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Research Article

The Lived Experiences of Indigenous Working Mothers in the Pursuit of Tertiary Education

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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the lived experiences of Indigenous working student mothers in pursuing tertiary education in Zambales. It focuses on describing and finding meaning in their lived challenges and discovering their day-to-day struggles and experiences. It aims to propose a guidance and counseling support program that would help them ease their difficulties. A descriptive phenomenological research approach was employed, with respondents purposively selected to ensure that individuals with rich, relevant experiences related to the phenomenon under investigation were included. Data were gathered through one-on-one in-depth interviews with 12 respondents following a set of inclusion criteria. The respondents represented the Indigenous group of working student mothers enrolled in tertiary education in Zambales. Results of the study revealed that respondents describe their lived experiences as a challenge to their well-being. They describe being a mother as the most challenging job among other roles. Other challenges they identified included balancing parenthood and personal growth, time management problems, financial struggles, and academic challenges. Despite the hurdles they were facing, they found significance in their adversity. They experienced a profound sense of empowerment in their role as a model for others, emphasizing personal achievement, strength, and motivation, and inspiring dignity. A proposed guidance and counseling support program was designed to help this special group of students overcome their difficulties while pursuing tertiary education. Conclusions and recommendations are also provided.

Keywords: *Lived experiences, Indigenous working mothers, Tertiary education*

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Background

Zambals are among the earliest inhabitants of Central Luzon. They are among the indigenous groups living in Zambales. While local people refer to them as “Sambali”, they are generally called “Aytas”. They are divided into four ethnolinguistic groups: Ayta Abellen, Ayta Ambala, Ayta Mag-Indi, and Ayta Sambal (Lobel et al., 2020).

Similar to other ethnic groups, Aytas have their own system of worship. They believe in spirits called “anitos”, which they presume to guide their everyday living, including their way of healing. These beliefs and practices are still observed today. Aside from this, they also have their own unique way of living, especially among those living in the highlands.

Meanwhile, the government of Zambales puts much importance on education, as evidenced by numerous primary and secondary schools located throughout different towns and barangays in the province. Because of this, many of the indigenous groups can attend schools even in far-flung areas. The number of people unable to read and write is decreasing, leading to more professionals in the province. This demonstrates that education plays a pivotal role in enhancing the lives of the Aytas, fostering their progress toward greater education and civilization. Moreover, they are now more aware and cognizant of their environment, political and economic freedom, and civic rights and responsibilities.

To tackle the issues of education and civilization, the Department of Education (DepEd) introduced the Education for All (EFA) initiative, aiming to improve the quality of life for all citizens, particularly those from Indigenous communities, regardless of age. In Zambales, the local government units (LGUs), in coordination with DepEd, put up schools in the mountainous areas, despite the struggles and difficulties in reaching these places. For instance, in the municipality of Botolan, located in Zambales, several schools were established in Baytan, the eastern part of Botolan, near Mount Pinatubo. One of the teachers assigned in Baytan, an Ayta Head Teacher who gave a testament regarding the lives of Aytas in Baytan. She noted that the main source of living for Aytas in

Baytan is farming. However, due to the eruption of Mt. Pinatubo in 1991, the Aytas were displaced and forced to look for a living elsewhere. Some Aytas displaced to the lowlands struggled to adapt and integrate with the local population due to their distinct way of life, ultimately choosing to return to the mountainous regions. She emphasized that education remains an essential need that should not be overlooked, with the community’s primary necessities (Mallari, 2017).

Education plays a significant role in the preservation and improvement of society. As much as education is important for all of us, it is equally hard to achieve, given the differences among individuals. These individual differences, together with varying cultural beliefs and socio-economic status, may affect the individual’s motivation and success in obtaining a school degree. For students who are also working parents, pursuing tertiary education and finishing a degree despite their situation is a crucial decision they need to make.

In the Philippines, pursuing tertiary education while working is a common scenario in different colleges and universities in every part of the country. Furthermore, this has already been the topic of several studies. Previous research concluded that working while studying has both constructive and undesirable effects on students’ success in pursuing college degrees. To address the conflict between work and studies, time management is a crucial requirement to overcome difficulties (Tumin et al., 2020). Other suggestions include self-discipline, commitment, and taking full responsibility for their obligations. Based on the study, respondents claim that to balance their life-work-studies, they only need to know the basics in their courses and the extent of time required to manage their academic load at the university. Nonetheless, work will not be the reason for their failures in their academic accomplishment. In another study, some of the themes associated with the same sample group include motherhood, perseverance, thought about going back to tertiary education, and suggestions for improvement of college personnel (Spilovoy, 2014).

College life is not easy. Students must learn to effectively manage their time, energy, and financial resources with careful consideration. Being a working student entails more obligations and responsibilities. Despite the challenges, individuals must pursue and complete their college education as it is a vital step in shaping their future. The 1987 Philippine Constitution, Article XIV, Section 1, cited that the state shall protect and promote the right of all citizens to quality education at all levels and take appropriate steps to make such education accessible to all (Ang Konstitusyon ng Republika ng Pilipinas, 2022). Over the years, education has been recognized for its pivotal role in sustaining and advancing societies while enriching the lives of individuals and preserving their cultural heritage. It is hard to think about life without education. However, despite the efforts of the local government and different leaders in Zambales, the Ayta-Sambal college students still face problems concerning completing their education. According to the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples held on September 22-23, 2024, indigent people should be nurtured and encouraged to obtain a quality education to improve their lives (United Nations, 2014). According to some studies, the integration of the curriculum designed for Indigenous People is still far from being successful. Verdidá et al. (2024) revealed that teachers had a tough time implementing the curriculum for Indigenous Peoples (IP) learners. These challenges include the overwhelming burden of additional workloads, which strain teachers' capacity to deliver quality instruction. Language barriers exacerbate communication challenges, hindering teachers and students from fully engaging with the material. Additionally, the scarcity of appropriate learning materials tailored to the unique needs of IP learners exacerbates the difficulty in providing a meaningful learning experience.

Previous research focuses on the challenges of working students while pursuing tertiary education. However, no attention was given to the marginalized population of students in college and universities in Zambales, specifically, the indigenous working student mothers. Focusing on the unique experiences of indigenous mothers in Zambales has filled

the gap in the field of study and contributed in materializing the goal of the government to support and nurture the lives of indigenous people. This study sought to explore and understand the challenges faced by indigenous working student mothers while pursuing tertiary education and proposed a comprehensive and localized guidance and counseling support program suited for them.

The researcher has served as a guidance counselor at a local college in Zambales for several years. During the researcher's stay as a guidance counselor, she observed and recorded many problems encountered by the students. In addition, she observed a college population consisting of student-parents who were also balancing work responsibilities, most of whom were members of an indigenous group (Ayta). Since these students have multiple roles (mother, worker, student), most of their problems are related to balancing their numerous roles. They are treated similarly to regular students concerning study load and academic hours. Aside from the institutional regulations they need to obey, other factors affect their performance. As observed, one of the reasons for their low performance is their inferiority complex. Another reason is their cultural practice of early marriage, as evidenced by their civil status. They are already married even at a young age, so their family obligations add to their struggles as students. Therefore, the school administration concluded that the difficulty of stabilizing studies, work, and personal responsibilities was the primary reason why students from this indigenous group experienced breakdowns and decided to drop out.

