

CHALLENGES AND ADAPTATION STRATEGIES OF STUDENT-MOTHERS IN MARIANO MARCOS STATE UNIVERSITY-COLLEGE OF TEACHER EDUCATION (MMSU-CTE): IMPLICATIONS FOR FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS AND HOME MANAGEMENT

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Abstract

This study investigated the challenges and adaptation strategies of student-mothers, particularly enrolled at Mariano Marcos State University - College of Teacher Education (MMSU-CTE). The participants were 15 student-mothers selected through purposive sampling to ensure experience-based insights into their dual roles. Employing a mixed-methods design, data were collected using a researcher-made 4-point Likert-scale questionnaire administered to assess challenges and adaptation strategies, supplemented by semi-structured interviews on needed supports. Analysis of the data included descriptive statistics (means and verbal interpretations), Pearson's r correlations, and thematic analysis with themes ranked by frequency of occurrence.

Key findings indicated pronounced challenges, predominantly encompassing elevated stress and anxiety, physical exhaustion, time management constraints, and financial pressures. Adaptation strategies were routinely implemented, with a focus on flexible study scheduling and prudent financial budgeting. Home management was generally efficacious, with paramount attention to children's welfare. No significant associations were observed between challenge intensity and adaptation strategies, or between strategies and home management efficacy. This underscores that even highly adaptive student-mothers continue to experience considerable role-related strain.

Thematic analysis revealed key priorities, ranked by frequency: ongoing support from family members, more flexible university policies (such as adjustable class schedules or extended deadlines), and government programs for affordable childcare and financial aid. These findings shed light on broader systemic obstacles that student-mothers face daily. The present study likewise calls for targeted solutions, including institutional changes to support persistence in studies, stronger family bonds through reduced parental stress,

and smoother household routines to enable student-mothers thrive academically while maintaining stable homes and close-knit relationships.

INTRODUCTION

Education has long been recognized as a powerful driver of personal, social, and economic transformation, enabling individuals to improve their quality of life, support their families, and participate more fully in community and national development. Within this landscape, higher education institutions play a critical role in expanding opportunities, particularly for women who increasingly seek professional qualifications to gain economic independence and long-term security for their families (Fatima et al., 2025). As Anane et al. (2021) also noted, many women seek higher education not only to fulfill personal aspirations but also to acquire the qualifications needed to support their families and secure a future. In the Philippines and globally, more women are enrolling in teacher education programs, reflecting broader commitments to the Sustainable Development Goals, especially those related to quality education and gender equality. As more women enter universities, however, it has become evident that not all students experience college life under the same conditions; some pursue their degrees while simultaneously carrying the responsibilities of motherhood and household management (LaBrenz et al., 2023).

Despite growing acknowledgment of the difficulties encountered by student-mothers, there remains a notable gap in research on how managing dual roles specifically shapes their family relationships and home management within higher education, especially in undergraduate teacher education programs where coursework, field experiences, and practice teaching are particularly demanding. In teacher education institutions, where future educators are prepared, female students who are also mothers face distinct pressures, such as lesson planning, practicum requirements, and rigid schedules that seldom accommodate caregiving responsibilities. These demands not only affect their academic performance but also shape their family relationships and home management practices. Existing studies have identified various difficulties and coping strategies related to managing these dual roles. However, there remains a need for a more comprehensive exploration of the lived experiences and adaptation strategies of student-mothers, particularly in terms of how they navigate the tensions between their roles as students and mothers and how these dynamics influence their family relationships and home management.

The relevance and necessity of this study stem from the need to raise awareness in the higher education sector regarding the gender-specific challenges encountered by student-mothers. As these women work to fulfill their dual responsibilities at home and in school, institutions must also strengthen their awareness and provide targeted forms of assistance and support that will enable their academic persistence and success (Espiritu et al., 2023; Bustillo et al., 2024). By addressing the existing gap in understanding their challenges and adaptation strategies, the research hopes to contribute to the development of informed policies and support mechanisms that can enhance the inclusivity and success of student-mothers in higher education. Likewise, this study holds significance for their families, academic institutions, policymakers, and practitioners seeking to create a more supportive and equitable environment for student-mothers.

