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## *Lived Experiences of Filipino Student-Mothers in Night Shift Undergraduate Classes*

### **ABSTRACT**

It is a daunting task to balance the life of motherhood and student hood. In addition to the responsibilities of being a mother and a student are the requirements of academic and personal life; especially, during the time of COVID-19 pandemic. According to studies, for generations, student-mothers in the Philippines, who decided to continue their academic endeavor despite their struggles in academic and parenthood duties. In this phenomenological study, the lived experiences of five (5) night class student-mothers to young children during the pandemic had undergone one-on-one and panel group online interviews. The respondents were chosen via purposive sampling. The student-mothers were from Pangasinan State University-Bayambang Campus. The instrument used was researchers-made semi-structured interview guide questionnaire and was validated by experts in the field of psychology and education. Results revealed that most of the participants encountered difficulties regarding their personal and academic lives like work and financial issues, attending online classes, distractions and concentrations during online classes, limited availability of digital resources, and proper time management. To cope with these challenges, the participants relied on the support provided by their classmates, friends, families, and religious beliefs. Also, the results imply that academic institutions may consider intervention programs for night class student-mothers who are attending online classes during this time of COVID-19 pandemic, and create webinar workshops that may empower them to better manage their dual roles of being a mother and a student.

### **KEYWORDS**

*night classes, student-mothers, online class, phenomenology*

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## INTRODUCTION

The outbreak of COVID-19 has affected many people's lives among all sections of society, which has led the world to an unprecedented public health crisis. In response to the situation, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared a public health emergency of international concern on January 30, 2020 (World Health Organization, 2020) and urged countries to arrange and do the mandatory measures to manage the spread of COVID-19 virus.

In the Philippines, since March 15, 2020, the country has implemented emergency health protocols and lockdown procedures, including closing non-essential establishments, schools, colleges, universities, and other educational institutions to regulate COVID-19 transmission and avoid contact with others (CNN Philippines, 2020). With the closure of the complete sector of education, the requirement for an urgent transition from traditional face-to-face learning to flexible online modality suddenly emerged which caused problems for both teachers and the students (*Kapasias et al. 2020*). According to a study by *Adnan and Anwar (2020)*, online learning has been observed as a possible alternative to traditional learning, which may be adopted during the time of pandemic.

This abrupt change has greatly influenced the students of all age groups worldwide, especially the less privileged (*Hasan and Bao 2020*). The students from the less privileged backgrounds have experienced larger negative impacts due to the Covid-19 outbreak (*Aucejo et al. 2020*), particularly people who have low family income, limited access to digital resources, weak internet connectivity, student parents, and those who were attending night classes.

In a study by *Williams, et al. (2006)*, the quantity of student-mothers entering universities has been increasing around the world since 1966. Early pregnancy and motherhood vary by education, wealth quintile, personal upbringing, and region. It is more common among young adult women aged 15 to 24 with less education than those with higher education (44 percent for girls with elementary education versus 21 percent for girls with college education) (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2014). Therefore, the existence of student-mothers raised concerns about playing the dual roles of being a mother and a student (*White, 2008*) especially in time of COVID-19 pandemic. Combining motherhood and studying without compromising the activities of either one is a great dilemma for student-mothers. When a woman must focus all her attention on her studies, her behavior may contrast with her traditional motherhood role (*Visick, 2009*). The guilt of not being present as a mother to their young children with the constant student demand of papers, exams, deadlines for submissions, and class expectations can leave night class student mothers exhausted and at risk for dropping out (*Johnson & Skinner, 2020*). There are different roles and responsibilities expected as a mother and at the same time as a student, what more, for the student-mothers who have young children enrolled in the night classes.

