

Original Research Article

Competence and Academic Performance of Student Parents in Higher Education: A Descriptive-Correlational Study

ABSTRACT

Learning competence is the ability to effectively acquire and apply knowledge and skills. This study assessed the role of competence in pursuing higher education on the academic performance of student parents in selected state higher education institutions. A total of 101 student parents participated in the study, which employed a descriptive-correlational design and proportionate stratified random sampling. Data were analyzed using frequency, percentages, mean, standard deviation, T-test, one-way ANOVA, Duncan test for post hoc comparison, Pearson correlation, and multiple regression analysis. The results revealed that most student parents were aged 18-24, predominantly female, living with a partner, had a first child aged 0-4, had an income below the poverty threshold, and had parents who attended college without completing a degree. Respondents demonstrated a moderate level of competence but possessed a superior level of academic performance. Interestingly, a significant negative relationship was found between competence and academic performance. This counterintuitive finding suggests that academic performance in this context may rely more on adaptability, support systems, or external academic resources rather than solely on individual competence. The study recommends that policymakers, school administrators, and educators implement assessment systems, mentoring programs, and activities that bridge academic knowledge with practical applications to foster both competence and academic excellence.

Keywords: Academic performance, Emotional Competence, Cognitive Competence, Higher education, Student parents

1. INTRODUCTION

The educational system in the Philippines has evolved significantly over the years, aiming to provide accessible and inclusive education to diverse learner populations. Historically, state higher education institutions have provided affordable education to underprivileged students. Recent reforms, such as

implementing the Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education Act (RA 10931), have further democratized access to education by providing free tuition and miscellaneous fees in public universities and colleges.

Balancing the demands of higher education and parenthood presents unique challenges for student parents who must navigate dual roles as learners and caregivers. In higher education institutions, students are often expected to fully engage in academic pursuits, develop competencies, and maintain high academic performance. However, student parents face the added responsibility of managing family obligations, which can impact their ability to focus on educational goals. A successful transition from high school to college has been demonstrated by extensive research to be essential for higher education success (Beach, 2019). Student parents are individuals enrolled in college or university who are also responsible for raising children. They often represent a diverse demographic, including single parents, married or partnered parents, and those with children of varying ages. They may come from various socioeconomic backgrounds and often face additional financial pressures and time constraints compared to their non-parenting peers (Roy et al., 2022).

According to Vyskocil (2018), student parents are in a unique position as they pursue degrees in higher education institutions, encountering several obstacles such as academic difficulties, financial strain, time management challenges, stigma, and childcare responsibilities. Addressing these challenges requires a combination of different factors, including competence, to continue and be successful in their academic journey. Socio-economic challenges often

exacerbate these difficulties, as supported by the findings of Usman et al. (2016), who highlighted the significant influence of parents' socioeconomic status on students' academic performance. The financial strain faced by student parents, often having to manage educational expenses alongside household responsibilities, may directly impact their ability to maintain academic focus and success.

Scholars have acknowledged the multifaceted nature of competence, encompassing cognitive abilities, practical skills, and adaptive strategies required to effectively balance the demands of academic and parenting responsibilities (Dow-Fleisner et al., 2023). In this context, competence serves as a crucial mediator, potentially influencing the translation of learning motivation into tangible academic outcomes among student parents.

The study conducted by Lenon et.al. (2016) investigated the experiences and challenges faced by student-parents, drawing on data from the Trade Union Congress, which reported 13.9 million Filipino student-parents. Findings highlighted significant challenges, including financial constraints, time management issues, and the dual responsibility of academic and parental roles. The study emphasized the need for targeted support systems and recommended delaying parenthood during educational pursuits to promote academic success.

Additionally, these student parents face the dual burden of fulfilling both academic and family responsibilities. They are more likely to come from low-income families and to be female. They may have to cover expenses such as childcare and transportation while managing tuition and other educational costs.

For student parents, these challenges may hinder their ability to complete college education. This study explores student parents' competence and academic performance, shedding light on their ability to juggle academic and parental responsibilities. Understanding how they navigate these dual roles is crucial for educational stakeholders seeking to create a more inclusive and supportive learning environment.