This study aimed to investigate the challenges faced by student-mothers and how they manage their dual roles. Specifically, it sought answers to the following questions: a) What are the major challenges faced by student-mothers in balancing schooling and family life? b) What are the adaptation strategies that the student-mothers use to manage academic and family demands? c) How do student-mothers' challenges influence their adaptation strategies? d) How do student-mothers' adaptation strategies affect their home management practices? e) What interventions or support mechanisms can be provided to help student-mothers achieve balance in school and family life?

METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a mixed-method research design to determine the challenges and adaptation strategies of student-mothers. The design was appropriate for this study as it involves both measurable patterns and rich personal experiences. In this study, mixed methods combined quantitative data with qualitative data.

Mixed methods are especially useful when a single approach cannot fully capture the complexity of research questions that cannot be fully answered by using a single research design (Sharma et al. 2023), leading to the utilization of a mixed-method design in this study. Moreover, a mixed-method design is needed to explore how the different variables are related, since relying on only one type of research approach cannot adequately capture or explain the relationships among them, as emphasized by Sharma et al. (2023).

Respondents and Locale of the Study

The target population for this study consisted of 30 student-mothers enrolled in MMSU-CTE during the first semester of the academic year 2025-2026. However, only 15 valid responses were included in the analysis. The respondents were identified and selected through purposive sampling. This sampling technique enabled the researcher to select participants who met the inclusion criteria of (1) officially enrolled as undergraduate students of MMSU-CTE for the academic year 2025-2026, (2) student-mother, and (3) willing to participate. Purposive sampling was utilized because it focuses on including participants who can provide rich, direct, and relevant information about the phenomenon under study.

The study was conducted at Mariano Marcos State University - College of Teacher Education (MMSU-CTE), located along Castro Avenue, Barangay 5, San Pedro, Laoag City, Ilocos Norte. As one of the university's flagship colleges, MMSU-CTE is committed to developing competent, innovative, and service-oriented educators who embody excellence and public service. It offers teacher and technology-oriented programs across five departments—Secondary Education (SEd), Early Childhood and Special Needs Education (ECSNEd), Elementary Education (EEd), Technology and Livelihood Education (TVLEd), and Human Movement and Arts Education (HMAEd), equipping future educators with skills for evolving demands of the educational landscape. With over 108 years as a leading teacher education institution in Northern Luzon, it has 3,298 bona fide enrollees in the first semester of the current 2025-2026 academic year.

However, for this study, several limitations should be considered. One of which is the relatively small sample size ($n = 15$), along with the use of purposive sampling, may restrict the generalizability of the findings. As such, the results should be interpreted with caution and may not fully reflect the experiences of all student-mothers across different contexts.

Research Instrument

To obtain the necessary data for the study, a researcher-made survey questionnaire using a 4-point Likert Scale was employed. The survey first underwent rigorous content validation by experienced educators and research professionals to ensure integrity, validity, appropriateness, clarity, relevance, and alignment with the study's objectives. The experts' comments and suggestions were incorporated to enhance accuracy and reliability. The finalized questionnaire was offered in two formats: online via Google Forms and printed copies. Additionally, the use of a standardized 4-point Likert Scale with consistent response anchors ensured uniformity in how the respondents interpret and answer items, further contributing to measurement stability. Standardized administration procedures, including identical instructions, fixed item order, and controlled testing conditions, were implemented to minimize situational variability that could affect responses.

While formal reliability statistics were not computed, this decision was appropriate given the study's small sample size ($n = 15$). Computing reliability coefficients with only 15 participants would yield unreliable and misleading results (Bujang et al., 2018). Thus, the instrument's reliability was supported through expert content validation, clear item construction, scale standardization, and controlled administration. However, future research with larger samples should calculate Cronbach's alpha to quantitatively confirm the instrument's reliability.

The questionnaire comprises four parts. Part I assessed challenges encountered by student-mothers using a 4-point scale where 4 = Strongly Agree, 3 = Agree, 2 = Disagree, and 1 = Strongly Disagree. Part II measured adaptation strategies, and Part III evaluated home management practices using a scale where 4 = Always, 3 = Often, 2 = Rarely, and 1 = Never. Part IV consisted of a semi-structured interview guide on support mechanisms, focusing on family, institutional support, and interventions to balance school and home responsibilities. Descriptive interpretations followed these mean ranges: 3.40-4.00 (Strongly Agree/Always), 2.60-3.39 (Agree/Often), 1.80-2.59 (Disagree/Rarely), and 1.00-1.79 (Strongly Disagree/Never).