The researcher selected this topic because it holds a significant personal meaning for her. The researcher, being also a student, a mother, and an employee simultaneously, faces too many distractions and challenges that hinder her in obtaining her master's degree. She even took a ten-year break due to the hardships and financial struggles she faced, eventually reaching a point where she had to choose between two crucial things that were deeply important to her. Her firsthand experiences with these challenges inspired her to pursue this research, to gain further insight into other women facing

similar situations, and to propose a counseling support program tailored to their needs.

The researcher's aim in the study is to learn and understand the different perspectives of working student mothers, and will give insights based on the obtained information. These insights will ultimately assist the school administration in developing an improved educational program addressing the specific needs of this student group. In this manner, the school will be able to address and promote student diversity and inspire this group of students to enroll, complete their studies, and pursue their dreams. Lastly, the researcher aimed to conceptualize and implement a counseling support program for this specific group of students.

The research provides information about the conditions of school life within the same context and conditions as other higher institutions. It is hoped that other educational institutions with the same group of students will be able to enhance and adapt programs based on the recommendations given by this research.

The study is assumed to be significant for working student parents, administrators, educators, researchers, policymakers, and government leaders. For working student parents, this research aims to increase their awareness of their plight and improve their educational quality. Results generated from this research can provide colleges with important data about the experiences and difficulties of working student parents, which can lead to the creation of ideal educational practices and programs suitable for this specific group of students. For administrators and educators from higher educational institutions, it is hoped that they will be able to foster positive actions for this special group of students through the conceptualization and implementation of programs earmarked for them, which will lead to better adaptation and adjustment in meeting the needs and demands of education.

Moreover, this study aimed to provide information about the conditions of school life for working students in the higher educational authorities of Zambales. Policymakers accountable for matters concerning student and school achievements are informed by the data and results of this study, which can help them design

a more flexible and suitable school policy, program, and guidelines for diverse students. Providing knowledge of the needs of students as members of the community, and more importantly, of an indigenous group, can make them aware of the plight of students who are also working parents. In this manner, local government units can identify the needs of the higher educational institution and craft laws and policies to support this special group of students.

This study aimed to describe the experiences and challenges faced by working student mothers belonging to the indigenous Ayta group while pursuing tertiary education in Zambales. It is intended to provide context for the experiences of Indigenous working student mothers. Lastly, this study aimed to propose a support program suited for Indigenous working student mothers in the university setting.

Specifically, the research aimed to answer the following questions:

- 1 How do the Indigenous working mothers describe their experiences in their pursuit of tertiary education?
- 2 How do the Indigenous working mothers give meaning to their experiences?
- 3 Based on the findings, what guidance and counseling support programs can be offered to Indigenous working mothers in the university setting?

Methods

The research demonstrated the application of a descriptive-phenomenological qualitative approach through semi-structured interviews to explore the daily experiences and challenges of working student parents of tertiary education in Zambales while studying. It sought to understand and describe the experiences and personal narratives encountered while studying. A descriptive phenomenological approach is a qualitative method in research to know deeply and get substantial data for the study. Its advantage over quantitative research is that it provides a full description and analysis of a research subject based on the purpose of the research without restricting the participant's responses (Collis & Hussey, 2014). A descriptive phenomenological approach is best suited for this research since it allows for a deeper

understanding of certain groups' social patterns and experiences through the stories of the participants.

The researcher employed purposive sampling to enable the recruitment of students with specific experiences relevant to the research questions. Semi-structured interviews were used to gather data. It was the most appropriate strategy for acquiring information since it allowed the researcher to ask and probe for more follow-up questions. This method also alleviated the uneasiness between the researcher and the participants, making the interviews more natural.

The research targeted the Indigenous working student mothers enrolled in two tertiary education institutions in Zambales: President Ramon Magsaysay State University (PRMSU), which has seven campuses in various towns throughout the province, and the Polytechnic College of Botolan (PCB), a local college run by the local government unit in Botolan.

Participants included twelve (12) working student mothers currently enrolled in tertiary education who are parents (biological, guardians, "foster," or "adoptive" parents) at the same time. It is mandated that their children should be living with them, and they have parental custody of the child. It primarily targeted parents with children aged zero (0) to thirteen (13) years old, living with or without partners. These Indigenous people were selected regardless of their family and community dynamics. The research is not specific about their culture and beliefs.

Demographic data was also collected to assist the researcher in obtaining the participants' private information, such as name, age, contact number, address, number of children, and marital status. In addition, the researcher used aliases for the participants to protect their identity and anonymity.

The researcher made sure to minimize biases in the conduct of the research. Since the research was focused on the Indigenous People of Zambales, the participants were randomly selected among the different colleges throughout the province of Zambales to avoid biases regarding the experiences in the college and the research site. Further, the research was

focused solely on the specific group of Ayta Indigenous people and did not include the experiences of other minority groups.

For this research, in-depth interviews were used in data gathering. The researcher prepared a step-by-step procedure for data collection to clearly document the process of data collection and analysis.

To have a detailed and organized data collection, the researcher secured a letter of approval to conduct research from the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) Regional Office (Region III) and from the school administrators of both President Ramon Magsaysay State University and Polytechnic College of Botolan.

After the approval of the School Head/Administrators, the researcher requested permission, if feasible, for the list of students who could potentially be the target participants, along with their contact information, as conducting a study via random selection is extremely challenging in today's situation.

With the approval of school administrators, the researcher approached the target participants to ask if they were willing to participate in the study, ensuring that their decision was made voluntarily and without any pressure. They are free to decline the request.

Upon approval, the researcher discussed the ethical considerations, such as confidentiality and the objectives of the research, before conducting the interview. All participants signed a letter of consent as proof of their willingness and acceptance to participate in the study.

The researcher also highlighted the nature and significance of the study. The researcher cannot force the participants to answer all of the questions. They also have the option to discontinue at any time. Their privacy was kept confidential in all published and written data.

The interviews were conducted at the participant's most convenient time, with a duration of 1 - 2 hours. Demographic data was also collected to obtain the personal information of the participants. The participants were given the option of interviewing, writing, phone calls, or face-to-face.

After gathering the results, the researcher explored the data through multiple readings

and reviews. The researcher created initial codes after the data had been reviewed and analyzed. The codes have been reviewed and revised, then integrated into categories, which were combined into themes. The themes were presented cohesively.

In a descriptive phenomenological qualitative study, thematic analysis was used. A thematic analysis entailed closely examining the recurrent themes relevant to the study, which will lead to the emergence of common ideas and concepts. This was also undertaken to ensure that all information from the participants was not overlooked or misunderstood. Moreover, the researcher wanted to ensure an in-depth and correct interpretation of the data collected. The researcher achieved this by being familiar with and carefully examining the data. All responses were encoded verbatim. Their responses were grouped based on the questions posted. Afterward, the researcher calculated the frequency of similar responses and grouped them to identify relevant statements in the data. The researcher initially constructed units of meaning and code themes. Next, viewpoints were summarized and placed under clusters. Subsequently, viewpoints were also labeled and described in detail. Finally, major themes were constructed with succeeding subthemes.

