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

This study focused on the challenges and coping mechanisms of Student-Teacher Mommies (S-TM) who were enrolled at the Nueva Ecija University of Science & Technology, College of Education. The goal of this research study is to explore the student-teacher mommies experiences on how it is both a student and a mother at the same time. Data were analyzed using the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis in which the researchers have captured the challenges as well as the coping mechanisms of student-teacher mommies in managing their multiple roles. The researchers explored the life story, experiences and the reflections of student- teacher mommies Since face-to-face interview is not possible in this time of pandemic, the information needed from the respondents were gathered through interviews via Zoom Meetings. The researchers were guided by semi-structured questions that the professionals relevant to the field of study validated. As to challenges as regards childcare, student- teacher mommies found it challenging to combine their responsibilities to their families and their academic pursuits. They needed to do multi-tasking and take extra efforts so as to lessen the guilt of not doing their reproductive roles. Prayers, time management and positive mind setting serve as their coping mechanisms. As to financial challenges, allotting budget for babysitter since the father is not that financially capable in providing the needs for the family, budget for school materials, home rentals and the increasing transportation expenses are found to be quite challenging as revealed by the student – teacher mommies. To cope up with these financial constraints, support systems from family, friends, schools, and community help student mommies to surpass this burden. More so, vending also helps them to augment their income. As to academic challenges, student -teacher mommies revealed their difficulty in attending class when their children are sick. They found it hard catching and reviewing lessons for the examinations as well as completing their homework/ assignment. Hence, intrinsic motivations drive the student mommies to continue with their professional growth. A proposed Project ES-TM (Empowered Student-Teacher Mommies) was drawn from the findings of this study.

Keywords: student -teacher mommies, challenges, coping mechanisms

1. INTRODUCTION

An Educational philosopher once said that “education is the passport for the future, for tomorrow belongs to those who prepare for it”. This only means that education is believed to be the most powerful wealth that every individual could have to secure the future for better livelihood and social development. Therefore, the decision and determination to pursue a higher education is one of the significant commitments that a person must decide in his life. According to Manalang, Liongson & Bayubay (2015), education in the Philippines has been recognized as a central element in development. Despite the limited financial resources of the family, the parents’ attitude towards education and the pressure of improving a family’s socioeconomic status, ultimately influence to pursue their children into higher education.

According to Dankyi et. al. (2019), social and cultural factors may also contribute whether an individual will continue to pursue a degree. In the traditional society, the man is perceived as the head and the breadwinner of the family. The women are said to be the heart of the family and keeper of the home and expected to be trained at the kitchen. However, the recent trend in the world economy has made it necessary for women to act as co-breadwinners of the family and therefore must be educated to gain employment so as to earn for living. According to Imbong (2009), “education for women remains the most vital tool in the promotion of equality between men and women and in the empowerment of women to contribute fully to society.”. The role of 21st-century woman often requires her to be a wife, mother, nurse, teacher, and cobreadwinner all at the same time, and the changing role of women in the society has made it necessary for nursing mothers to combine childcare, home care, career, and studies (Anibijuwon & Esimai, 2020).

In the study of Manalang, Liongson and Bayubay (2015) the results of the 2013 National Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS) by the Philippine Statistics Authorities (2013) showed that, one in ten young Filipino women aged 15-19 had begun childbearing: 8% are already mothers and another 2% were pregnant with their first child. Among young adult women aged 20 to 24, 43% were already mothers and 4% were pregnant with their first child. These age ranges 15-19, 20 to 24 were the common age of the college students. This might be a sort of reasons why women will not be able to pursue a degree or stop from schooling. But with the recent trend in the world economy, more and more married and mothers are willing and encourage to go back in schooling and pursue a higher education. This has resulted in a phenomena of student mommies in various higher education institution.

In the Nueva Ecija University of Science and Technology – College of Education, there are Student-Teacher Mommies (S-TM) enrolled and graduated in the Bachelor of Secondary Education and Bachelor of Elementary Education programs. Despite of the multiple roles of being a mother, a wife and a student, they were able to handle the demands of their multiple roles and cope with their challenges. It may be hypothesized that student-teacher mommies returning to school would demonstrate higher levels of achievement motivation. However, despite of strong motivation to finish their degrees, student-teacher mommies are also at risks of stress and burnout because of continuing schooling while at the same time parenting a child. According to Egenti and Omoruyi (2011) the stress and trauma which they have to go through will make them feel psychologically, emotionally and physically ill-disposed towards the program. But this problem can be resolve with the adequate support systems of the universities and their family in terms of academics, child care and financial support Dankyi et. al. (2019).