Given this current situation of the education sector brought by the COVID-19 pandemic and the gap between the much-needed support for night class student-mothers due to limited availability of online educational resources and readiness of both teachers and students here in the Philippines, the researchers aim to explore in-depth the lived experiences of night class student-mothers to young children at Pangasinan State University – Bayambang Campus. Specifically, this study wants to know and describe the challenges, roles, obligations, responsibilities, and coping mechanisms of night class students who are mothers to young children during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## METHODOLOGY

Due to the dearth in literature for this particular context, this qualitative study utilized a phenomenological approach, which aimed to investigate the lived experiences of night class students who are mothers to young children (birth to 8 years) - how it is to be a night class student and a mother at the same time during the pandemic. According to Rojas (2018), the three broad stages of child development are early childhood (birth to eight years), middle childhood (eight to twelve years), and adolescence (twelve to eighteen years). A qualitative research study according to *Mills and Birks (2014)*, aimed to examine phenomena that affect the lived reality of individuals or groups in a particular cultural or social context. Phenomenology is one of the qualitative research approaches that intends 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 be able to connect with the subjects and to see the world from their perspectives (*Corbin & Strauss, 2015*). The researchers found this method most applicable to the inquiry to provide an in-depth analysis of the lived experiences of night class student-mothers.

### Participants

The method used to identify the participants of the study was purposive sampling. The sample size was determined by data saturation, defined as the point when "no new themes are observed in the data" (*Faulkner & Trotter, 2017*). In this study, five (5) night class student-mothers were chosen to participate in the study. Participants met the criteria of the subjects: 1) A bonafide night class student of Pangasinan State University; 2) 18 years old and above; 3) A biological mother to young child/children ages 0 – 8 years old; 4) Single parent or married; 5) Had the custody of the child/Living with her child or children, and 6) willing to participate in the study. See table 1 below for the profile of the participants:

Table 1. Profile of the Participants

Participant	Age	Status	Year Level	Number of Young Children	Age of Young Children
1	21	Single Parent	4 <sup>th</sup> year	2	1-year-old 4-year-old
2	32	Married	4 <sup>th</sup> year	1	7-year-old
3	36	Single Parent	4 <sup>th</sup> year	2	2-year-old 8-year-old
4	34	Married	4 <sup>th</sup> year	1	7-year-old
5	36	Single Parent	4 <sup>th</sup> year	1	7-year-old



## Data Collection

In gathering the relevant data for the study, the researchers used one-on-one and panel group online interviews using a semi-structured interview guide through the Zoom application. This type of interview is the most familiar technique in collecting qualitative data (*Bloom & Cabtree, 2006*), which could help the researchers obtain all the necessary information needed and allow them to ask follow-up questions for verification. Three professionals who were experts in the field of Psychology and education validated the content of the interview guide. The researchers also provided the respondents a letter, which includes obtaining informed consent, ensured confidentiality, time commitments, and permission to record, and publish, delineating the ethical principles of research. As to data storing methods, the researchers asked permission from the respondents to record the entire duration of the interview to reach deeper the responses of the respondents and to be able to review the contents of the recordings. All participants explicitly agreed on the given terms. To establish data trustworthiness, the researchers have employed the following strategies (as stated by *Lincoln and Guba (1985), cited in Consuji P. (2021)*): Keeping of well-documented audit trail which consists of comprehensive notes taken during the conduct of the online interviews, audio-video recordings of all interviews, rigorous and verbatim transcription of interviews including non-verbal cues, researcher credentials, and all relevant auditable documentation. Moreover, various triangulation measures were also implemented with the participants to ensure internal validity and credibility by letting them confirm the data recordings and making sure that the interpretations made are accurate from their point of view.

## Data Analysis

Immediately after each session, the interviews were transcribed verbatim and read several times to get the sense of the whole, and the data were analyzed using the steps suggested by Hycner (1985). The following are the steps followed in the research: 1) bracketing and reduction; 2) listening to the interview multiple times to get the sense of the whole; 3) delineating units of general meaning; 4) delineating units of meaning relevant to objectives of the research; 5) identifying codes for categories; 6) grouping data; 7) removing redundancies; 8) clustering units; and 9) finalizing and transforming the themes into meaningful concepts.

## RESULTS

Based on the analysis of data gathered by the researchers, four dominant themes emerged, namely: (1) Pandemic Struggles of Night Class Student-Mothers; (2) Online Learning Experiences during COVID-19; (3) Motivations and Inspirations, and (4) Coping Mechanisms of Night Class Student-Mothers. The four themes- and subthemes- that emerged suggested those night class students who are mothers of young children struggle to be a student and a mother at the same time during the pandemic. Yet, given their current situation, they are inspired and motivated to pursue and continue their studies despite the struggles and challenges that they are facing as shown in Theme 3. Theme 4 illustrates how they cope up with these challenges and how they manage their dual roles as mothers and students at the same time. The major

themes and subthemes are presented in the following sections below. See Table 2 for a visual representation of the breakdown of themes and subthemes.