Data Gathering Procedure and Analysis

In conducting this study, the researchers followed the procedure outlined below:

Preliminaries. The researchers first sought validation of the questionnaire from experienced educators and research professionals to ensure the questions were appropriate, clear, relevant, and aligned with the study's objectives. The comments and suggestions were carefully incorporated to enhance the instrument's accuracy and reliability. After revisions, the finalized questionnaire was made available in two formats: an online version via Google Forms and printed copies, to accommodate respondents' preferences and accessibility.

Before Data Collection. A formal request letter was submitted to MMSU-CTE authorities to obtain approval for conducting the study among student-mothers. The letter outlined the research objectives, participants' involvement, data collection procedures, and assurances of strict confidentiality, with data used solely for academic purposes and reported in aggregate form to protect identities and privacy.

During Data Collection. Upon approval, the researchers introduced the study to participants, explaining its purpose, scope, and voluntary nature. Informed consent was obtained from each before administering the questionnaire. Participants received clear instructions and ample time to complete it via online form or printed copy, based on their

preference. The researchers monitored the process to address concerns, emphasizing confidentiality for academic use only.

After Data Collection. Responses were organized, coded, and tabulated for analysis. Quantitative data from questionnaires were entered into Microsoft Excel, checked for completeness and consistency, and summarized for computing means and the overall mean. Qualitative responses from semi-structured interviews were transcribed, grouped by emerging themes, coded, and categorized for thematic analysis. Confidentiality was maintained by removing identifiers, using participant codes, and securely storing files. Access to the raw data was limited only to the researchers and statistician of this study, and ensuring that participants' privacy and the integrity of the information were protected at all times.

Ethical Considerations

The researchers ensured that all ethical standards were rigorously followed throughout the study to safeguard participants' rights and well-being. Before data collection, a letter was submitted to MMSU-CTE authorities requesting approval to conduct the study. To obtain enrollment data, another letter was submitted along with the approved conduct letter to the college registrar. Questionnaires were administered without disrupting participants' classes or schedules. Data were gathered using Google Forms and printed copies, accompanied by the approved conduct letter, a respondent letter, and informed consent forms that outlined the study's objectives, procedures, and purpose. Participants were informed that involvement was entirely voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time without repercussions.

Participants' privacy was protected through coding instead of names, with all data stored securely. The researchers explained data usage and storage to foster comfort and encourage honest responses (Kang & Hwang et al., 2023). Likewise, it was also emphasized that responses would not be released and that no harm would occur, reinforcing voluntary participation and privacy for participants' safety (Brandimarte et al., 2012). Secrecy over information was maintained, as results primarily benefited academic purposes at that time, though respecting privacy enhanced the study's viability (Alase, 2017).

Overall, data collection adhered to key ethical principles of beneficence, justice, and respect for persons, which align with Brear and Gordon (2020) and Rasmussen et al. (2025). These principles protected and honored participants. The researchers minimized emotional discomfort during interviews with respectful, empathetic language, given the sensitive nature of student-mothers' experiences. Data security was upheld, findings were reported anonymously to preserve dignity, and transparency ensured information was used only for academic purposes. All participants received fair, equal treatment, valuing their contributions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Challenges Encountered by Student-Mothers

Table 1 presents the data gathered on the student-mothers' strength of feeling towards the statements they face in balancing their academic and family responsibilities. The findings revealed that student-mothers experience challenges in balancing academic and family responsibilities, with an overall weighted mean of 3.34 (Agree). This indicates that most student-mothers encounter difficulties in managing their dual roles as both students and mothers.