Thus, this study sought to find out the challenges and coping mechanisms of Student-Teacher Mommies (S-TM) from the College of Education who combine the worlds of family, works, and academics. This could be a basis for program enhancement that will support S-TM to continue their battle and finish their respective program despite of their reproductive responsibilities.

2. METHODS AND MATERIALS

2.1. Research Design

The goal of the research study is to explore the student-teacher mommies experiences on how it is both a student and a mother at the same time. The present study used a phenomenological approach as a technique to address the research question in qualitative terms. Qualitative research study according to Mills and Birks (2014) “aimed to examine phenomena that impact on the lived reality of individuals or groups in a particular cultural or social context”. Phenomenology aimed to accurately describe the phenomenon without a pre-existing knowledge to a framework, but remaining truth to the facts (Groenewald, 2004). More so, using qualitative research, the researchers would able to connect with their participants and to see the world from their viewpoints (Corbin & Strauss, 2015).

2.2. Participants

Five (5) student-teacher mommies have participated in the study. According to Smith, using purposeful sampling, eligible participants were selected for the present study. By means of purposive sampling, it enhanced the understanding of the researchers to the selected individuals or groups’ experience (Dever & Frankel, 2000) that can help them to choose their participants that is fitted for the study. Respondents were screened based on the following criteria listed below:

- a. female;
- b. currently enrolled/graduated in NEUST – College of Education;
- c. has a child/children;
- d. she had the custody of the child; and
- e. willing to participate in the study.

2.3. Instruments

Demographic form – The participants have answered a demographic form, which helped the researchers collect some of their personal information, such as name, address, age, contact number, etc. Before the interview begin, participants have completed the form separately.

Semi-structured interview – A semi-structured interview was used in collecting data. This type of interview is the most familiar strategy in collecting qualitative data (Bloom & Crabtree, 2006), that allowed the researchers to obtain all the required information needed and allow the researchers to ask clarification follow-up questions.

The content of the questionnaire was adopted from the study of Manalang, Liongson, & Bayubay (2015) and were validated by three professionals who were an expert in the field of psychology.

2.4. Procedure

2.4.1. Pilot Testing

In order to decide if the questionnaire is sufficient and valid, the researchers have performed a pilot test involving five (5) student-teacher mommies, who met the requirements set out by the researchers.

Prior to the interview, the researchers asked questions to the respondents about their desired time and means of the interview. Before the interview begin, the participants granted informed consent and the

researchers explained it briefly. The participants were granted the opportunity at any time to discontinue their participation. They have also given the right to refuse to answer some of the questions to be asked with them. There were one-on-one interviews between the researcher and the participant via Zoom Meeting. Participants were interviewed by a female researcher. It is possible for the participants to speak and share their experiences. In three different interviews, respondents were asked several questions.

After the interview, the researchers have asked the participants about their interview perspectives and feedback about how to improve the interview. The interview results were transcribed to be analyzed by the researchers.

2.4.2. Actual Procedure

Participants were initially screened if they are eligible for the study based on the requirements set by the researchers. An informed consent was given and the researchers discussed the purpose of the research and the relevance of the involvement of the participant. Participants are allowed at any time to withdraw or discontinue their participation. In the interview, they also have the right to refuse to answer the questions. Both released and written data resulting from the present study will preserve the individual privacy of the subjects.

The researchers asked the participants before the interview about the date, time and means of the interview, according to the schedule and convenience of the participants. The analysis and the questions to be asked were explained by the researcher prior to the interview. They asked to respond to the demographic profile in order to provide the participants' personal details.

During the interview, the researchers told the participants that the interview will be documented for the purposes of transcription. The researchers were guided by semi-structured questions that the professionals relevant to the field of study validated. To explain the responses provided by the participants and get all the details needed for the analysis, the researchers used a semi-structured interview to ask follow-up questions. The interview questions, as guided by Seidman (2006) are divided into three categories - the life story, the experienced and the reflection. Every category was conducted separately (one category per day). The first session focused on the life story of the participants, the second one was about the experiences of being a student-teacher mommies and the last one was about their reflections regarding their current situation.

Permission from the participants were sought that the interview will be documented and recorded via Zoom Meeting. Participants have presented with the transcript of the interview for confirmation.

