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# Student-Parents' Experiences on The Flexible Learning Modalities Under the New Normal

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*Abstract* — This qualitative-phenomenological research aimed to find out the experiences and of student parents on flexible learning modalities during COVID 19 Pandemic and how they manage and handled the academic requirements. The participants were the student parents enrolled for the A.Y. 2021-2023. The sample size was chosen through purposive sampling. Semi-structured individual interview was used as the instrument of the study to determine the student parents' experiences and coping strategies during the pandemic and a focused group discussion was employed to validate the theme or commonalities of their experiences. The participants' responses were transcribed and interpreted through thematic analysis. The results revealed five commonalities in the experiences of the student parents: 1) difficulty in understanding concepts and topics in the self-directed modules; 2) difficulty balancing time between family and studies;3) slow and intermittent internet connectivity;4) lack of resources for load expenses and 4) opportunity to work and engage in entrepreneurial activity. The coping strategies identified are: proper time management; joining group study; entrusting care of children to parents, in-laws and other family members; sharing gadget with others, and installation of Wi-Fi connectivity at home or sharing with others. This study showed that the pedagogical method employed to carry on instruction during the pandemic period have both positive and negative impacts on the student parents. The study also shows the coping ability, and resilience of the student parents as they toiled for the completion of their academic requirements.

**Keywords — *Student Parents, Flexible Learning Modalities, Experiences, Coping Strategy, New Normal***

## I. Introduction

The Education 2030 Agenda and the UN's Sustainable Development Goal 4 emphasized the need for flexible learning modality in higher education systems to bring forth sundry learning pathways to reinforce impartial and lifelong learning (Martin & Furiv, 2022). Government institutions and the education sector in various countries were urged to restructure their curricular design to suit the needs of the learners under the "new normal" set up (Dayagbil et al., 2021). Most countries in the Asia were propelled to implement educational policies that supported flexible learning modalities to address the distressing effects of the pandemic (ADB (Asian Development Bank), 2021). As most countries shift instructional modality from face-to-face classroom interaction to online learning however, students living in financially disadvantaged or low socioeconomic status encounter a range of barriers and/or risks including long-term educational disengagement, digital exclusion, poor technology management, and increased psychosocial

challenges (Agaton & Cueto, 2021). There are four obstacles to overcome in order to achieve quality distance learning: personal, pedagogical, financial and organizational obstacles (Lassoued et al., 2020).

At the height of the Covid-19 pandemic, the United Nations reported that approximately 1.6 billion learners in more than 190 countries were affected by the disruption of the educational systems around the globe, comprising 80% of the student population and some of them are student-parents (U.N., 2020). Student-parents in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are students who are still pursuing their college education while having families of their own, taking steps to pursue their broken dreams and aspirations to obtain college degrees, motivated and committed to finish believing that their success will benefit their children (Roldan et al., 2020). The National Center for Education Statistics and the National Post-Secondary Aid Study revealed that there were 3.8 million students parents in college (Radwin et al., 2018). Their voices and experiences have gradually become a matter of study that informs policy, practice and theory (Nikiforidou & Holmes, 2022). Based on student parents' own accounts, children are often a driving force behind their decision to enter or remain in higher education (Brooks, 2011). The personal views of parent students as well as the wider support systems in place intertwine while managing these dual identities and the uncertainties(Sharp et al., 2020). Van Rhijin & Lero (2014), found out that student parents' own beliefs in their ability to function adequately (self-efficacy) in their studies and parental roles predicted their perceived ability to meet the demands of their multiple roles and satisfaction with life.

According to Manze et al., (2021) the challenges of shifting to flexible learning was difficult both for the parent and their children, having been doubly affected over others as student parents were forced to adjust their daily lives. Usually juggling studies, family life, and engaging in part/full-time work and assuming other responsibilities (Owton, 2016).