As for the guide interview questions, the researcher first deliberated with the adviser. Afterward, the researcher then requested that the interview questions be validated and verified by two (2) other experts in the field of Guidance and Counseling. The results were consolidated and revised by the researcher. Upon approval by the said experts, the set will be translated into the respondents' native language by someone who is fluent in that dialect, in order to ensure that the theme, wording, and tone of each statement or question are acceptable.

The researcher provided information about the conditions of school life for working student mothers to the higher educational authorities of Zambales. Authorities responsible for student and educational achievement would be able to utilize the information gathered from this research to devise more flexible and suitable school policies, programs, and guidelines

for various types of students, including the participants of the present study.

Data was evaluated by identifying themes from interview data. Themes aided in simplifying the outcome, allowing for a focus on the study's key purpose and answering the researcher's primary questions. However, because it is subjective to the researcher and there is a chance of misinterpreting the data, human error is common in content analysis. As a result, the researcher could arrive at inaccurate and unreliable decisions.

As mentioned, participants signed a written acceptance before participation in the study. However, they can also opt out and sign a withdrawal letter if they want to cancel their participation in the study. This is to ensure that their participation is voluntary and that they have the right to withdraw from the research study at any point in time and for any reason.

The participants were not forced to answer all of the questions. They were not subjected to physical or psychological abuse throughout the interview. The researcher provided a friendly and comfortable environment to establish rapport with the participants.

Furthermore, participants were fully informed about the objectives and nature of the study. Their responses and identities were kept confidential and utilized solely for academic purposes and for the research only.

The result of the study was communicated to the NCIP Office, concisely and simply, without disclosing the identities of the participants. As for the participants, the researcher's contact information was provided to them at the end of the interview in case they sought a copy of the findings.

The researcher identified herself as a working student mother. To address potential bias due to her personal experience, a bracketing process is employed. It includes the cautious effort to neutralize prior experiences and personal assumptions to maintain the fidelity of the participants' lived experiences. In this study, the researcher engaged in an endless self-reflection and reviewed her prejudices during the data analysis process to ensure that the findings perfectly characterized the participants' genuine experiences rather than being

influenced by the researcher's personal viewpoint.

Limitations and Delimitations

As mentioned, the study was focused on the Indigenous students of Zambales in tertiary education. The participants are primarily mothers with partners (husband, legally lawful partner) and child/children ranging in age from 0-13 who are currently enrolled in tertiary education in Zambales at the time of research writing. Hence, it does not generally reflect all others within the same group.

Though topics about Indigenous people's cultural and spiritual beliefs and values emerged in the responses, the research was interested in the experiences and challenges of working student mothers pursuing tertiary education, as approved by the National Commission on Indigenous People (NCIP) Office. It did not involve any cultural and spiritual beliefs and practices. A separate study must be conducted to learn more about the cultural and spiritual beliefs of the respondents.

The researcher used the descriptive-phenomenological qualitative approach. The researcher prepared guide questions for the data gathering. It is focused solely on lived experiences and does not entail a quantitative analysis. The study used a relatively small sample size, consisting of 12 participants. The researcher proposed a larger sample size for future research. The interview is free-flowing despite having a set of guide questions based on the interview to elicit the best outcome, as it requires a narrative of the participants. In some instances, they refuse to share or answer certain questions out of embarrassment, which

may affect their organization and family's reputation. This may have hampered the ultimate goal of the study.

Result and Discussion

1. Experiences of Indigenous Working Mothers in the Pursuit of Tertiary Education

In response to the first assertion of the problem, the experiences of working student mothers and their challenges are discussed. Participants described their academic experience as both hard and fulfilling. They are facing numerous challenges as IP-working student mothers. Being a mother, wife, and student is not an easy task. It requires a lot of patience, time, and effort to carry out each role. Each role they play has an equally important value in their life. Participants ranked their roles according to their importance: being a mother first, followed by being a student, and lastly, being a worker. Breiner's work acts as the theoretical validation for these findings. It suggests that the Ayta mothers' priorities are not just personally powered, but essential for their children's socio-emotional and cognitive development. Based on them, it is not only enough that they provide for their basic needs, but more importantly, they should be available for their emotional support and development. As one parent said:

"Pinakanakakachallenge po talaga yung sa pamilya ko. Yung sa mga anak ko, bilang isang nanay. Yung time ko sa kanila kulang na kulang. Pagbangon ko sa umaga, pagkaayos ko ng mga kailangan nila aalis na ako para pumasok sa trabaho. Minsan tulog pa sila. Tapos deretso na yun hanggang gabi pagpasok ko sa school. Pag-uwi ko ng gabi tulog na sila." – P7.

Table 1. Challenges as Experiences of Indigenous Working Mothers in the Pursuit of Tertiary Education

Theme	Theme Description
Balancing Parenthood and Personal Growth	This refers to experiences of being a primary caregiver and feeling the physical and psychological burden, which results in neglecting personal aspirations.
Time Management Problem	This refers to having less time with children, prioritizing responsibilities, and loss of personal autonomy and time.
Financial Struggles	This refers to low income and salary, and limited job opportunities.
Academic Challenges	This refers to feelings of fatigue, difficulty comprehending, the technology gap, and transportation challenges.

Balancing Parenthood and Personal Growth

Indigenous working student mothers navigate a complex landscape of competing roles, juggling the demands of motherhood, education, and employment. These roles can often create conflicting demands and feelings of guilt, stress, and exhaustion. Maintaining a balance between being a mother and a wife and pursuing their dreams is excessively challenging. As many of them admit to the difficulty of their roles, they find solace in seeing their children happy and knowing that they are doing their best in all aspects. As one participant (P1) shared, though the demands of these roles were difficult, it was still rewarding: "All of these roles are, to be honest, and I am both blessed and happy to have such challenging yet fulfilling roles."

The interaction among these roles brings about confusion and accumulation of fatigue physically and emotionally that hinders other priorities, leading to unnecessary sacrifices, self-doubt, and neglect of other duties. When asked about what was the most challenging role for them, most of the participants ranked them as follows: motherhood took first place, then their studies, then work-life.

Participant 6 emphasizes that becoming a student is a challenging task, as it requires careful consideration of numerous factors and responsibilities. She says, "Mahirap bilang isang estudyante. Kasi pag nag-aaral ka, di lang pagiging estudyante ang iisipin mo e. Siyempre pag pati mga gastusin sa school at sa bahay."

Participant 8 shared another concern that deeply worries her. She narrated, "Ah, pinakamahirap po 'yung sa pamilya. Lalo na pag nagkakasakit yung mga bata. Wala pa kaming panggastos." Additionally, one participant shared that aside from those tedious responsibilities, socialization with others is also being affected. As Participant 12 said, "Ang isa sa challenge sa akin eh yung kung paano makisalamuha at makibagay sa komunidad. Iba-iba ugali natin. Ang hirap makisama at kailangan makisabay sa takbo ng buhay. Kelangan kontrolin ang sarili."