2.5. Data Analysis

The qualitative analysis seeks to organized and reduced the data into themes or essences, which it could turn into description, models, or theories (Walker & Myrick, 2006). As Dey (1993) suggested "we break down the data in order to classify it, and the concepts we create or employ in classifying the data, and the connections we make between these concepts, provide the basis of a fresh description".

Collected data were analyzed using the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). According to Smith and Osborn (2007) IPA aims to explore in detail how participants were making sense of their personal and social world", which it will capture and explore the life of the participants assigned to their experiences. The

data analysis started by reading the transcripts a number of times to immerse themselves to the data (Cooper, Fleischer, & Cotton, 2012; Smith & Osborn, 2007).

As they read the transcripts, the researchers took notes on what is significant about what is said by the participants, which according to Cooper, Fleischer, and Cotton (2012) “the purpose of descriptive comments was to describe the content of the data”. The next step, the researchers re-read the whole transcript and then documented the emerging themes in the right margin of the transcription (Tomura, 2009). Tomura (2009) also suggested that themes should be captured the commonalities in the data using psychological terminologies. More so, Reid, Flowers, and Larkin (2005) suggested that in coding the data the following questions should be answered:

- a. What experiences are described by the participants?
- b. What are the key features of such experiences for the participants?
- c. What do those experiences appear to mean?
- d. How would you characterize their stance in relation to these topics/ events?

The next step in the study was to group or cluster the themes that seemed to be related. The researchers reviewed and compared the themes in the transcripts after the clustering of themes happens to ensure that the interpretations are accurate to what the participants actually said (Smith & Osborn, 2007; Tomura, 2009).

The next step was to established a list of themes in which the characteristics of the clustered themes are defined by the researchers and composed of categorical titles for them (Tomura, 2009). The other transcriptions followed the same process.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study explores the coping mechanisms of student-teacher mommies using a phenomenological approach. Five (5) student-teacher mommies from College of Education of Nueva Ecija University of Science and Technology (NEUST) have been interviewed and had an in-depth discussion with the researchers. Although each participant provided unique information, numerous common themes emerged. Thus, this section gives a description of the participants as well as a narrative from their points of view. The participants were asked questions focused on their coping skills, support systems, barriers faced, financial concerns, childcare, and struggles associated with motherhood in general.

From the results of interview, several challenges of student-teacher mommies in managing their multiple roles were identified and themes of their coping mechanism were emerged. The most prevalent themes in this study were childcare, financial, and academics.

3.1. Challenge and Coping Strategies of Student Mommies

3.1.1. Childcare

Majority of student mommies participated in the study explained the difficulty in obtaining quality of childcare as being a defining factor with scheduling classes and attendance. They experienced greater hardships because of the difficulty in accessing childcare while they attended school. By not having accessible childcare it makes it difficult for student mommies to attend classes and to have devoted time to complete homework. These challenges of childcare difficulties include being unable to exclusively breastfeed their children, inadequate time for breastfeeding, taking care of child illness, and inadequate time to care for the child. This result fortifies the study of Cerven (2013) which shows that this factor alone plays a significance

Table 1. Project ES-TM (Empowered Student-Teacher Mommies)

Programs/ Activities	Description	Person/s Involve	Expected Outcome
Inclusion of S-TM children in the Day Care Center of the University	This program will allow not just the children of the faculty and staff of the university but also the children of the S-TM to be included in the existing Day Care Center program of the university, so S-TM will no longer have hard time finding someone to take care of their young children.	Gender and Development (GAD) Staff	Certificate of Recognition/Completion of S-TM's child.
Mentally-Ready Student Mommy Program	This program will give opportunity to S-TM to have free mental health consultation with register guidance councilor of the college/university every week or whenever needed.	Registered Guidance Councilors of the college/university	Attendance of S-TM
Healthy Baby - Happy Mommy Program	Since each of the colleges in the university has their respective extension activities where they provide services to community, like medical missions for the College of Nursing (College of Medicine, if available), this program will offer a great opportunity to S-TMs children to be included as beneficiaries of the services like free check-up, immunization, dental services, and others.	College of Nursing/ College of Medicine	Accomplished Medical Card of S-TM's child
Earning while Learning Program	This program is composed of series of short livelihood trainings that will capacitate the S-TM during their most convenient time. They will also be given financial support through the extension activity fund of the college, to start having a business while studying and taking care of their children.	Bachelor of Technology Livelihood Education Faculty of the college	Documentation

difference in the mother's level of persistence in achieving these goals.