As a state funded university, it is our mission to provide quality and relevant education, and sustainably contribute to the improvement of the quality of life of our clientele by giving them the opportunity to fix their career paths, returning to college and earn professional degrees. For student parents, however, returning to school comes with a far more pressing challenges specifically all these times of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The varied predicaments of the student parents prompted NISU Batad Campus to identify areas needing support and intervention for students with children struggling to survive the challenges in order to achieve professional goals during the time of the pandemic and even beyond. Supporting student parents by addressing their concerns will enable them to sustain challenges towards obtaining their preferred degrees by being consistently enrolled every semester, and maintaining favourable cumulative grade point average (GPA),(Pendleton & Atella, 2020)The researcher was interested to explore the experiences and challenges of student parents' and their individual ways in handling flexible learning modalities during COVID 19 Pandemic, thus this study was conducted.

For purposes of clarity, the following terms are defined technically and operationally:

**Student Parents** – are individuals who are pursuing an educational program in any level who also has responsibilities of raising one or more children. (lawinsider.com)

In this study, student –parents are those enrolled in the different degree programs of Northern Iloilo State University, Batad Campus, concurrently balancing education with parenthood and were taken as respondents to this study

**Flexible Learning Modalities**- are teaching methods that allow students to customize how, when, and where they learn which can be delivered in person, online, modular or blended.

In this study, flexible learning modality are different learning options from which Student-parents can choose from that best suits both their dual role as students and as parents.

**Experiences**. means the process of doing, seeing, and having things happen to you that gives you practical wisdom or skill through direct involvement in events, activities or personal encounter over time. (William Webster Dictionary, 2022).

In this research, experience refers to the state of having affected student-parents after their exposure to the different teaching and learning methods under flexible learning modalities.

**Coping Strategy**- refers to the specific methods, behaviors, and cognitive processes that individuals use to manage stress, difficult emotions or challenging situations that are taxing or exceeding the resources of the person(Lazarus and Folkman,1984)

In this study, coping strategies are the ways or methods in which student parents resorted to in handling and managing the strains of flexible learning modalities.

**New Normal** –refers to an unfamiliar or atypical situation that that has become standard, usual or expected following a significant change, crisis or disruption requiring individuals, organizations or societies to adapt to new ways of operating.

In this study, "new normal" refers to the new ways of how students and educators adapt to the new methods of instruction during and after the covid -19 pandemic.

**Significance of the Study**

This study aimed to benefit the following:

1. **Student-parents**. The insights and strategies they can gain from this study will teach them how to balance academic and parental responsibilities and can learn about available institutional support that could empower them;

2. **Educational Institutions** –The schools, particularly colleges and universities can utilize the findings of this study to improve learning programs, policies  and be able to provide appropriate support system to student-parents;

3. **Policy–Makers –** Institutional policy–makers can develop policies that will promote inclusive and accessible education for student-parents;

4. **Educators and Academic Staff**- Professors and teachers would be able to understand the plight of student –parents and thus, adjust and modify their pedagogical methods that would best suit to their clientele;

5. **Future Researchers –**  Researches on education or the social sciences can use the findings of this study for further studies.

6. **Families of Student-Parents-** this study can foster empathy, cooperation, support and help families work together to reduce stress and misunderstanding, and inspire others to pursue education knowing that flexible learning can accommodate different life situations.

**RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

1. What are the experiences of the student parent on flexible learning modalities?

2. How did student-parents manage to handle both academic requirements and family under flexible learning modalities?

This study aimed to:

1. Find out the experiences and challenges of student parents on flexible learning modalities and how they managed to handle both their family responsibilities and academic requirements;

2. Identify areas needing support for student parents in order for them to continue schooling and obtain their preferred college degrees;

The responses of the participants were expected to vary considering their various circumstances and living conditions which may have influenced or affected their academic performance under the flexible learning modalities.

According to the Commission on Higher Education, flexible learning is a pedagogical approach of teaching and learning that allows for flexibility in time, place and audience. It can be a combination of online and offline learning process. it includes digital and non-digital tools and supports different learning styles.

The core theory behind flexible learning modalities is centered around learner-centricity, (Agung, A.S N, Surtikanti, M.W. & Quinones, C.. 2020.) highlighted how learner-centered approaches improved adaptability and engagement in digital and blended learning environment. Students learn based on their individual needs and learning styles, often utilizing a combination of online-face- to- face instruction, which is often referred to as "blended learning or hybrid learning, within this framework. The learner –centric approach helped students to cope with online and modular learning formats. (Serrano, JC. & Bacudio. M.A (2021)

Another key aspects include the Cognitive Flexibility theory which is crucial in a flexible learning environment where learners may navigate various learning modalities and pace. (2019) Deak, G; Wiseheart, M .& Gopnik A. contends that individuals with high cognitive flexibility can shift strategies and explore multiple perspectives, and generate innovative solutions more effectively.