Working student mothers navigate a complex web of challenges arising from their gender, socio-economic background, and racial/ethnic marginalization. Societal norms

often position women as the sole caregivers. This increases domestic burdens, such as household chores and childcare, which primarily fall on the shoulders of mothers, leaving them with less time for studies. Also, it limits educational attainment, wherein the pressure to prioritize childcare can hinder academic progress and career advancement.

The participants shared the taxing effects of meeting their children's physical and emotional needs, including feeding, bathing, dressing, schoolwork supervision, and emotional support. Indigenous mothers have historically and often been the primary caregivers for children, especially in the early years. Likewise, Cabaguing's observation (2017) does not simply imply a difficult situation in rearing a child but highlights a fundamental dilemma rooted in the conflict between the complex interplay of biological, social, and cultural factors. The demanding role of being a mother hinders an equally urgent need of the participants for personal growth. This reiterates that society expects them to prioritize their children's well-being and should be available to their children when they seek touch, supported by Participant 1: "As a mother, I have to take care of my kids, assist them when they wake up, feed them, and make sure they are well-loved."

The Filipino cultural values – "women nurture, and their advantages lie in housework," while "men provide, and their place is in the labor market" is a rigid adherence of Ayta families to the Filipino cultural values. This idea is crucial in understanding the cultural inequalities as identified in our findings. Further, these cultural values contribute to the discrimination faced by Ayta women who aspire to pursue a career. The institutionalization of the cultural belief that women's advantages lie in housework ultimately narrows their access to career paths. Subsequently, the discrimination faced by Ayta women aspiring for professional growth (Bayudan-Dacuycuy and Dacuycuy, cited in Wang) is firmly grounded in a social system that places less emphasis on women's professional development and imposes greater social constraints on their participation in the labor market, thus reinforcing gender gaps in management and wages.

Ayta indigenous working student mothers face a unique set of daily struggles that can be incredibly demanding. Mornings are exclusively devoted to juggling household responsibilities, such as managing chores like cleaning, cooking, and laundry, often with limited time and energy. Further, they always provide for the emotional well-being of their children. They are providing a nurturing and stable environment while experiencing their stress and emotions. The most frequent issues faced by the respondents were time management, money, family requirements, academic performance, and stress (Paredes, 2022). Participant 12 discussed the struggles she encounters in managing the demands of multiple roles: “Hirap na hirap po ako kasi ang hirap ng trabaho ko umiikot sa bahay, trabaho, eskwelahan.” Participants also noted a shifting of different roles and identities, particularly because of experiencing difficulty in achieving balance and integration of their familial, academic, and professional roles and identities.

Ayta indigenous working student mothers claimed that no role is ever unfulfilled. They constantly perceived themselves as a “delayed” professional, a “part-time” student, and an “occupied” mother due to the demands and strains from competing roles. The overlapping roles are not simply a means of prioritization, but a struggle to achieve an empowered self-identity.

Managing studies, work, and motherhood can leave little time or energy for their personal pursuits. Something often has to give. They often push aside their aspirations to meet the immediate needs of family and education. One mother was wondering if she made the right decision to enroll and prioritize their business to provide for the needs of her twin kids. She stated, “Pangarap ko makatapos pero ganun tayo mga nanay. Kasi tayo ang mga anak na natin ang priority. Di ko na maibibigay ang kailangan nila kung i-le-less priority ang Nego-syo.” Most of these women are dedicated to their families, especially to their children, often disregarding their personal growth and achievements. Increased home commitments, such as caring for young children and remote schooling, hampered their perceived ability to achieve ideal academic criteria, such as a fo-

cused concentration on work, productivity requirements, and the ability to demonstrate job proficiency and dedication (Miller & Riley, 2022).

As an Ayta indigenous mother, balancing work, studies, and childcare demands requires exceptional time management skills. They must squeeze in studying, homework, and attending classes around work and childcare schedules, leaving little time for personal needs. The results support this notion that one parent's function was limited because they needed to perform the student role (Manalang et al., 2015). It is more than a simple confirmation of role strain. Ayta's multiple roles constantly feel inadequate in all domains. When they focus on academics, they will feel parental guilt and vice versa. This cyclical feeling of deficiency can lead to burnout or dropping out.

Time Management Problem

Dealing with multiple responsibilities with different dynamics and expectations is hard to balance. Time management is difficult for women who juggle the demanding roles of motherhood and academic pursuits, highlighting that it was challenging since they had to learn how to manage their time well (Torres, 2017).

Motherhood has many social expectations associated with being a mother. This is also true with an Ayta mother. Their job does not end after producing a baby, but she has a greater expectation of responsibility for taking care of their offspring. Being a mother is one of the most demanding roles of an Ayta mother. Becoming a mother impacts every Ayta woman greatly by thinking of caring for and providing for their children. One participant shared:

“Alam ko bata pa mga anak ko, kelangan nila ng atensyon at lambing, kaso madalas di ko na maibigay ‘yun. Kasi parang lagi akong naghahabol sa oras para matapos ang gawain ko sa bahay, tapos susunod ko yung mga requirements namin sa school.” – P3

Having multiple roles can be draining for them because they want to give the best for each role they have in a limited time. Hence, they mostly forget their aspirations in life.

One of the respondents said that she was not thinking about herself anymore, but more about the welfare of her family.

“Kasi nga po ang priority nating mga magulang e yung maibigay yung pangangailangan nila. Hindi ko na iniisip kung ano ba gusto ko para sa sarili ko. Iniisip ko ngayon ano ba ang mas kailangan ng mga anak ko. Syempre para sa mga anak ko palagi” – P5

Having less time with their children has a direct association between inadequate child-care performance and subsequent poor social bonding (Ashipala & Natanael, 2022), explaining why many Ayta mother-students reported academic dropouts and lower academic performance—sacrificing their professional fight and neglecting personal aspirations to avoid the guilt of maternal failure and maintain the family’s emotional bond.

Moreover, some parents also experienced depression as one of the respondents said, “Nakaranas po ako ng depresyon. Sobra. Kasi ang hirap pagsabay sabayin. Kaso naisip ko andto na ako e kelangan ko matapos to. Kaya yung trabaho ko po sinisikap kong mairaos.”

However, it is important to remember that indigenous working student mothers also demonstrate remarkable resilience, resourcefulness, and dedication. They often develop strong time management skills, prioritize effectively, and find creative solutions to manage their roles. They are role models for their children, demonstrating the value of education, hard work, and perseverance. Even if they struggle greatly with time management, they can overcome it (Sicam et al., 2021). Participant 9 demonstrates exceptional resilience and strong time management skills, despite facing challenges with school requirements: “Despite na meron silang mga deadline napapasa ko na po mga kailangan. Time management din po.”

Financial Struggles

The life of a marginalized Ayta indigenous family is not easy. Supporting a family while pursuing education can be financially challenging. They might need to work multiple jobs or longer hours, further impacting their time and energy. Ayta women demonstrated that they were financially burdened; the majority of them ran out of money since they need to pay

for their education and their child, pointing out that Ayta working student mothers, in particular, who relied on their parents, had to decide what to prioritize (Torres, 2017). Adding to this concern were the other Ayta working student mothers with working partners who struggled to budget for their home and school costs. Two main reasons emerged from the responses: (1) low income and salary, and (2) limited job opportunities.