Table 1. Challenges Encountered by Student-Mothers

Statements	Mean	Descriptive Interpretation
1. I have difficulty managing my study time because of childcare and household duties	3.53	Strongly Agree
2. I often miss or come late to classes because of family responsibilities.	3.13	Agree
3. I find it hard to focus on lessons because I am preoccupied with family concerns	3.27	Agree
4. Completing school requirements on time is difficult due to my role as a mother	3.47	Strongly Agree
5. I struggle to provide for both school expenses and family needs at the same time	3.47	Strongly Agree
6. I often need to choose between spending on school and household necessities	3.00	Agree
7. I feel physically and emotionally exhausted from balancing school and family duties	3.60	Strongly Agree
8. I sometimes feel guilty for not giving enough time to my children because of school.	3.40	Strongly Agree
9. I experience stress and anxiety when school and family demands overlap	3.67	Strongly Agree
10. I occasionally feel like dropping out of school due to the pressure of motherhood.	2.93	Agree
Weighted Mean	3.34	Agree

Note: 1.00-1.79 (Strongly Disagree) 1.80-2.59 (Disagree) 2.60-3.39 (Agree) 3.40-4.00 (Strongly Agree)

Based on the findings, student-mothers reported a generally high level of challenges in balancing academic and family responsibilities. They strongly agreed that they experience stress and anxiety when school and family demands overlap, feel physically and emotionally exhausted, and struggle to complete school requirements on time due to their role as mothers, consistent with Baluyos and Alvarico (2025) and Nnadi and Nazım (2025), who documented intense emotional strain, guilt, and burnout among student-mothers. Student-mothers also strongly agreed that they face substantial financial challenges, such as difficulty providing for both school expenses and family needs and having to choose between spending on school or household necessities, echoing Montañó and Francisco (2024) and Salindo P. and Salindo (2024), who highlighted financial problems as a major cause of absenteeism and delayed graduation. Although fewer respondents agreed that they felt like dropping out, the mean score still indicates that withdrawal remains a real concern under mounting pressures. Overall, these findings show that time management difficulties, emotional strain, and financial instability significantly hinder student-mothers' academic engagement and contribute to frequent lateness, absences, and challenges in prioritizing schoolwork.

Adaptation Strategies of Student-Mothers

The following table exhibits the adaptation strategies of student-mothers in balancing their dual role as students and at the same time mothers.

Table 2 reveals that student-mothers display a generally high level of adaptation, as reflected in the overall weighted mean of 3.49, verbally interpreted as Always. This indicates

that respondents consistently practice multiple strategies to manage their dual roles as learners and mothers.

Table 2. Adaptation Strategies of Student-Mothers

Statements	Mean	Descriptive Interpretation
1. I plan a weekly schedule that integrates both my academic deadlines and family/home tasks.	3.53	Always
2. I communicate with members of my family about my academic workload so that they understand and help when possible.	3.60	Always
3. I negotiate or delegate some household tasks with family members to free up time for studying.	3.60	Often
4. I adjust my study times (e.g., study during children's naps, early mornings, nights) to accommodate caregiving.	3.80	Always
5. I take breaks / rest periods to prevent burnout, balancing academic work and family interaction.	3.47	Always
6. I use academic support resources (e.g., study groups, tutors, online materials) to work more efficiently.	2.87	Often
7. I seek emotional support from family or friends when academic pressure or family stress becomes overwhelming.	3.47	Often
8. I set realistic expectations of myself in both my academic and maternal/family roles, accepting that sometimes one might suffer.	3.40	Always
9. I proactively inform my instructors/professors about my responsibilities as a mother when they affect my academic obligations.	3.13	Often
10. I manage finances carefully (e.g., budgeting, saving) to reduce stress from family-academic conflicts.	3.80	Always
11. I schedule family/fun time deliberately to maintain good family relationships despite my academic demands.	3.53	Always
12. I revise or postpone non-essential commitments (social, extracurricular, volunteer work) during peak academic periods.	3.40	Always
13. I create or use home environment adjustments (quiet study space, minimizing interruptions) to improve academic focus.	3.53	Always
14. I reflect on what is working/ what is not, and change my routines or strategies accordingly.	3.67	Always
15. I involve family (e.g., children, partner) in planning or decision making when academic schedule changes (e.g., upcoming exams, assignments).	3.60	Always
Weighted Mean	3.49	Always

Note: 1.00-1.79 (Never) 1.80-2.59 (Rarely) 2.60-3.39 (Often) 3.40-4.00 (Always)

In the present study, student-mothers consistently adopted a range of adaptation strategies, with an overall weighted mean of 3.49 (Always), indicating that these coping practices are regularly used to manage academic and family demands. Central to their approach is flexible time management, including planning weekly schedules, adjusting study hours to children's routines, and revising non-essential commitments, which reflects what Kim et al. (2022) and Andrade et al. (2024) describe as temporal flexibility and structured time management that support parents' continued engagement in both roles. Financial planning also emerged as a key strategy, as student-mothers carefully budget and manage resources to reduce stress from family and academic conflicts, aligning with Montaña and Francisco (2024) and Fabillar et al. (2025), who found that budgeting and financial literacy help sustain schooling and lessen financial anxiety.