Humanistic Learning Theory on the other hand emphasizes the importance of individual needs and self-directed learning as it allows student-parents to control their learning pace and schedule based on their family responsibilities. While student-parents assumes dual roles, the flexible learning modality gives them the opportunity to engage in academic endeavour at their convenient time, while tending their children at home.
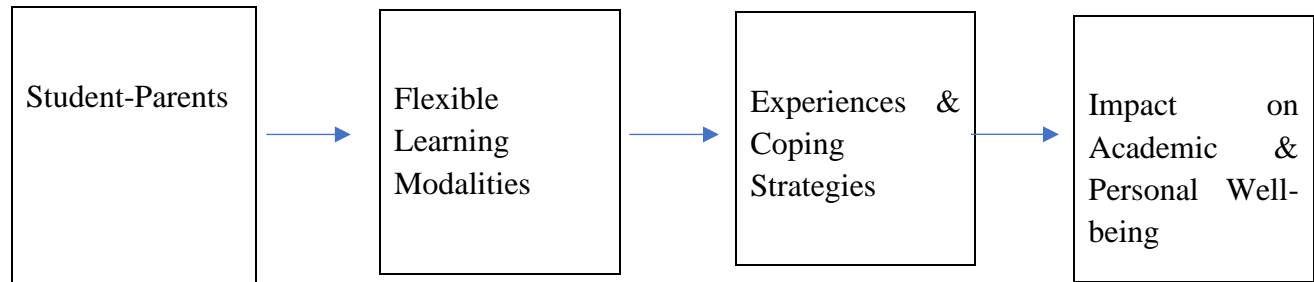
Adult learning Theory recognizes that adult learners often have established life commitments and require flexibility in learning methods, making flexible learning particularly beneficial for student-parents.

Social Learning Theory. This theory highlights the importance of a supportive learning environment, which flexible learning can provide by allowing student-parents to access support networks and collaborate with peers.

Another learning theory is Constructivism, which emphasizes that learners actively construct knowledge by connecting new information with their existing understanding which aligns with flexible learning, as it encourages students to explore and engage with content in their own way;

Situated Learning theory also emphasizes learning within authentic contexts and real-world applications which can be facilitated through flexible learning by incorporating relevant scenarios and case studies.

A Schematic Diagram on the Conceptual Framework of the Study is shown below:

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┌──────────────┐     ┌──────────────┐     ┌──────────────┐     ┌──────────────┐
│              │     │ Flexible     │     │ Experiences &│     │ Impact     on│
│Student-Parents│ ──▶ │ Learning     │ ──▶ │ Coping       │ ──▶ │ Academic    &│
│              │     │ Modalities   │     │ Strategies   │     │ Personal Well-│
│              │     │              │     │              │     │ being        │
└──────────────┘     └──────────────┘     └──────────────┘     └──────────────┘
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The diagram illustrates the following:

1. Student-parents engaged in flexible learning modalities;

2. The experiences and challenges they encounter;

3. The coping strategies they use;

4. The impact of flexible learning on their academic and personal lives

**REVIEW OF RELATED STUDIES**

Student-parents in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are students who are still pursuing their college education while having families of their own, taking steps to pursue their broken dreams and aspirations to obtain college degrees, motivated and committed to finish believing that their success will benefit their children (Roldan,et al.,2020).

Globally, the number of student parents form part of the minority in the higher education institutions, labelled as the "silent population" (Garibay 2021). The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2018), and the National Post-Secondary Aid Study

(NPSAS, 2015-2016) revealed that of the 3.8 million students parents in college, roughly 2.7 million or (70% are mothers and 1.1 million (30%) are fathers. With these, 61 percent are single parents, with children under 18, while majority of fathers (61%) are married. (GAO, 2019).