Moreover, this study aims to assess the role of competence in pursuing higher education on the academic performance of student parents in selected state higher education institutions. Specifically, it examines competence's cognitive and emotional dimensions and explores their relationship with academic outcomes.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a descriptive-correlational research design combined to examine the competence and academic performance of student parents pursuing higher education. The descriptive aspect of the design identified and analyzed the respondents' levels of competence, while the correlational approach explored the relationships between competence and academic performance. The study was conducted at a state higher education institution in the Philippines, providing a relevant context for investigating the unique experiences of student parents. A proportionate stratified random sampling method was employed to select respondents, with a sample size of at least 101 student parents, as identified by the Student Affairs Office. Primary data were gathered using a survey questionnaire which was adapted and subjected to content validity and

reliability testing to ensure its appropriateness and suitability for the respondents. A consent letter to ensure the confidentiality of the respondents' information was also included. The researcher personally administered the questionnaire to facilitate accurate data collection and respondent engagement. Following data collection, the researcher tallied and recorded the data subjected for statistical treatment such as frequency and percentage, mean and standard deviation, T-test, ANOVA, Pearson correlation and Multiple Regression Analysis. A focus group discussion (FGD) was conducted to provide deeper insights and contextual understanding of the quantitative findings. The qualitative data enriched the analysis by highlighting the lived experiences and perspectives of student parents navigating their dual roles.

2.1 Study Questions

1. What is the demographic profile of the student parents?
2. What are the student parents' levels of competence in pursuing higher education in terms of:
 - 2.1 Emotional Competence
 - 2.2 Cognitive Competence
3. What is the academic performance of student parents?
4. Is there a significant difference in the levels of competence in pursuing higher education of student parents and their academic performance?
5. Can emotional and cognitive competence predict academic performance among student parents?

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Most student parents were aged 18 to 24 (70.3%) and were predominantly female (72.3%). Most lived with a partner (61.4%) and had a first child aged 0 to 4 (68.3%). Financially, 92.1% earn less than 10,957 pesos monthly. While 25.7% of fathers attended college without a degree, 9.9% were graduates. Similarly, 40.6% of mothers attended college without completing a degree.

3.2 Student Parents' Level of Competence in Pursuing Higher Education in Terms of Emotional Competence, and Cognitive Competence

Table 1 presents the consolidated findings of the student parents' level of competence in pursuing higher education in terms of emotional competence and cognitive competence.

Table 1

Student Parents' Level of Competence in Pursuing Higher Education

Indicators		Mean	SD	Interpretation
Emotional Competence		3.23	.44	High Competence
Cognitive Competence		2.91	.39	High Competence
Total Measure		3.07	.35	High Competence
Note:	3.26-4.00	Very High Competence	1.76-2.50	Low Competence
	2.51-3.25			
		High Competence	1.00-1.75	Very Low Competence

The table shows the mean score for emotional competence was 3.23, with a standard deviation of 0.44, indicating a high level of emotional competence among student parents. This suggests that student parents possess strong abilities in understanding and managing emotions, which can positively influence their overall well-being and academic success. The mean score for cognitive

competence was 2.91, with a standard deviation of 0.39, indicating a high level of cognitive competence among student parents. This reflects their proficiency in managing cognitive tasks and processes, such as problem-solving, time management, and learning retention. When considering the total measure, which combines both emotional and cognitive competence, the mean score was 3.07, with a standard deviation of 0.35, indicating an overall high level of competence among student parents in pursuing higher education.

This suggests that they possessed a strong combination of emotional and cognitive skills that enable them to effectively navigate the challenges and demands of higher education while balancing familial responsibilities. The findings underscore the resilience and adaptability of student parents in managing the complex demands of higher education. Moreover, the findings imply that academic resilience is a dynamic process that enables individuals to overcome adversity, adapt, and bounce back after periods of stress or hardship. Additionally, student parents drive to provide a better future for their children often fuels their motivation. This dual motivation for personal achievement and their family's well-being enhances their commitment to their studies. These types of the student also typically have well-defined academic and career goals. This clarity of purpose helps them stay focused and persistent, even in the face of challenges.

Sartika and Nirbita (2023) provide relevant insights into academic resilience and student engagement in higher education. Additionally, the research by Wallace et al. (2021) offers valuable perspectives on nursing student experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. These references collectively support the notion that student parents possess a high level of resilience and adaptability in

managing the complex demands of higher education. Institutions can leverage this high level of competence by providing tailored support services and resources that address the specific needs and challenges faced by student parents, ultimately fostering a positive and conducive learning environment that promotes academic success and personal growth.