The findings further show that student-mothers frequently rely on self-reflection, emotional support, and open communication to sustain their well-being. They regularly reflect on which strategies work, adjust routines, and set realistic expectations for themselves in both academic and maternal roles, echoing Kasworm's (2023) view that self-reflective practice strengthens resilience and adaptability and Baluyos and Alvarico's (2024) conclusion that recognizing limits reduces guilt and increases satisfaction. They also communicate with family members about academic workloads, involve them in planning, and seek emotional support, while some inform instructors about their maternal responsibilities, which supports findings by Fatima et al. (2025), Baluyos and Alvarico (2024), and *Frontiers in Education* (2025) that open disclosure of struggles fosters greater understanding and flexibility from both families and academic institutions, even though caregiving demands may still hinder access to formal support programs.

Student-Mothers' Challenges and Their Influence on Their Adaptation Strategies

Table 3. Relationship between Student-Mothers' Challenges and their Adaptation Strategies

Variable	Student-Mothers' Challenges	
	r-value	p-value
Adaptation Strategies	-0.32	0.25

Table 3 shows a weak to moderate negative correlation ($r = -0.32$) between challenges and adaptation strategies. This indicates a slight inverse relationship, where higher levels of challenges are associated with a small decrease in the use of strategies. However, the p-value (0.25) is well above 0.05, indicating no statistically significant relationship. As such, there is not enough evidence to conclude that the level of challenges influences how student-mothers use adaptation strategies, and the observed pattern may be due to chance.

These results suggest that coping is not simply a direct response to the level of difficulty. Student-mothers adjust their strategies depending on the situation, rather than increasing effort as challenges intensify. Studies by Azuka and Hildayani (2023) show that they shift between problem-focused and emotion-focused approaches. Similarly, Dankyi et al. (2019) found that many adapt by reorganizing roles and expectations, while Andres (2021) highlights the role of resilience, support systems, and role negotiation—factors not easily captured in simple correlations. Support from family and institutions can also buffer stress, weakening any direct link between challenges and coping (Wambu, 2021). Therefore, the relationship between challenges and adaptation strategies is complex, shaped by context, support, and individual resilience rather than a clear linear pattern.

Home Management Practices of Student-Mothers

Table 4. Home Management Practices of Student-Mothers

Statements	Mean	Descriptive Interpretation
1. I am able to maintain a regular schedule for household chores despite my academic responsibilities.	3.14	Agree
2. I plan household activities in advance to balance my time for school and home duties.	3.07	Agree
3. I can complete essential home tasks efficiently even when school demands increase.	2.86	Agree
4. I budget household expenses carefully to meet both family and school needs.	3.29	Agree
5. I find practical ways to save or allocate resources to sustain my household.	3.21	Agree
6. I make financial decisions that prioritize the needs of my children and studies.	3.57	Strongly Agree
7. I ensure that my children's basic needs are met despite my school schedule.	3.64	Strongly Agree
8. I spend quality time with my family even during busy academic periods.	3.07	Agree
9. I communicate with family members to maintain harmony and cooperation at home.	3.21	Agree
10. I can keep my household organized and functional while fulfilling my role as a student.	3.33	Agree
Weighted Mean	3.24	Agree

Note: 1.00-1.79 (Never) 1.80-2.59 (Rarely) 2.60-3.39 (Often) 3.40-4.00 (Always)

Table 4 shows that student-mothers highly practice home management skills, as evidenced by an overall weighted mean of 3.24, interpreted as Often. This suggests that the participants are typically capable of handling their household duties while also meeting their academic requirements. With a mean score of 3.64, which is considered Always, the most highly ranked practice with the statement "I ensure that my children's basic needs are met despite my school schedule".