Based on student parents' own accounts, children are often a driving force behind their decision to enter or remain in higher education (Brooks, 2012). They are committed and motivated to finish their degree because their success will benefit their children and their time away from their children will allow them to provide their children with greater knowledge, more financial resources and more quality time in the future.

The main challenges student parents face, according to their views, relate to time, finances, and possible health and emotional issues (Moreau, 2016). Student parents have shown high levels

of sleep deprivation (Marandet & Wainwright, 2010), high occurrence of depression (Gerrard & Robert, 2006), as well as feelings of guilt, of 'missing out' and 'not fitting in' regarding family life and studies (Moreau & Kerner, 2015). They have also reported uncertainty-induced stress related to their transition to academia and parenting that, in turn, has been associated with adverse mental and physical health outcomes (Gerrard & Roberts, 2006); Scharp & Dorrance Hall, 2018).

Van Rhijn and Lero (2014) found in their study with 398 student parents that their own beliefs in their ability to function adequately (self-efficacy) in their studies and parental roles predicted their perceived ability to meet the demands of their multiple roles and satisfaction with life. Interestingly, according to this study, family satisfaction fully mediates the relationship between studies – family balance and life satisfaction. Therefore, the experiences of student parents are vital to be heard in order to understand how success in both roles as students and parents are interpreted and understood. Under these lines, the current study aims to address student parents' voices of how they have experienced their student parent identities under the flexible learning modality.

As most countries shift instructional modality from face-to-face classroom interaction to online learning however, students living in financially disadvantaged or low socioeconomic status encounter a range of barriers and/or risks including long-term educational disengagement, digital exclusion, poor technology management, and increased psychosocial challenges .

In a study conducted by  Lassoued, Alhendawi and Bashitialshaaer, 2020  entitled "An Exploratory Study of the Obstacles for Achieving Quality in Distance Learning" conducted to professors and students from Algeria, Egypt, Palestine, and Iraq, the following obstacles surmised: 1)Personal obstacles from weak motivation to distance learning and the difficulties of understanding some subjects in the absence of classroom interaction ; 2) Pedagogical obstacles from the difficulty of learning applied courses and directed remote work as well as conducting tests within the e-learning environment; 3) Technical obstacles from weak internet speed in remote areas and consequent interruptions in broadcasting, and the impediment to access lessons; and

Financial and organizational obstacles from using electronic multimedia and the absence of uniform controls among all professors leading to confusion in receiving information and students' difficulty in understanding the lessons.

The same results were obtained by Abel [12] who applied qualitative phenomenological research to analyze the lived experiences of five learners immersed in a remote learning in the Philippines and found the challenges including poor to no internet access, financial constraints,lack of technological devices, and lack of affective or emotional support.

Focusing on the Philippines as a case study on modular distance learning, in response to the health crisis, Agaton et al,2020 explores the lived experiences of the parents of the learners on distance learning. Specifically, the study aimed to describe the parents' perceptions on COVID-19 crisis and the government's response through educational policies as well as the parents'

experiences and challenges in dealing with distance Learning with their children during the pandemic.

Among the distance learning modalities, the study focused on modular distance learning as: 1) Applied in a broader coverage in the case country; 2) More inclusive with low- to middle-income families as well as those located in remote rural areas with inaccessible internet connectivity; and3) The most preferred modality by the learners' parents. Using online survey,this qualitative research collected self-report from the parents or guardians of the learners from the Philippines and applied Inductive Content Analysis.

This study finally aimed to provide a basis for a more inclusive educational policies that consider the perspective of the learners' parents during and beyond the pandemic.

The pedagogical shift under the new normal, placed the student parents to experience complex challenges. Nearly three quarters of student parents (70 percent) are mothers—who, in 2020, experienced significant unemployment, due in part to increased caretaking responsibilities stemming from child care and school closures, causing losses of income and heightened basic needs scarcity (White, 2021). The challenges of shifting to flexible learning was difficult both for them and their children ( Maredeth, Manzel, et.al.2021),having been doubly affected over other students ( Madekine St. Amour, 2020), alongside the decreased accessibility to support services as there was transition from the conventional classroom set up to remote learning access (Maze, 2013). The Pandemic brought studentparents to fulfil several demanding roles concurrently, a sociological concept known as *role overload* (Coverman, 1989 in Jackson 2020).