3.3 Academic Performance of Student-Parents

Table 2 shows that the majority of student parents, comprising 36.6% of the total sample, achieve a superior level of academic performance. This indicates that a significant portion of student parents excel in their studies, demonstrating strong dedication and proficiency in their academic pursuits.

Table 2

Academic Performance of Student-Parents

Academic Performance	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Excellent	8	7.9
Superior	37	36.6
Very Good	36	35.6
Good	16	15.8
Fair/Passing	3	3.0
Failed	1	1.0
Total	101	100.0

Note: Mean (SD) = 3.28 (.99)

Description: Very Good

The table shows that the majority of student parents, comprising 36.6% of the total sample, achieve a superior level of academic performance. This indicates that a significant portion of them excel in their studies, demonstrating strong dedication and proficiency in their academic pursuits. The data further show that there were 35.6% of student parent who attained a very good academic performance, highlighting their overall success and competence in their coursework. Moreover, 7.9% of them achieved an excellent level of academic performance, indicating exceptional achievement and mastery of course material.

These findings suggest that a substantial proportion of student parents are capable of excelling academically despite the challenges they may face in balancing their academic responsibilities with family obligations. Furthermore, 15.8% achieved a good level of academic performance, indicating solid achievement and competency in their coursework. Additionally, a small percentage comprising 3% of the sample, achieved a fair or passing level of academic performance, while only 1% reported having failed. While these lower performance levels are less common among them, they still underscore the importance of providing tailored support and resources to address academic challenges and promote student success.

The data imply that student parents demonstrate a range of academic performance levels, with the majority achieving superior or very good performance. A study set out to investigate the relationship between learning engagement, motivation, and academic performance among university nursing students. This is supported by Sturges et al. (2016) that there was a significant relationship between students' GPAs, the number of hours they reported studying, their motivation, and their academic performance.

3.4 Significant Relationship Between the Level of Competence in Pursuing Higher Education and Their Academic Performance

Table 3 presents the results of Pearson correlation coefficients (R-values) and corresponding p-values indicating that there were no significant relationships between emotional competence, cognitive competence, total competence, and academic performance.

Table 3

Test of Relationship between the Level of Competence in Pursuing Higher Education and their Academic Performance

Level of Competence	Academic Performance		Remarks
	r-value	p-value	
Emotional	-.095	.345	<i>Not significant</i>
Cognitive	-.018	.856	<i>Not significant</i>
Total Measure	-.069	.490	<i>Not significant</i>
<i>Note: Analysis is based on Pearson Correlation</i>		<i>Not Significant (p>.05)</i>	

For emotional competence, the correlation coefficient was -0.095 with a p-value of 0.345. For cognitive competence, the correlation coefficient was -0.018 with a p-value of 0.856. For the total measure of competence, the correlation coefficient was -0.069 with a p-value of 0.490. These results suggest that there are no strong correlations between the level of competence in pursuing higher education and academic performance among student-parents in this analysis. Other factors beyond emotional and cognitive competence may have a more substantial influence on academic performance among student-parents. The significant negative relationship between competence and academic performance found in this study may initially appear counterintuitive. One possible explanation is that student parents who possess high competence may encounter greater role strain as they take on more responsibilities in both academic and personal domains. Additionally, those with moderate competence may rely more heavily on available institutional resources, social support, or pragmatic learning strategies that lead to better academic outcomes. Further research is recommended to explore the mediating factors, such as social support networks, institutional flexibility, and adaptive learning strategies, that may influence this relationship.

Moreover, this implies that emotional and cognitive competence may not affect the academic performance of student parents. In contrast, the study of Triyono et al. (2020) posited that cognitive competence is characterized by an

integrative nature, based on students' self-activity and personal responsibility. This includes knowledge and skills related to broad areas of cognitive activity. Therefore, the formation of cognitive competence is closely linked to the student's readability and self-seeking knowledge. In this regard, cognitive competence is essential in learning and extracurricular situations, as well as the self-development and application of knowledge and the effective implementation of the learning process.