Participant 8 expressed her challenges in effectively managing time and finances, noting how difficult it has been to balance these two essential aspects of her daily life. She said, “Ang hirap hati-hatiin ng oras. Tapos ang sahod maliit lang. Tapos mga anak pa sinusupportahan.”

Participant 4 shared her struggle with managing the family allowance provided by her husband, highlighting the difficulty in budgeting effectively to meet their household needs. She quoted, “Tulungan siya sa financial sa araw-araw. Bilang asawa kailangan mo tipidin ang binibigay ng iyong asawa, mabudget mo ang sahod niya sa isang linggo sa pang-araw-araw ninyo ng inyong mag-anak, idagdag pa ang pamasaha mo sa school.”

Access to higher education, particularly at the tertiary level, may present insurmountable challenges for indigenous parents who must balance multiple roles, such as parenting, studying, and, on occasion, working full-time or part-time to provide for dependents while maintaining benefits to ensure their family’s survival.

Participant 9 shared that they were experiencing significant expenses related to their college course, highlighting the financial strain it is causing. She said, “Marami po kaming pangangailangan lalo na sa course ko magastos.” In addition, Participant 2 expressed another financial constraint related to the costs of school projects, further adding to their financial challenges: “Tapos pag may mga project at kelangan ng pera, ang hirap gawin.”

Academic Challenges

With the strains of caregiving and providing for the emotional and financial needs of the family, more often than not, they could not fully focus on their studies. The most problematic element that has a significant impact on their

school performance is the combination of academic and parenting responsibilities (Ogunji et al., 2019). The research findings indicate that school-related problems included difficulty in meeting deadlines in submitting assignments and projects, the inability to attend face-to-face lectures regularly, and inadequate preparation for exams (Dankyi et al., 2019). These difficulties clearly reflect the scarcity of time and other resources. Addressing the non-negotiable parental demands reduces the time, effort, and money allocated for important college tasks. The failure to meet deadlines is therefore interpreted as an inherent issue—the parental role repeatedly interrupts the Ayta student mothers' school-related task completion.

Consequently, a lack of academic concentration and preparation, parenting without a supportive partner, and other logistical or financial barriers could compound the problem and prevent the parents from finishing their degrees (Oyegun & Oyegun, 2022). Students' role conflicts harmed their academic performance (Ashipala & Natanael, 2022). Some participants testified:

“Malaki ang epekto sa pag-aaral ko siguro. May mga araw na sobrang pagod ko, ang hirap ko intindihin ang mga lessons. Minsan din nalelate ako, o kaya hindi makapasok dahil walang pamasaha man lang. Basta ganun. Tapos pag may mga project at kelangan ng pera, ang hirap gawin.” – P2

Moreover, Participant 8 shared another concern impacting her studies: the age gap and her struggles with technology illiteracy, which make it challenging to keep up with modern academic demands. She expressed, “Sa mga kapwa ko estudyante, ang hirap po makipagsabayan. Sa edad kong eto ang hirap lalo na gumagamit ng makaba-gong technology.

Nahihirapan talaga ako makipagsabayan. Marami po kaming kailangan gawin na project at activities na dapat salihan.”

Giving Meaning to Indigenous Working Mothers to their Experiences

Playing multiple roles simultaneously is very challenging, which contributes to their personal life experiences. They describe their daily lives as taxing because they require proper time management and a lot of effort in each role. Time management, discipline, order to perform, commitment, and a sense of responsibility are the major attitudes that every working student must possess (Faizuddin & Tumin, 2018).

Nevertheless, these hardships and challenging experiences make them more interested and inspire them to strive more in life. Their financial instability is one of the factors why they push through their education. Participants are unfavorably affected in their studies because of financial issues (Zambito, 2017). Getting married and bearing a child at an early age is one of the reasons for not being able to go to school on time, but it is not a hindrance to their aspiration of getting a degree despite their age. They believe that self-regulating behaviors, such as a high level of tolerance to fight self-issues and having a positive outlook and motivation in life, would help them to complete tertiary education.

Four (4) main themes emerged to describe the implications of their experiences on the quality of their lives, namely, (1) embracing positivity, (2) personal growth and achievement, (3) motivation and overcoming criticism, and (4) inspiring dignity. Table 2 highlights these themes as well as the subthemes and sample statements from the respondents.

Table 2. How Working Mothers give Meaning to their Experiences

Theme	Theme Description
Embracing positivity	This theme refers to being an empowered role model and an inspiration to others, valuing education.
Personal Growth and Achievement	This theme refers to self-esteem, personal growth and fulfillment, and future-oriented indigenous mothers.
Motivation and Overcoming Criticism	This theme refers to having a solidifying faith with a reliable support group.
Inspiring Dignity	This theme refers to uplifting the dignity of Indigenous Peoples.

Embracing positivity

Indigenous women are stewards of indigenous peoples' lands and resources (Razote, 2022). However, in many Indigenous communities, this gender-neutral concept of equality has been proven insufficient to overcome the myriad of barriers that Indigenous women face. Nonetheless, Ayta women demonstrated resiliency by embracing positivity despite all the hardships they encountered. These challenges result in the feeling of self-empowerment as they overcome every burden. One of the participants is a tribal chieftain from Botolan, Zambales. In addition to serving as their community's leader, she is a mother of five children, a government contract employee, and will soon graduate with a degree in education. Participant 8 shared, "Sa PCB po ako taz chieftain pa po. Ganun po ang ginagawa ko pinaghahahati hati ko yung oras ko. Halimbawa po, bilang isang chieftain, yung mga gusot gusot iniischedule ko po ng Saturday at Sunday. Halimbawa may mga kaso." She is the pinnacle of strength and dedication, having pursued her ambitions not just for herself but also for the benefit of her family and community. She is appreciative of everyone who supported her in achieving her goals and who had faith in her. She is grateful that they helped her until their financial difficulties are resolved and everything is falling into place. By performing well on all of her obligations, she hoped to return their goodwill and spread it to others.

Since they live closely and share culture, will, power, and kinship are abilities innate to these women. They are motivated to become a catalyst of change to help empower their people. Participant 11 said, "Bilang isang Ayta, gusto ko makatulong sa kapwa ko Ayta pagdating ng araw pag nakatapos ako. Gusto ko ipamulat din sa kanila na hindi basehan ang kahirapan basta pursigido ka makakatapos ka."

Despite the additional tasks, they see the positivity in pursuing tertiary education. Ayta mothers who pursue higher education while raising children confront persistent demands from two directions: school and family (Cabaguig, 2017). Despite these bidirectional struggles, participants feel that their increased empowerment and self-efficacy as a result of

their education have restored the sense of dignity they had previously lost (Dasig, 2020). Higher education provides more opportunities for earning and enjoyment. One participant said:

"Nakita ko kasi sa panahon ngayon dapat pala makapag-aral ka. Napakahalaga pala nang may pinag-aralan. Mag-iiba ang tingin sayo ng tao. Yung mababang tingin sayo medyo mababago. Gusto ko may ipagmamalaki ako na kahit ganitong edad ko may narating ako." – P12

While Participant 8 acknowledged that education is the only treasure she can give to her children, something they can truly be proud of. She narrated, "Ay ma'am narealize ko kasi wala naman akong maipapamana sa mga anak ko. Pag-aaral na lang maipagmamalaki ko. May time na napagisip isip ko na ang hirap pala ng hindi nakapag-aral. Parang ang baba ng tingin sa akin."