Studies on student parents revealed that they have been struggling, with the flexible learning modalities, adding up to the many conflicting demands attached to their dual status, reconciling both obligatory roles in the family and that in the academe (Brooks, et al 2012), usually juggling studies, family life, and engaging in part/full-time work and assuming otherresponsibilities (Owton , 2016).

As a state funded university, it is our mission to provide quality and relevant education, and sustainably contribute to the improvement of the quality of life of our clientele by giving them the opportunity to fix their career paths, returning to college and earn professional degrees. For student parents, however, returning to school comes with a far more pressing challenges specifically all those times of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The varied predicaments of the student parents prompted NISU Batad Campus to identify areas needing support and intervention for students with children struggling to survive the challenges in order to achieve professional goals during the time of the pandemic and even beyond. Supporting student parents by addressing their concerns, will enable them to sustain challenges towards obtaining their academic degrees by being consistently enrolled every semester, and maintaining favourable cumulative grade point average (GPA) (Virginia Pendleton and Julie Atella, 2020).

The researcher was interested to explore the status of student parents' experiences on flexible learning modalities during COVID 19 Pandemic and the coping mechanisms or strategies they resorted to which enabled them to handle both as parents and students at the same time. The coverage of this study was limited only to the student parents of NISU Batad Campus. The result of this study will aid the Office of Students Affairs in identifying possible student services that could be best offered in order to help student parents, in finishing their degree, with less academic strains and financial difficulties, thus, this study was conducted.

**RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

1. What are the experiences of the student parent on flexible learning modalities?

2. How were the student- parents able to handle both family and academic requirements under the flexible learning modalities?

**SCOPE AND DELIMITATION**

The study was limited only to 28 student-parents of NISU Batad Campus who were officially enrolled for the Academic Year 2022-2023. At the onset of the research formulation, the participants were identified and confirmed by the Office of the Registrar as bonafide and duly enrolled student-parents, thus, they were chosen and utilized as respondents subsequent to their affirmation and willingness to the interview conducted by the researcher.

## II. Methodology

A qualitative phenomenological research design was utilized in this study. Creswell (2007) noted "a phenomenological study describes the meaning for several individuals of their shared experiences of a concept or a phenomenon" (p. 57). The research was conducted in NISU Batad Campus, Batad, and Iloilo. The participants were the student parents enrolled during the Academic Year 2022-2023. Participants were identified through the Registrar's record, after which, the sample size was chosen through purposive sampling. A letter approved by the research director and the Campus Administrator were individually sent to the participants expressing the intent of the researcher to utilize the student parents as respondents. Semi-structured individual interview questions were formulated and employed in the study to determine the student parents' experiences and coping strategy during pandemic. The participants were assured of the confidentiality of their responses before interviews were conducted. Focused group discussion was employed to validate the theme or commonalities of their experiences. The participants' responses were subjected to content analysis through thematic and funnel method in identifying themes or patterns leading to a deeper understanding of their experiences of flexible learning modalities.

**III. Results and Discussion**

Tables below presents the thematic analysis of student-parents' responses to questions asked during the interview. Based on the analysis made on the interview, responses of the participants about their experiences of the flexible learning modality, the following findings surmised:

1. For question number 1, the study revealed common themes of the student parents' experiences such as: 1) difficulty in understanding concepts and topics in the self-directed modules ;2) difficulty balancing time between family and studies; 3) slow internet connectivity; 4) lack of resources for load expenses and 5) opportunity to work and engage in entrepreneurial activity.

The student parents have been confronted with learning difficulties in modular approach, balancing time and dual roles, between family and school work, intermittent and unstable internet connectivity and financial strains. These all imply negative feedbacks. In item 5, however, the opportunity to work and engage in small-scale or home-based entrepreneur implies a positive response.