Similarly, student-mothers demonstrated effective home management practices (overall M = 3.57, Always), particularly prioritizing financial decisions for children and studies (M = 3.57, Always), maintaining organized households while studying (M = 3.33, Agree), budgeting expenses carefully (M = 3.29, Often), finding practical resource-saving methods (M = 3.21, Often), communicating for family harmony (M = 3.21, Often), maintaining regular chore schedules (M = 3.14, Often), planning household activities in advance (M = 3.07, Often), and spending quality family time during busy academic periods (M = 3.07, Often).

Student-Mothers' Adaptation Strategies and Their Effect on Their Home Management

Table 5 shows a moderate negative correlation ($r = -0.493$) between adaptation strategies and home management. This suggests that students who report using more coping strategies tend to have lower home management scores. However, the p-value (0.062) exceeds the 0.05 threshold, indicating that the relationship is not statistically significant, though it may suggest a trend.

Table 5: Student-Mothers' Challenges and Their Influence on Their Adaptation Strategies

Variable	Home Management Practices	
	r-value	p-value
Adaptation Strategies	-0.49	0.06

The negative pattern implies that greater use of coping strategies may reflect ongoing strain rather than effective home management. Student-mothers who rely on multiple strategies are likely responding to competing demands from school, childcare, and household responsibilities. This aligns with Kanana et al. (2021), Maluleke et al. (2023), Villones et al. (2023), and Espiritu et al. (2023), who describe the dual role as marked by persistent time and role conflict. While support systems and personal coping mechanisms help manage these pressures, they do not eliminate the strain. Thus, higher strategy use appears to signal role overload rather than improved outcomes. This suggests that support should go beyond coping strategies and address underlying pressures through institutional support, flexible academic policies, and family assistance.

Support Mechanism for Student-Mothers

Table 6: Thematic Analysis on Support Mechanism for Student-Mothers

	Theme	Codes	f	%	R
Family Support	Practical and Affective Support	Assistance In Caregiving for Children	9	60%	1
		Contributing Financially to Meet Their and Children's Needs	4	26.67%	2
		Understanding, Encouragement, and Upliftment.	2	13.33%	3
University Support	Supportive and Inclusive Learning Environment	Flexible Arrangements	7	46.66%	1
		Compassionate Pedagogies	5	33.33%	2
		Accessible Facilities	3	20%	3
Government or Community Programs Support	Integrated Student Development and Support Services	Financial and Educational Support	8	53.33%	1
		Childcare Accessibility and Support System	4	26.66%	2
		Psycho-social Development and Life Skills Enhancement	3	20%	3
Policies or Interventions	Integrated Support Framework for Student-Mothers' Stability and Well-Being	Flexibility and Inclusion Policies	5	33.33%	1
		Childcare Access and Support	5	33.33%	1
		Financial and Mental Health Support	5	33.33%	1

Table 6 highlights the support that can be provided to student-teachers. The support mechanism is categorized into four main themes. Each theme is broken down into codes ranked by frequency and percentage to provide a clear understanding of the barriers faced. Each theme and its codes are likewise described below, and participant quotations are given.

Family Support

For family support, a theme emerged: "Practical and Affective Support". 60% received assistance in caregiving for children, and in household responsibilities, 26.67% percent received support in contributing financially to meet their needs, and 13.33% received constant child/children needs, understanding, encouragement, and upliftment.

Family support emerges as a foundational mechanism that enables student-mothers to sustain their studies while fulfilling caregiving roles. Practical help in childcare, financial contributions, and assistance with household chores reduce daily burdens and allow them to focus more fully on academic tasks (Xuereb, 2014; Ogunji et al., 2020; Hitchings, 2024). Emotional support in the form of understanding, encouragement, and affirmation further strengthens their capacity to cope with stress, echoing recent Filipino studies that highlight the indispensable role of both practical and affective family support in navigating the complexities of motherhood and student life (Ogunji et al., 2020; Sicam et al., 2021; Espiritu et al., 2023).

University Support

The theme "Supportive and Inclusive Learning Environment" emerged. This reflects the shared experiences of student-mothers who emphasized the need for a learning environment that recognized their ever-demanding dual roles as students and mothers. University support, manifested through flexible arrangements (46.66%), compassionate pedagogies (33.33%), and accessible facilities (20%).