Another point of interest is that they turn into an inspiration to others. Ayta working student mothers break the mold of traditional gender roles. They defy the notion that motherhood solely defines a woman's capabilities. Their success proves that women can pursue their ambitions while nurturing their families. The women in this study believe that their lived experiences can encourage and inspire other student mothers to pursue higher education.

"Sa mga kagaya kong single mom na working student tandaan hindi lahat ng dinadanas nating hirap ay diyan na lamang tayo mag stay, samahan mo ng gawa at dasal ang bawat araw na lumilipas. Sa atin upang sa panahon na tayo ay nanghihina lalakas tayo. Hindi lamang ang iyong sarili ang iyong dapat mong pahalagahan at ingatan kung hindi may anak at magulang ka pa na dapat mong ilagay lagi sa iyong priority dahil sila ang panghuhugutan mo ng lakas at tag ng loob." – P10

Moreover, Participant 1 shared another positive outlook on herself. She said, "I see myself as a living model to working student mothers that it may seem impossible but nothing is impossible if you work hard for it."

Personal Growth and Achievement

These women find a sense of personal accomplishment and rediscover their passions

and capabilities through their educational journey. Their sense of achievement may stem from different aspects of their journey, highlighting personal growth, the impact on their family, or the newfound purpose gained through education. Participant 11 aspires to earn a diploma to achieve greater success and open more opportunities for herself. She said, “Kasi po sa nakikita ko nung huminto ako, mahirap maghanap ng trabaho. Sa panahon ngayon diploma ang hinahanap nila. Kaya gusto ko makatapos.”

Participant 11 expressed a sense of happiness and fulfillment with the progress she is making, little by little: “Masaya po ako kasi unti ko ng naaabot ang pangarap ko. Marami na rin pong katutubo ang nakatapos kaya naging inspirasyon ko sila.”

Working mothers often emphasize the importance of education and perseverance that they instill in their children. Witnessing their mother's dedication can inspire their children to pursue their goals with similar determination. Additionally, earning a degree or higher qualification empowers them to potentially secure better-paying jobs, leading to improved financial stability for themselves and their families. This creates a sense of security and accomplishment. One mother said:

“Kagaya po ngayon, Practice Teacher na ako, sinasabi po ng anak ko, ay Mama ko Teacher. Parang mas nagiging proud ako pag yung anak ko pinagmamalaki ako. Dapat pag nakapasa ako, dapat magawa ko talaga yug pinagmamalaki ng anak ko. Pangarap ng parents ko yun (Teacher). Pero okay na rin sa akin kasi naisip ko pag degree holder ako, mas mabibigyan ko ng magandang future mga anak ko.” – P6

Working student mothers' experiences are a powerful testament to self-improvement due to the unique challenges they overcome and the skills they develop, such as time management, resourcefulness, discipline, determination, and resilience. Participant 6 consistently seeks out solutions to alleviate their financial challenges, while Participant 3 is motivated by a strong desire to prove something — not just to others, but primarily to herself.

Successfully navigating the challenges fosters a strong sense of self-efficacy, the belief in

one's ability to achieve goals. This newfound confidence empowers them to tackle future challenges with a positive and determined mindset. Further, the pursuit of education while juggling motherhood demonstrates a growth mindset. They embrace challenges as opportunities to learn and continuously improve themselves. Participant 3 was able to boost her self-esteem through her studies, hoping that her efforts would one day improve their quality of life: “Nung una, mababa talaga self-esteem ko. Kasi nga nabuntis ng maaga. Di nakatapos ng pag-aaral. Walang narating sa buhay. Pero nagbago yun nung nag-aral ako. Nagkaroon ako ng pag-asa na balang araw, aasenso din ako.”

Pursuing a career together with a fulfilling education is never easy. Participants understand the value and difficulties of education as students, but they also think that those difficulties are only transient (Dasig, 2020). They have a strong drive to overcome these obstacles because completing their degree will allow their family to realize their ambitions. They fervently think that by doing this, they would be able to give their kids a bright and safe future. Participant 4 said, “I have decided to go back to college for my kids so that I can give them a better future and have a degree.”

Furthermore, Participant 3 dedicated her decision to pursue college to her children, hoping it will pave the way for a brighter future for them. She said, “Saka yung mga anak ko gusto ko mabigyan ng magandang buhay. Kaya ako nagsisikap na makata-pos ng pag-aaral.”

By pursuing their education, working mothers become powerful role models for their children, demonstrating the importance of perseverance and striving for a better life.

Motivation and Overcoming Criticism

Ayta working student mothers possess an extraordinary wellspring of strength and motivation. They face constant challenges like balancing demanding work schedules, academic pressures, and the responsibilities of motherhood. Their ability to persevere through these hurdles showcases immense strength. Their love for their children serves as a powerful motivator. Every sacrifice made, every challenge they overcome, is fueled by a deep desire to

provide a secure and nurturing environment for their family. Participant 1 draws her strength from her family, finding support and motivation in them, quoting, "My family, my kids especially."

Working student mothers are adept at finding creative solutions to challenges. They exhibit exceptional self-discipline in managing their endeavors, at home or with other people (Regaspi, 2023).

Aside from their family, one powerful motivation that keeps them going is their faith in God. Most of these women relied on prayers and their faith in the Lord during trying times - trusting that faith is a source of inner strength, offering solace and motivation during challenging times. It helps them cope with the immense pressure and enables them to juggle their various responsibilities. Their faith can provide a sense of meaning and purpose in their lives, reminding them that their struggles are part of a larger picture and contributing to a greater good. When asked about their leisure time or their way of releasing stress, they mostly replied by conversing with God. Participant 12 shares a deep and unwavering bond with God, drawing strength and guidance from her faith: "Ang ginagawa ko po at pang relax na rin ay yung pumupunta ako ng simbahan. Kinakausap ko ang panginoon. Nagiging okay din ako. The best po yun."

Moreover, Participant 11 shared that she finds solace and peace in the church, where she feels a sense of calm and spiritual comfort: "Pag Sunday ma'am. Nagchu-church po kami. Opo mam. Sa church talaga kami nakakapag relax."

Relationships with family, friends, and other parents were common sources of assistance throughout their college careers, as they needed additional financial and emotional support as well as childcare assistance (Zambito, 2017; Rogayan, 2019). Thus, all the participants mentioned having a solid support group that pushes them forward and beyond. Working student mothers can benefit from a variety of support groups, depending on their specific needs and circumstances. Participant 2 shared, "Very supportive ang pamilya ko, pamilya ng asawa ko, lalo na ang asawa ko, isama mo na rin ang mga instructor at classmate ko."

Participant 11 is experiencing strong and holistic support from her husband, which is making a positive difference in her life. When a partner offers both financial and practical assistance, it can significantly reduce stress and create a more balanced, harmonious living situation. Like what she said, "Opo ma'am. IP din po sya. Naiintindi-han naman po nya ako. Pero pag wala na ako sa bahay sya (asawa) naman na po."