**Question #1. How did you manage your time doing your lessons under flexible learning modality while you are taking care of your family?**

| Themes | Quotes | Discussion |
|---|---|---|
| 1.Difficulty in understanding concepts | 1. "I find the lessons hard to understand especially the modules where we are left on our own to interpret the topics and understand concepts." | Students confess that they find it difficult to grasp the subject matter of the lessons due to the absence of a teacher to explain clearly and elaborately. |
| 2. difficulty balancing family and studies | 2. "Studying and engaging in schoolwork while tending children all in one time is quite tough to handle for us student-parents". | The respondents find it hard to focus on their lessons and subject requirements as they need to attend to their young children's needs. |
| 3. Slow internet connectivity | 3. The problem with flexible learning is the intermittent or very slow internet connectivity in our location. | Students who are living in far-flung rural communities have very little access to network signals or they have experienced intermittent wifi connectivity which hinders their full participation in online sessions or difficulty in transmitting their course outputs. |
| 4.lack of financial resource for data connection or internet connectivity | 4." We miss some lectures and online exams due to the absence of favourable signals and Wifi connectivity because we lack | 4. Most student parents have very meager financial resources to avail internet connection due to their |

| | financial resources to pay for internet connection" | financial incapacity which deters their participation in online sessions. |
|---|---|---|
| 5. Opportunity to work and engage in entrepreneurial activity. | 5." We can engage in a small business at home while at the same time tending our children and doing our school work or listening to online lectures". | 5. Student-parents who have entrepreneurial inclinations find the opportunity to make small income by doing online business at home while living up to their dream of earning college degrees. |

This finding parallels with the study of Herrera. AB,( 2021) & Licayan, R, Jr, (2021) on the "Readiness of Students in Flexible Learning Modality" which investigated student preparedness for flexible learning, finding variations in readiness based on factors such as year level and course, which highlighted the need for target support mechanisms. This involves self-management skills and ability to adapt to modular learning

Based on the analysis made on the interview responses of the participants about their experiences of the flexible learning modality, the following findings surmised:

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For question #2, the responses showed the following themes or patterns:

1) proper time management in doing dual roles; 2) joining group study; 3.) entrusting care of children to parents, in-laws and other family members; 4) sharing gadget with others, and 5) installation of Wi-Fi connectivity at home or share with others.

The student parents have been confronted with learning difficulties in modular approach, balancing time and dual roles, intermittent and unstable internet connectivity and financial strains. These all imply negative feedbacks. In item 5 however, the opportunity to work and engage in small-scale or home-based entrepreneur implies a positive response.

The student parents' have varied coping strategies in dealing with their academic requirements under the flexible learning modalities that are obviously affect their performance and personal lives.

| Themes | Quotes | Discussion |
|---|---|---|
| 1.) Proper time management | 1.) "I find my dual role both as mother and a student very complicated but I learned how to manage my time schedule on both" | 1.) Learning proper time management eases the complications and difficulty in performing dual roles for student-parents |
| 2.) joining group study | 2.) "When I find my lessons hard, I in a group study with my classmates | 2.) Collaborative learning like group Interaction, discussions or peer sharing with classmates is a strategy that entails broader understanding and evoke deeper meanings rather than studying alone. |
| 3.) entrusting care of children to parents and other family members | 3.)" For me to be able to perform my dual role being a student and a parent, I entrust my child/children to the care of my parents, in-laws and other family members every time I find it difficult to do both" | 3) Family and relatives are a great source of support to student-parents in that they can get assistance for childcare when the demand for academic pressures get intense. |
| 4. sharing gadget with others | 4. "For students like me who don't have any gadget, for use in online sessions or distance learning, we just share or borrow gadgets from classmates, friends or relatives". | |
| 5.) Installation of Wi-Fi connectivity at home or share with others. | 5. "Those who can afford it, are able to install Wifi connections in their homes or acquire mobile Wifi to have internet access but to some who don't have the capability like me, we just rely on the generosity of other students or of our friends and relatives" | 5). Majority of student-parents are marginalized and have no easy access to internet connectivity which hinders their participation in online & remote classes, thereby missing lectures and experience delay in transmitting course requirements. Mostly, they only rely on shared connectivity such as mobile hotspots and free internet access. |

Student parents have been confronted with learning difficulties in modular approach, balancing time and dual roles, intermittent and unstable internet connectivity and financial strains. These all imply negative feedbacks. In item 5 however, the opportunity to work and engage in small-scale or home-based entrepreneur implies a positive response.