University support is equally critical, particularly through flexible modalities and compassionate academic environments. Flexible or blended learning options help student-mothers manage time, reduce travel costs, and remain engaged in school while meeting family responsibilities (Adu-Yeboah, 2015; Anane et al., 2021; Bourdeau et al., 2022; Hitchings, 2024). Studies also stress the importance of empathetic, inclusive pedagogies and campus cultures where student-mothers feel valued and that they belong, showing that such support improves persistence, retention, and overall success (Dickson & Tennant, 2018; Roy et al., 2018; Lindsay & Gillum, 2018; Ogunji et al., 2020; Hitchings, 2024).

Government or Community Program

The theme "Integrated Student Development and Support Services" emerged. Over half of the participants (53.33%) emphasized the need for financial and educational support, such as scholarships, allowances, or subsidies tailored to student-mothers' circumstances. Childcare accessibility and support systems were also highlighted by 26.66%, indicating demand for affordable, reliable daycare or community-based childcare services that align with academic schedules. In addition, 20% underscored the importance of psycho-social development and life skills enhancement programs, including counseling, parenting workshops, and stress management initiatives to strengthen their overall well-being.

Beyond home and campus, government and community programs provide structural support that can ease financial and caregiving burdens. Direct financial aid and educational subsidies reduce anxiety over tuition and daily expenses and are linked to better focus and

continuity in schooling (Espiritu et al., 2023; Sicam et al., 2021). Accessible childcare services are especially pivotal, as they allow student-mothers to attend classes and study with peace of mind, while social and emotional support programs help rebuild confidence, manage stress, and strengthen resilience (Sicam et al., 2021).

Policies or Interventions

The overarching theme was an "Integrated Support Framework for Student-Mothers' Stability and Well-Being." Equal proportions of respondents (33.33% each) pointed to three key policy directions: flexibility and inclusion policies (e.g., lenient attendance, extended deadlines), improved childcare access and support within or linked to the institution, and enhanced financial and mental health support services, all aimed at sustaining student-mothers' academic engagement and personal stability.

Finally, proposed policies and interventions underscore that flexibility functions as an issue of equity rather than mere convenience. When institutional policies integrate flexible scheduling, childcare assistance, and accessible financial and mental health services, student-mothers are more likely to sustain participation and succeed academically (Sicam et al., 2021). Collectively, the literature indicates that effective support mechanisms must be multi-layered, combining family, university, government, and policy-level initiatives that explicitly recognize the dual roles of student-mothers and provide fair, practical, and emotionally responsive assistance.

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE WORKS

The study concludes that being both a mother and a student is an especially demanding dual role that exposes women to overlapping emotional, physical, financial, and time-related pressures, yet many respond with notable resilience. Student-mothers use strategies such as careful budgeting, flexible scheduling, open communication with family, and self-reflection to cope with stress, preserve family relationships, and keep household routines as functional as possible, although heavy academic demands and limited support can still lead to accumulated tasks and heightened strain. Family assistance in childcare, household chores, finances, and emotional encouragement emerges as crucial, while university-level support through flexible schedules, understanding instructors, and family-friendly facilities is likewise essential in sustaining academic engagement.

Correlation results show only weak and statistically non-significant links among challenges, adaptation strategies, and home management, suggesting that greater difficulty does not automatically result in greater or more effective coping, and that heavier reliance on strategies may sometimes reflect persistent strain rather than strong home management. These patterns may be influenced by sample size and the complex, non-linear nature of student-mothers' experiences. The study further underscores that targeted government and community programs—such as scholarships, accessible childcare, and life-skills training—can meaningfully improve conditions for student-mothers. Overall, their success depends not only on personal determination and coping strategies but also on robust, coordinated support from families, educational institutions, and the wider community.

However, this study comes with its share of limitations. The small sample size and the use of purposive sampling limit the extent to which the findings can be applied. It was also conducted within a single institution, so the results may not fully represent the experiences of student-mothers in other educational settings. Future research could build on this work by drawing on larger and more diverse samples to strengthen external validity.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The researchers declare no conflict of interest.

DECLARATION OF AI USE

In the preparation of this research, artificial intelligence tools such as ChatGPT and Grammarly were employed to support language editing and improve clarity. The use of these tools was limited to writing assistance and did not influence the conceptualization, methodology, data analysis, or findings of the study. The authors assume full responsibility for the accuracy and validity of the work.

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