Two of the women shared heart-warming stories of those people who were the main reasons for them to pursue greater heights in life, citing that their life teachings and advice are engraved and embedded deep within their being. Participant 7's father plays a crucial role in her life by providing unwavering support and encouragement to pursue her studies. Having a parent who is both a motivator and a source of inspiration can be a transformative influence on a person's academic and personal growth, as evident by the respondent's statements: "Bale ma'am ang talagang nagtulak sa akin na makatapos ay yung Tatay ko. Naku ma'am, very supportive po talaga siya. Siya din yung nagsabi na mag-aral na ako habang may trabaho daw po siya."

These women also noted the big influence and impact of having considerate and understanding individuals who can relate to their situations. Teachers and classmates played a significant role in supporting working student mothers in their academic journey. Some teachers offered flexible deadlines for assignments or tests when unexpected situations arise due to child-related needs. Their classmates provided a sense of community and belongingness within the classroom.

Participant 12 expressed gratitude for the restrictions set by her teachers, recognizing that, although initially challenging, they ultimately contributed to her personal growth and led to positive outcomes in her academic and life skills development: "Okay naman po sila. Kasi para sa akin, may mga na-encounter na namimisinterpret ko pero bandang huli para sa akin din lang naman pala yung mga paghihigpit nila."

Inspiring Dignity

The life of an Indigenous peoples' (IP) group is different from others. Most of their elders are illiterate. Most of their elders failed to study and stay in the mountains to make a living. Education is not a priority for them since they have a unique belief. However, due to the increasing curiosity and introduction to education in the mountainous area, members of the IP community have been enlightened about the importance of education in their lives.

Participants explained the impact of continuing education on them as members of the IP Community. Most of the participants noted that they wanted to uplift the dignity of their IP Community. They take pride in contributing to the growth of their group and aspire to be among the successes that shape their community. They were studying not just to secure a future livelihood, but also to discover a deeper sense of purpose in their lives. Participant 1 shared, "As an IP, I feel that I can lift the dignity of the IP community."

Participant 4 aspires to be a powerful symbol of change for her Indigenous People (IP) group, striving to inspire progress and foster a sense of empowerment within her community as she stated "Gusto kong ipagmalaki ako ng IP community bilang isang taong may pangarap sa buhay at gusto ko maging daan ako para mabago ang tingin nila sa mga IP, yung hindi na mamaliitin ng iba."

Additionally, Participant 9 aspires to be an inspiration for other Indigenous People (IP), encouraging them to dream big and pursue their ambitions with confidence: "Bilang IP, itong pangarap ko ay sumasalin sa mga pangarap namin. Alam ko di lang ako ang IP na nangangarap, at dumarami na ang professional. Gusto ko maging isa ako sa kanila."

The respondents are optimistic despite the hardship in their lives, as evident in the responses from the interview. Some respondents also give a rich reason behind their eagerness to finish schooling. Their statement highlights the hope that education can bring a better life for them. Other participant has dedicated her struggles to her family and the Indigenous Peoples (IP) community she belongs to, hoping that someday, people will view them in a different light.

Participant 10 also shared a remarkable quote that she believes will inspire and motivate her Indigenous People (IP) group to overcome challenges and pursue their goals with determination: "Bilang isang IP, gusto ko ipagmalaki ang mga kapwa ko katutubo. Maging role model sa ibang IP na mangarap kahit maa-gang nag-aasawa."

Guidance and Counseling Support Needed by the Indigenous Working Student Mothers in the University Setting

Drawing upon the narratives of IP (Indigenous People) working student mothers, a culturally sensitive support program can be built around the following elements: first is addressing the socioeconomic challenges of these women and exploring community support structures to offer childcare assistance. Thus, upon analyzing the responses of the participants, three (3) main themes appeared to help them achieve their academic goals and contribute meaningfully to their communities, namely, (1) economic support, (2) flexible curriculum, and (3) establishing support centers for working student mothers.

Table 3. Guidance and Counseling Support Needed by the Indigenous Working Student Mothers in the University Setting

Theme	Theme Description
Economic Support	This theme refers to alleviating financial struggles through looking for livelihood opportunities.
Flexible Curriculum	This theme refers to the importance of blended learning, adjusted deadlines, and attending weekend or evening class opportunities.

Theme	Theme Description
Establishing a Support Center for Working Student Mothers	This theme refers to providing a voice for Indigenous working parents by having a representative at a student organization.

Economic Support

Aside from the financial and educational assistance given by the government, a specific program tailored to their circumstances is yet to be developed. There is still a need to raise awareness that highlights the challenges faced by IP student mothers and promotes the importance of educational equity for Indigenous communities. The main problem claimed by these women is their financial struggles, and all of them hope to have livelihood opportunities to help with their everyday endeavors. There is a need to equip IP student mothers with skills and resources to establish small businesses or income-generating activities that cater to their flexible schedules and cultural context. Specifically, some programs that the leaders can provide are entrepreneurship programs, job offerings, and additional financial assistance.

Participant 8 hopes to establish an additional livelihood program that will help alleviate their financial burdens and provide greater economic stability: “Kung pwede po sana mag-gawa sila ng programa yung livelihood program po para po sa amin. Para po mayroon po kami pinagkukuhaan sa araw araw.”

Two of the participants mentioned that there should be more working opportunities near their area of residency or school so that they can have more time to accommodate and attend to their many roles. Additionally, they could still work and finance their school and home expenses.

Flexible Curriculum

Safe spaces should be created for IP student mothers to connect, share experiences, and build a sense of community within the educational institution. These women believe that a flexible curriculum caters to their unique needs while juggling studies with work and family responsibilities. This type of curriculum entails blended learning, flexible deadlines, and weekend or evening classes. Participant 2 shared, “Pero sana magkaroon sana siguro ng

special curriculum para sa mga working mother tulad namin.”

Participant 1 asked for a blended learning modality for working student mothers and single parents. A flexible curriculum with additional support services can create a more inclusive learning environment that empowers working student mothers to succeed in their academic pursuits.

Establishing a Support Center for Working Student Mothers

Establishing support centers for working student mothers can be a crucial step in addressing the challenges they face and fostering their academic success. The center should strive to empower working student mothers by providing a comprehensive range of support services that address their academic, financial, and personal needs.

Participant 1 wishes for the establishment of daycare facilities, allowing her to focus on her responsibilities without worrying about her young child being far from her: “Having a daycare facility, especially when there are emergencies that can occur unexpectedly, so that we can bring our child inside the campus.”

The center will aim to provide access to counseling services, stress management workshops, and support groups that can address the emotional toll of balancing various responsibilities. Further, it would strive to organize workshops, social events, and mentorship programs to foster a sense of community and allow student mothers to connect and share experiences.

The challenges faced by the IP-working student mothers have been turned into a meaningful existence of their being. Four themes emerge under this meaning in their life. These are embracing positivity, personal growth and achievement, motivation and overcoming criticism, and inspiring dignity.

To properly propose a guidance and counseling support program for the IP-working

student mothers, they have been asked about the programs needed to support and alleviate their difficulties. According to them, the support they need is economic support, establishing a support center for working student mothers, and a flexible curriculum. Based on these findings, the researcher developed a tailored guidance and counseling support program for IP-working student mothers in Zambales.