According to Maness and Munoz (2019), student mommies experience similar dilemmas when they had to be in class at a certain time and finding accurate day care facilities that are affordable and available. Mostly all participants stated that childcare is one of the most difficult challenges they face. Mothers in higher education are more susceptible to experienced hardships, than male counterparts (Lynch, 2008). One of the participants said;

"Napakahirap po makita na iiwanan ko ang aking anak sa oras ng pagpasok, at napakahirap din po maghanap ng mag-alaga ng aking anak. Nagkakaroon po ako guilty

feeling bilang nanay. Kapag nasa bahay naman, kailangan hatiin ang oras ko sa pagaaral at pag-aalaga ng aking anak. Mas mahirap pa kung may sakit. Napipilitan po akong lumiban sa klase."

"It is very difficult to see that I will leave my child every time I go to school, and it is also very difficult to find someone to take care of my child. I feel guilty as a mother. When I'm at home, I have to divide my time between studying and taking care of my child. It's even harder if you're sick. I was forced to miss class."

In general, student-mommies found it challenging to balance spending time with their families and academic obligations. They frequently struggled because they had to combine their responsibilities to their families and

their academic pursuits. They admitted that they needed to do multi-tasking. They needed to take extra efforts just to meet the two and to the lessen the guilt of not doing her reproductive role.

To cope this challenge, participants explained that constant prayers help them a lot and prayers were necessary in handling the difficulties. One of the participants said that she used daily prayer to overcome her challenges.

In addition, all participant mentioned that they needed to have a strict time management in order to handle their multiple roles and make sensible financial decisions. Student-mommies clearly established that they were using time management to cope with the challenges. Kent (2018) opined that life experiences can provide individuals with useful time-management and multi-tasking skills to effect of working busy schedules of student-mothers. Keven and Webb (2004) and Kouri et al., (2016) also supported that multi-tasking has always been in the narratives of student-mothers; thus, multi-tasking is already a mark of these individuals.

Positivity from their environment and mind setting also help them to lighten and cope the situation. One participant claimed that she could always find solutions to any situation by thinking positively. According to Sameer (2018), positivity of mind leads to innovative behavior and positive thinking helps with stress management.

3.1.2. Financial

Most participants expressed common stressors, which are associated with financial burdens of raising children with a limited income. Student mommies have financial struggles because their father is not financially supportive, they need to allot budget for babysitter. Student mommies also allotted budget for school

materials. Budget for home rentals and increasing transportation expenses also added to their financial challenge.

“Bilang student mommy, lahat naman siguro sasabihin na challenge talaga sa amin ang finances. Hindi molang kasi babudgetin ang pera sa pagaaral lang, pero malaking bahagi ng income mo ay magagamit sa pangaraw-araw na gastusin ng pamilya mo. Kasama na dito ang syempre yung pangaraw-araw na pamasaha sa eskwelahan.”

“As a student mommy, everyone will probably say that finances are really a challenge for us. The money will not be budgeted just for education, but a large part of your income can be used for the daily expenses of your family. This includes, of course, the daily school transportation fare.”

The study of Trepal, Stinchfield, & Haivasoso (2013) supported that financial struggle is one of the major barriers for student mommies aiming to finish their educational goal. Their study revealed that many educational opportunities for single mothers become limited because of the lack of a childcare resource. According to Mortos et al. (2020) the current situation of the student-mothers in Southern Philippines Digos Campus showed that student mommies were financially burdened and most of them ran out of budget because they needed to provide for their schooling and for their child.

Coping the financial challenge is not easy however support systems composed of family, friends, schools, and community able to help student mommies to surpass this burden. Nearly all of the participants noted how much their support networks affect how successful they are in school.

“Malaking bagay po na nalalapitan ko ang aking mga kaibigan at pamilya sa aspetong pinasyal. At dahil

nakatira po ako sa parent's ko, natutulungan naman nila ako. Saka malaking bagay din po ang allowance na nakukuha ko from scholarship."

"It's a big help that I can get closer to my friends and family in terms of financial aspect. And because I live with my parents, they can help me. Then the allowance that is obtained from my scholarship is also a big help."

This finding supports the study of Son & Bauer (2010) that having a strong support system is one of the most important factors to a single mother. According to Maness and Munoz (2019) the participants who lived with their parents found it helpful both for emotional and financial support. They explained how they are grateful for their children's grandparents being involved as a supportive factor in their children's lives.