**Table 2. Themes and Subthemes**

	<b>Theme 1: Pandemic Struggles of Night Class Student- Mothers</b>	<b>Theme 2: Online Learning Experiences during COVID- 19</b>	<b>Theme 3: Motivations and Inspirations of Night Class Student- Mothers</b>	<b>Theme 4: Coping Mechanisms of Night Class Student- Mothers</b>
<b>Subtheme 1</b>	Work and Financial Problems	Limited Access to Digital resources	Professional Growth	Faith and Religious Beliefs
<b>Subtheme 2</b>	Concentrations and Distractions	Academic Performance and Lesson Understanding	Child's Brighter Future	
<b>Subtheme 3</b>		Dual Roles: Motherhood and Student hood		

#### Theme 1: Pandemic Struggles of Night Class Student-Mothers

Theme 1 can be best explained by looking into its two (2) subthemes, which are work and financial problems and concentrations and distractions of student-mothers. From the in-depth analysis of the reflections of the participants, it can be understood that being an night class student and a mother of young children at the same time during this time of pandemic is not an easy task. All of the interviewed participants have experienced difficulties and problems in terms of their work, education, and personal lives as a mother. These experiences are illustrated in the following statements:

Two of the participants mentioned that one of the main problems they encountered relates to their experiences attending online classes.

*Participant 1: "Pandemic caused too much hindrance for me especially in my education due to online learning."*

*Participant 2: "For me, it is more difficult now since while attending online class, we are also with our kids who are experiencing difficulties in their studies and education."*

In addition, another two participants mentioned their problems on how to balance their time for their family, work, and education.

Participant 3: *“I need to exert more time in explaining the lessons to my children compared before. It's like we are their real teachers at home which is sometimes very difficult to do.”*

Participant 5: *“Now that we are in a pandemic, I have problems balancing my time for my children, my job, and my education. My time to focus on the studies of my children and help them accomplish their activities is no longer available anymore.”*

### **Subtheme 1. Work and Financial Problems**

During the pandemic, many businesses have closed and many people have lost their jobs, which caused financial burdens to them. Among those directly affected are the night class student-mothers who do not have a regular full-time job and are single parents. Even some student-mothers who have partners who are employed are also having problems budgeting their finances for their family and education due to the limitations brought by the COVID-19 lockdowns, more so, during the early outbreak of the pandemic. Their experiences are illustrated in the following statements:

Four of the participants admitted that they experienced financial and work-related issues during the COVID-19 lockdown due to the imposed nationwide restrictions.

Participant 1: *“Financially, since my partner who was in Isabella lost his job and could not return to Pangasinan and my only source of income is my online selling which is why I'm struggling a bit.”*

Participant 2: *“Since my husband is an OFW, and during the COVID outbreak, he was here in the Philippines, we experienced financial problems”*

Participant 3: *“I spend an average of 150 pesos a day for my data consumption for my online class which is a burden for me especially now during the pandemic.”*

Participant 5: *“Now that we are in a pandemic, I cannot go out normally and look for a regular job to feed my children.”*

### **Subtheme 2. Concentrations and Distractions of Student-Mothers**

Majority of the night class students who are mothers of young children who were interviewed experienced problems concentrating and focusing on their tasks as mothers and students at the same time. Due to the lockdown measures implemented by the Philippine government to avoid the spread of the virus, students in all levels including those who are enrolled in the night classes were forced to have their classes through distance learning – either online or modular. Based on the shared experiences of our participants, it could be realized that there is a big difference in terms of their concentration and focus of attending online classes and conventional face-to-face classes before the pandemic. Their experiences are illustrated in the following statements:

Two of the participants shared that for them to lessen the distractions during online classes; they just stay outside of their homes.

Participant 1: *“I usually turn off my video during online classes since my child enters the room during classes which disturbs me sometimes”*

Participant 3: *"I join my classes from home, but I stay outside of the house since my children see and disturb me during classes to focus better."*

Another participant admitted that she was so stressed out during the initial outbreak that made her lose focus on her education.