Indigenous People who play many roles, including mother, working student, and wife. These centers can help working student mothers succeed and promote educational justice by providing a comprehensive support system that addresses their academic, financial, and personal needs.

A guidance and counseling program is a planned series of activities, support systems, and interventions designed to provide guidance and help individuals make informed decisions, typically in personal, educational, or career contexts. The researcher designed the program to support Indigenous working student mothers in their difficult areas, such as personal development, educational choices, career planning, and overall well-being.

Indigenous working mothers face unique challenges in balancing academic responsibilities with family obligations, work commitments, and often limited financial resources. To support Indigenous working mothers in their academic journey, universities can implement various programs and services that acknowledge their unique needs and foster their success. The guidance and counseling support program was based on the findings of the study.

This guidance and counseling support program aims to provide holistic support to Indigenous working student mothers, addressing both emotional well-being and practical challenges, with a strong emphasis on cultural sensitivity and community-building. By addressing their unique needs in a supportive, safe, and nurturing environment, the program will empower these mothers to succeed academically, personally, and professionally.

Table 3 below shows a guidance and counseling support programs matrix, specifically designed to be tailored to the unique needs of Indigenous working student mothers, fostering their success and well-being in the university environment.

Activities	Service	Objectives	People Involved
Focus Area / Component: Academic Coaching and Counseling (Based on the findings, Indigenous working student mothers are struggling to keep up with their coursework due to a lack of focus and limited knowledge of computer usage, which is contributing to low academic performance and failures.)			
Computer Literacy Program	Career Guidance	To assist Indigenous Mothers in addressing problems of computer illiteracy.	Guidance and Counseling Staff Computer Experts
Indigenous Faculty and Peer Mentorship Programs	Information Service and Career Counseling	To provide guidance, mentorship, and a sense of belonging to Indigenous working mothers by pairing them with faculty members, staff, or other Indigenous students who have navigated similar challenges.	Guidance and Counseling Staff, Peer Counselor
Home visitation	Follow-up	To assess their situation at home and give recommendations for the improvement of guidance and counseling services.	Guidance and Counseling Staff

Activities	Service	Objectives	People Involved
Focus Area / Component: Personal Development and Counseling (Indigenous working student mothers often neglect their personal aspirations and health due to the need to balance and prioritize their various responsibilities.)			
Health and Wellness Program and Seminar for IP-working student mothers	Information Service	To educate Indigenous working mothers about the importance of health and wellness.	Guidance and Counseling Staff
Culturally Sensitive Counseling Services	Counseling	Develop support groups or counseling sessions specifically for Indigenous women focused on stress management, emotional well-being, and coping strategies.	Guidance Counselors
Career Talk and Counseling	Information and Career Development Service	Offer guidance on career planning and development, helping mothers explore career options, manage time for professional advancement, and align their personal aspirations with academic goals.	Guidance Counselors
Seminar on Time Management	Information and Support Service	To assist them with their time management issues.	Guidance and Counseling Staff
Home visitation and Personal Coaching	Follow-up	To assess their situation at home and give recommendations for the improvement of the guidance program.	Guidance and Counseling Staff
Indigenous Peer-led Support Circles	Counseling Service	Organize regular peer support groups where Indigenous mothers can share their experiences, challenges, and successes.	Guidance and Counseling Staff and Peer facilitators
Focus Area: Family and Social Development (Indigenous working student mothers often face financial constraints and rely heavily on the support of others as a source of motivation and strength.)			
Job Fair Assistance	Placement	To help Indigenous working student mothers find additional sources of income to ease their financial struggles.	Guidance and Counseling Staff
Seminar on Financial Literacy	Information Service	To assist them in their financial management.	Guidance and Counseling Staff

Activities	Service	Objectives	People Involved
Peer Support and Community Building “Indigenous Mothers’ Circle”	Information and Support Service	Organize and establish Indigenous mothers’ regular social events to address specific challenges related to parenting, work-life balance, and academic pressures.	Guidance and Counseling Staff
Motherhood and Childcare Seminar	Information and Support Service	To assist and educate Indigenous working student mothers in childcare and motherhood.	Guidance and Counseling Staff
Establishing a Chapel in the University	Personal / Religious Coaching	To have a room and time for faith as their source of inner peace.	Guidance and Counseling Staff
Stress Management and Emotional Well-being Workshops Featuring Stress Reduction Techniques and Resilience Building	Information and Support Service	Equip Indigenous working mothers with tools and strategies to manage stress and prioritize their mental health.	Guidance and Counseling Staff
Regular Check-ins	Counseling Service	Create opportunities for group sessions or individual consultations where mothers can discuss their mental health and emotional well-being, as well as gain reassurance and guidance.	Guidance and Counseling Staff
Family and Work-Life Balance Counseling Featuring: Setting boundaries Support in Managing Guilt	Counseling Service	Offer guidance on how to maintain a balance between family, work, and academic commitments.	Guidance and Counseling Staff

Conclusion

This study has explored the challenges encountered by Indigenous working student mothers in Zambales as they pursue tertiary education, shedding light on their struggles and the meaningful experiences they derive from their academic journey and personal responsibilities. The findings reveal that balancing multiple roles— a mother, a wife, and a student— presents significant obstacles. These women navigate challenges such as time management struggles, financial limitations, academic pressures, and the physical and emotional strain of balancing their responsibilities.

Despite these challenges, they continue to find inspiration in their roles as caregivers and providers, demonstrating remarkable resilience and determination.

Through the narratives of these working student mothers, it is evident that their experiences are deeply shaped by cultural values and a strong sense of responsibility to their families. Their desire for personal growth, financial stability, and the betterment of their children's future serves as a powerful motivation to pursue higher education, despite the difficulties they face. The themes of positivity, personal growth, motivation, and dignity emerged as

crucial factors that helped these women overcome adversity.

To support their educational journey, it is recommended that universities and colleges in Zambales implement a culturally sensitive guidance and counseling program tailored specifically to Indigenous working student mothers. The program should address key challenges such as financial instability, time management difficulties, and the need for academic flexibility. Providing economic support, such as scholarships and financial aid, offering a flexible curriculum, and establishing dedicated support centers on campus are essential to helping these women succeed academically while balancing their familial and personal responsibilities.

Considering the NCIP's limitations concerning profound cultural study, it is recommended that the formulation and implementation of the proposed guidance and counseling program must be conducted through an active consultation and collaboration with the Ayta elders and leaders to ensure cultural appropriateness and practical significance.

By embracing these recommendations, educational institutions can create an environment where Indigenous working student mothers feel supported, empowered, and able to achieve their academic and personal goals. The proposed program will not only help these mothers overcome the barriers they face but will also contribute to their overall well-being, fostering a more inclusive and nurturing academic community for Indigenous students.

This conclusion seamlessly ties together the findings, themes, and recommendations, emphasizing the importance of cultural sensitivity and comprehensive support systems for Indigenous working student mothers. The Ayta working student mother's way of life has remained independent from mainstream Philippine society. They have a strong sense of self-identity and are committed to self-determination for the betterment of their family, people, culture, and unique way of life.

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