In order to get through to hurdling the challenges of Flexible learning modalities, student parents resorted to varied coping strategies in dealing with their academic requirements and pressures under the flexible learning modalities amidst parenting that obviously affect their scholastic performance and personal lives.

## IV. Conclusion

Summary

This qualitative phenomenological research aimed to explore the experiences of student-parents in managing flexible learning modalities during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study focused on the challenges they encountered and the coping strategies they employed to balance academic responsibilities with parenthood. Utilizing semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions, the research gathered data from 28 student-parents enrolled at Northern Iloilo State University, Batad Campus, for the Academic Year 2022-2023. Thematic analysis was used to identify recurring themes and patterns in their experiences. The study revealed both negative and positive impacts of flexible learning, emphasizing the resilience and adaptability of student-parents in overcoming academic and personal struggles.

**Findings**

1. Experiences of Student-Parents in Flexible Learning Modalities:

- Difficulty in understanding course content: Many student-parents found it challenging to grasp complex topics due to limited interaction with teachers and self-directed learning.

- Time management struggles: Balancing childcare, household responsibilities, and academic work was difficult for most participants.

- Internet connectivity issues: Poor or intermittent internet access was a major barrier, especially for those in remote areas.

- Financial constraints: Limited financial resources affected their ability to purchase data or maintain Wi-Fi connectivity for online learning.

- Entrepreneurial opportunities: Some student-parents benefited from the flexibility of the learning modalities, allowing them to engage in small-scale businesses while studying.

**2. Coping Strategies of Student-Parents**

- Time management: Student-parents developed structured schedules to balance academic and familial obligations.

- Group study participation: Many engaged in study groups to enhance understanding of lessons.

- Family support: Some relied on their parents, in-laws, or relatives to care for their children while they focused on schoolwork.

- Resource-sharing: Borrowing or sharing gadgets and internet access with classmates, friends, or family members was a common strategy.

- Self-learning and research: Many turned to online resources such as Google and YouTube to supplement their learning.

**Conclusions**

1. Challenges in Flexible Learning: The study highlighted that student-parents faced significant struggles in terms of comprehension, time constraints, internet access, and financial limitations. The modular and online learning formats were difficult to navigate without sufficient guidance.

2. Coping Mechanisms and Adaptability: Despite the challenges, student-parents demonstrated remarkable resilience by adopting various coping strategies. Time management, collaborative learning, and support systems played key roles in their ability to sustain academic engagement.

3. Impact on Student-Parents: Flexible learning had both positive and negative effects. While it posed considerable difficulties, it also provided opportunities for student-parents to pursue entrepreneurial activities and continue education despite the pandemic.

Implications

For Educational Institutions

- Institutions must provide structured guidance and academic support to help student-parents manage self-directed learning.

- Policies should be established to enhance online learning accessibility, including subsidized internet access or partnerships with telecommunications providers.

- Development of hybrid learning models that allow for both asynchronous and synchronous teaching methods.

  For Educators

- Teachers should adopt interactive and student-centered teaching approaches, such as recorded lectures and tutorial sessions.

- Course content should be simplified and well-structured to ensure clarity and ease of understanding.

- Faculty members must consider the unique struggles of student-parents when setting deadlines and assessments.

**For Policy Makers**

- Government and institutional policymakers should implement student-parent support programs, including childcare services, academic counseling, and financial aid.

- Scholarships and allowances tailored for student-parents should be provided to ease financial burdens.

- Legislative measures should be enacted to promote inclusive and accessible education for student-parents.

## V. Recommendations

1. Institutions should offer mental health support, academic counseling, and financial assistance programs to student-parents.

2. Development of blended learning frameworks combining face-to-face and online interactions to improve engagement and comprehension.

3. Schools should collaborate with internet service providers to offer affordable Wi-Fi packages for students.

4. Schools should create realistic deadlines and assessment strategies that accommodate student-parents' dual responsibilities.

5. Educators should receive training on handling diverse learners, including student-parents, through workshops on adaptive teaching strategies.

6. A follow-up study should be conducted to explore long-term effects of flexible learning on student-parents' academic and professional growth.

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