Participant 2: *"During the start of our online class, I was so stressed out because of COVID-19 and could not motivate myself to do any class activity or attend my classes."*

## **Theme 2. Online Learning Experiences**

As mentioned in subtheme 2, concentrations and distractions of student-mothers, under Theme 1, it was mentioned that students of Pangasinan State University – Bayambang Campus attend classes online during the pandemic.

Participant 4: *"There are sharing and brainstorming of ideas with my classmates during face-to-face classes which made my learning experience more productive and fruitful."*

Participant 3: *"I prefer studying and attending classes with my classmates and friends during face-to-face classes since I get to interact better with them including our professors unlike now during an online class."*

### **Subtheme 1. Access to Digital Resources**

Considering the fact that Pangasinan State University – Bayambang Campus is a public educational institution, wherein the majority of the enrolled students belong to the poverty threshold and the idea that online learning requires certain digital resources in order to be effective. It can be realized from the reflections of night class student-mothers that the majority of them complained about their negative experiences of joining and participating in their online classes. Their experiences are illustrated in the following statements:

One participant mentioned that the only available device she has for an online class is her mobile phone, which makes it very difficult to accomplish and submit her reports and outputs.

Participant 1: *"I have experienced technical difficulties in joining and doing my activities during online class since the only available device that I have is my mobile phone."*

Moreover, two of the participants shared that they have very poor internet connectivity at home since they live in rural areas.

Participant 3: *"I do not have Wi-Fi at home. I only use my mobile data in attending to my online classes."*

Participant 4: *"Since I live in a barrio, during online class, I actually experience very poor internet connection. In fact, I still need to walk around 300 m from our house just to find a good reception."*

### **Subtheme 2. Academic Performance and Lesson Understanding**

The daily experiences of night class student-mothers include the constant struggle of attending and understanding their lessons during online classes. In connection to the challenges that they encountered due to the limited availability of their digital resources and a weak internet connection, their academic



performance and understanding of the lessons have been one of their major concerns as well. It was stated from their reflections that they faced difficulties understanding the lesson due to concerns involving exposure to electronic devices, much more limited interaction, and common misunderstanding during class discussion. Their experiences are illustrated in the following statements:

Two of the participants said that there is a significant decrease in the interaction with their professors and classmates during online classes, which made it hard for them to better understand the lessons.

Participant 1: *"I encounter difficulties in understanding technical subjects like research since there are limited interactions with my professor and classmates compared to face-to-face classes."*

Participant 5: *"There was very little to no interaction between me and my classmates which I consider important in helping me better understand the lesson."*

In addition, three participants mentioned that they experienced health-related issues whenever they attend classes using mobile devices, which affected the overall learning.

Participant 4: *"In my case, I cannot use a gadget for a long period since I feel dizzy due to long exposure. This has affected the way I attend my classes and understand the lessons being discussed."*

Participant 2: *"Long exposure to cellphone during online class makes my eyes teary which is an issue whenever I attend online classes for a long period of time."*

Participant 3: *"I usually have migraines whenever I join online classes for a long period of time."*

### **Subtheme 3. Dual Roles: Motherhood and Student hood**

Having dual roles is a tough job according to night class student-mothers especially now during the pandemic. However, in spite of the hardships that they experienced in terms of meeting their deadlines, managing their time for their work and studies, and multitasking, student-mothers make it sure that they can still manage to do each role without compromising the other. The majority of them actually shared common advantages in terms of providing time for their family and children. They have learned to manage their time wisely. They instill discipline in their selves. They make sure that they have time for their child and give them all their needs. Thus, taking time to study and comply with all school requirements. Both family and studies are their priorities. Though sometimes it means prioritizing one from another, they find ways to meet both ends. It was understood based on their reflections that attending classes from home gave them better peace of mind and opportunity to a better opportunity to raise their children as shown in the following statements:

Participant 1: *"I managed to continue breastfeeding my child especially the one-year-old because I believed in the importance of breastfeeding for them to become healthier."*

Participant 2: *"I get to have more time with my family since I stay at home in attending my classes and I became more flexible in my responsibilities and studies."*



Participant 4: *"Before the pandemic, I had a problem controlling the behavior of my daughter who had a negative peer influence. But during the pandemic, since she doesn't need to go out anymore, we got the chance to have the heart-to-heart talk and better understand her problems."*

Participant 4: *"Before the pandemic, I usually leave my children at home without any guardian since my husband and I are working and studying at night until 10 pm. At least now, during the pandemic, I get to stay at home while attending classes which increased my peace of mind."*

### **Theme 3. Motivations and Inspirations of Night Class Student-Mothers**

Despite the struggle of being a mother and an night class student at the same time during the pandemic, they still see the importance of education and insist to pursue and finish their studies. They are motivated to pursue their education for a brighter future for their child and for their personal growth as well, as reflected in its two subthemes.