In addition, one of the participants also shared that she had to sell something to earn and cope with this challenge.

"Nagtitinda ako kahit pakonti konti. Pero malaking bagay na may iba pang source ng income kahit maliit lang ang kinikita ko. Mainam na hindi lang ako sa kanila dapat umasa ng pagkakakitaan."

"I sell at least a little bit. But it's a big thing to have another source of income even if I only earn a little. It's good that I'm not solely relying on my parents' financial support."

3.1.3. Academics

The student mommies' participants also agreed that they have also academic challenge. Major academic challenges faced include challenges during examination, learning, and lectures. They had difficulty managing most of their times because they needed to balance their family obligations such that they cannot attend classes when their children are sick. They also have difficulty in

catching and reviewing missed lectures thus affecting their performance in examination and quizzes. Many participants admitted that they had trouble finding the time to complete their homework. One of the participants said;

"Hindi po talaga ako nakakapasok kapag nagkakasakit ang aking anak. Kaya may mga times na nahihirapan talaga ako aralin yung mga lessons. Kailangan ko din munang tapusin ang obligasyon ko bilang ina bago ko maharap ang mga school related works ko. Talagang sakripisyo"

"I can't really go to school when my child is sick. So, there are times when I really struggle to learn the lessons. I also have to finish my obligations as a mother before I can deal with my school related works. Truly a sacrifice."

This result supported Taukeni (2014) who stated that the primary difficulties of student mothers were the lack of time to handle their studies and parental roles at the same time. In the research entitled "Challenges and Coping Strategies of Student Nursing Mothers in University of Ibadan Nigeria", topmost on the challenges during examinations was respondents' inability to prepare adequately for examination, combining childcare and learning at night, and getting late to lecture rooms (Anibijuwon & Esimai, 2020)

Although student mommies are at risks of stress and burnout due to academic challenge, strong motivation drives them to cope this challenge. In fact, two of the participants claimed that their desire to complete their education was sparked by having a husband and a child. This supported the findings of Mortos et al. (2020) where responses of the student-mothers evidently insinuated that having a child while schooling serves as their motivation for school. One of the participants said:

"Pinipilit ko paring makapag-aral ng mabuti kasi inspirasyon ko ang aking baby, ang aking asawa at ang aking pamilya."

"I'm still trying to study well because my baby, my husband and my family are my inspirations."

Another participant added that seeing her kid smile helped her feel better and removed all her exhaustion.

"Nawawala ang pagod ko kapag nakikita ko ang mga anak ako. Lalo na kapag nakangiti ang baby ko."

"My tiredness disappears when I see my children. Especially when my baby is smiling."

Intrinsic motivations drive the student mommies to continue with their professional growth because of they wanted to show to their families they can do it despite the challenges. According to Lie (2010) individuals have different motivation in pursuing something. This can be intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Wilsey (2013) mentioned that student mothers' intrinsic motivation results in their self-fulfillment and goal achievement.

3.2. Proposed Project

Table 1 shows the "Project ES-TM (Empowered Student-Teacher Mommies)" a proposed project for Student-Teacher Mommies addressing their holistic development focusing on the challenges they may encounter and strengthening their coping mechanisms. Presented are the programs and activities, its brief description, person/s involve, timeline, and expected outcome.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the study, it can be concluded that:

1. There are three (3) emergent themes observed in this study in relation to the challenges and coping mechanisms of the S-TM namely: childcare, financial, and academics. Challenges encountered are the following: multiple tasks at hand, having a hard time looking for someone who can take care of her children, financial struggles, and unable to go to school where their children have sickness, while these are the coping mechanisms mentioned by the S-TM: strict time management, positive mind setting, and finding strong support system.
2. Based on the result of the student, a proposed project entitled Project ES-TM (Empowered Student-Teacher Mommies) was developed consisting of four (4) programs/activities namely: Inclusion of S-TM children in the Day Care Center of the University, Mentally-Ready Student Mommy Program, and Healthy Baby – Happy Mommy Program, and Earning while Learning Program.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the result of the study, the researchers offer the following recommendations:

1. To deepen the result of the study, interviewing family members, teachers, classmates, friends, and other persons that the participants interact with is advised. This can be used to better understand the lived experiences of S-TM on how they manage their multiple roles.
2. The implementation and evaluation of the proposed project is also recommended to better serve and help the S-TM.

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7. CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors have declared that there is no conflict of interest.

8. SOURCE/S OF FUNDING

NA

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