#### **Subtheme 1. Professional Growth**

Even if they are already mothers, they still have the desire to finish their studies and achieve their dreams. They believe that it is not yet too late for them to succeed and dream bigger for themselves and their families. They wanted to prove especially to those people who doubted them that having a child is not a hindrance in the attainment of their dreams and earning their diploma. Their reflections are illustrated in the following statement:

One of the participants shared that because of the support that she got from her friends, she is now deeply motivated to pursue and finish her studies.

Participant 2: *"I started as a full-time stage mother for a very long time without any specific goals in life. At first, I just wanted to graduate for the sake of having a diploma, but after I met my friends and learned from their experiences, I was motivated to grow more professionally."*

Also, two participants mentioned that they are doing their best to finish their education for their families.

Participant 3: *"I always encourage myself even though I already have five children and a full-time job. I wanted to finish my education for my family and myself. I want to be an inspiration for others that despite my situation, I could prove to them that I could finish my studies and become successful someday."*

Additionally, one participant said that earning that diploma would increase her chance of finding a better job for her children.

Participant 4: *"I forced myself to go back to school because of the difficulty of finding a job without a diploma. I believe that finishing my education and earning this diploma would greatly help me in finding a better job in the future."*

#### **Subtheme 2. Child's Brighter Future**

Student-mothers view the importance of education in their current situation despite the ongoing pandemic. They believe that the best way to give a better future to their children is to finish their studies

and find better work. In this way, there is an assurance that they can get a good-paying job to support and sustain the needs of their child. They wanted to have their child a better education and a more comfortable life. They do not want their children to experience the hardships that they felt growing up and for them to serve as a good example and role model for them. These are reflected in the following statements mentioned by the participants:

Participant 2: *"I am already here, I will stick to my goal of finishing my education for my children and family."*

Participant 4: *"I was put down by many people me telling that I am old enough not to go back to school and study, but I did not listen to them and told myself that this my dream and I want to graduate to give my children a brighter future."*

#### Theme 4. Coping Mechanisms of Night Class Student-Mothers

Night class students who are mothers of young children stated that their current situation is hard. However, because of their coping mechanisms and support systems, which include their family, friends, classmates, and faith in God, they still manage their dual roles of being a student and a mother at the same time. They acknowledge the importance of having a sound mind and body and being able to share their problems with their friends and family.

One participant mentioned that her family and friends motivate her to keep on moving forward.

Participant 4: *"I think of my family as my motivation in doing all of these things including my friends with whom I could share my problems."*

In addition, another participant shared that her children helped her cope up with the various stresses and problems she encountered during the pandemic.

Participant 5: *"If I feel that I am stressed out, I just bond with children like I am their friend and sister, we just play around carefree, watch movies, and do other stuff."*

##### Subtheme 1. Faith and Religious Beliefs

Some night class student-mothers mentioned that when they start to feel pressure and stress, their main source of strength is their faith in God. They consider praying as their main coping mechanism that provides them the energy and positive outlook in facing their challenges in life. These reflections are illustrated in the following statements:

Two participants shared that they regularly pray and seek guidance from God to face their problems.

Participant 1: *"For me, praying and my faith in God has been my consistent support in dealing with this pandemic. I believe that in these trying times; God can provide what we need for as long as you have your faith in Him."*

Participant 3: *"My faith in God. We go to church regularly and I always ask God for guidance and wisdom."*

## DISCUSSION

Results of the present study showed the emergence of four major themes that would describe the lived experiences of night class students who are mothers of young children during the pandemic, these are (1) Pandemic Struggles of Night Class Student-Mothers; (2) Online Learning Experiences during COVID-19, (3) Motivations and Inspirations of Night Class Student-Mothers, and (4) Coping Mechanisms of Night Class Student-Mothers.

In the first major theme, which is the pandemic struggles of night class student-mothers, the participants talked about the challenges they encountered during the pandemic in terms of their work, education, and parenting roles as mothers of young children ages 0 – 8 years during the pandemic. [Taukeni \(2014\)](#) supported the study who asserted that the main challenges of student-mothers were the lack of time to manage to study and do parenting roles. In addition, [Marandet and Wainwright \(2010\)](#) also shared in their study that one of the main issues of students with dependents was proper time management. For the student-mothers to fulfill one role, they usually sacrifice the other role.

The second major theme focused on the online learning experiences of night class student-mothers during the covid-19 pandemic. The outbreak of coronavirus did not stop the student-mothers to continue their education despite the major transition from face-to-face classes to online classes. However, due to limited access to digital resources, limited communication with their subject teachers, and the much-needed interaction and support from their peers and classmates, the participants experienced learning gaps in this new learning setup. Moreover, adding damage to the problem, not only that the student-mothers experience struggles with their online learning, like mothers, they also carry the burden of their children who are also attending online classes just like them. This is supported by [Amour \(2020\)](#) who stated that vulnerable students are being hit hard by the changes brought on by the coronavirus pandemic. Student-mothers are affected twice as much, as both they and their children scramble to start online learning.

Moreover, the third theme discusses the motivations and inspirations of night class student-mothers during the pandemic. Though they may have trouble being a student mother, they also shared their motivations and inspirations that keep them going forward. The hope that by finishing their studies, they can give their child a brighter future and at the same time achieve their dreams remains to be their main driving force in continuing and finishing their education. According to [Lei \(2010\)](#), individuals have different motivations in pursuing something. It could be intrinsic or extrinsic. In this case, the student-mothers had their intrinsic motivations. They decided to continue with their professional growth because they wanted to show to their families and other people that they could do it despite the challenges. More so, they wanted to secure the future of their children by getting that diploma which could give them better opportunities in finding a good job. This motivation of student- mothers according to [Wilsey \(2013\)](#) realizes their self-fulfillment and goal attainment. Thus, [Mckeown et al., \(2002\)](#) were correct after they emphasized that education is seen to be relevant by student-mothers to attain their human desires.

Finally, the fourth and final theme revolved around the coping mechanisms of night class student-mothers during the pandemic. Generally, the participants stated that they were able to cope up with the various stresses that they experience from the support of their families, friends, and children. So long as they have a sound mind and body, they mentioned that they could be able to face any difficult situation that may come their way. Thus, with the student-mothers' positivity of thoughts on their situations, they were able to survive their difficult situations. [Sameer \(2018\)](#) was right when he mentioned that positivity of mind leads to innovative behavior. Likewise, it was also mentioned in the results that prayers were necessary for



handling the difficulties. This implies that few student-mothers were religious and believed in the power of God. *Kessler (1985)* said that prayers truly provide assistance to improve someone's condition; for *Levine (2008)* prayer with the meditative state allows someone to relax and to take away the burdens they feel; for *Rezae et al., (2008)* averred those prayers provide a resource to withstand while *Teo et al., (2018)* said that prayers offer a reprieve.

## CONCLUSION

This study provides an in-depth description of the lived experiences of the night class student-mothers of young children during the pandemic. As illustrated in their reflections, motherhood could be described as a difficult but beautiful adventure despite the ongoing pandemic situation. Student-mothers experienced juggling and struggling in their attempts to be both the mother they want to be and the student they could be. The majority of the respondents faced online academic challenges such as limited availability of digital resources, weak internet connection, limited interaction with teachers and classmates, home distractions during online classes, and time management issues. Hence, night class student-mothers are motivated and inspired at the same time. They are strengthened with the presence of the people who support them in their journey and they have the ability to manage and cope with the demands of being both a mother and a student. It suggests that these student-mothers experienced a challenging yet fulfilling dual role. Although the results of the study do not generalized all night class student-mothers of young children, the findings of the study can be seen as part of raising awareness of the challenges they encounter during this time of the pandemic, thus, worth the attention of the academic institution. Their lived experiences can encourage and inspire other student-mothers to pursue and finish their education despite their situation.

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