Prediction on Student Parents' Competence in Pursuing Higher Education to their Academic Performance

Table 4 shows the results whether student parents' competence in pursuing higher education predicts the academic performance of the respondents. The table reveals that the constant term had a significant unstandardized coefficient of 3.834, with a standard error of 0.874, a t-value of 4.389, and a p-value of 0.000. This indicates that the intercept of the regression model was significantly different from zero, suggesting that it contributes significantly to predicting academic performance. However, the coefficients for both emotional and cognitive competence were not significant.

Table 4
Multiple Regression Analysis of Academic Performance on their Level of Competence in Pursuing Higher Education

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		t-value	p-value	Remark
	B	S. E.			
(Constant)	3.834	.874	4.389	.000	<i>Significant</i>
Emotional	-.243	.252	-.966	.336	<i>Not significant</i>
Cognitive	.079	.289	.273	.785	<i>Not significant</i>

Note: Adjusted R² = .010 ANOVA for Regression: F=.483, p=.618

This implies that emotional and cognitive competencies may not emerge as significant predictors of academic performance among student-parents in this

study. Emotional competence involves managing stress, staying motivated, and maintaining a positive outlook. While these skills are beneficial, they may not be the most critical factors for student-parents. The Philippines has shown that the everyday realities faced by student-parents, such as balancing childcare and academic responsibilities, can overwhelm even those with high emotional competence. Similarly, cognitive competence, which includes intellectual abilities such as critical thinking and problem-solving, is undoubtedly important for academic success. However, the academic performance of student-parents often hinges more on external supports and resources than on cognitive skills alone.

This may be true to one of the respondents who said that she wanted to study in college because she wanted to give a brighter future for her family. *“Gusto gyud ko mag.eskwela sir kay tungod sa akong pamilya, ginalantaw naku ilang future kay lisud gyud kaau walay mahuman murag wala tay sakto nga kaugmaon. Bahalag magkalisud para sa akong pamilya, para di nila mafeel ang kalisud nga akong nabati karon* (I really want to go to school, sir, because of my family, I'm looking forward for the future because it's hard if you don't have a degree, it seems like there's no real future. Whatever difficulties I will endure it for my family, so that they don't feel the difficulty I felt today.) This finding supported by the study of Costa et al. (2019) posited that academic achievement is multi-determined, with influence from different cognitive and socio-emotional variables.

4. CONCLUSION

This study concluded that student parents exhibit remarkable cognitive and emotional competence levels while pursuing higher education. Their ability

to manage emotions effectively underscores their resilience in navigating the demands of higher education. However, emotional and cognitive competence did not significantly relate to or predict academic performance. The findings highlight the need for educational institutions to provide targeted support systems, such as flexible scheduling, mentorship programs, and tailored interventions, to help student parents succeed academically.

Consent

As per international standards or university standards, respondents' written consent has been collected and preserved by the author(s).

Disclaimer (Artificial intelligence)

Author(s) hereby declares that generative AI technologies such as Large Language Models, etc. have been used during the writing or editing of manuscripts. This explanation will include the name, version, model, and source of the generative AI technology and as well as all input prompts provided to the generative AI technology

Details of the AI usage are given below:

1. Name and Version: ChatGPT (OpenAI, GPT-4)
2. Source: OpenAI Platform
3. Purpose: Assistance in editing for grammar, language refinement, clarity, and scholarly tone.

REFERENCES

1. Beach, M. (2019). *The Relationship among career certainty, career engagement, social support and college success for veteran-students*. Corpus ID: 203044962.
2. Costa, B. C. G. and Fleith, D. d. S. (2019). Prediction of academic achievement by cognitive and socio-emotional variables a systematic review of literature. *Temas Em Psicologia*, 27(4), 977-991. <https://doi.org/10.9788/tp2019.4-11>
3. Dow-Fleisner, S., Leong, A. D., & Lee, H. (2023). The interaction between peer bullying and school connectedness on youth health and wellbeing. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 155, 107147. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2023.107147>

4. Lenon, N., Nidea, C. A. ., Engayas, Z. M. ., Castro, J. R. ., & Escalante, D. . (2020). Lifestyle and Role Identity of Student-Parents to their Children: Toward an Emerging Guide. *Ascendens Asia Singapore – Bestlink College of the Philippines Journal of Multidisciplinary Research*, 2(1). Retrieved from <https://ojs.aaresearchindex.com/index.php/aasgbcjpmra/article/view/2468>
5. Republic Act No. 10931. *Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education Act*. Republic of the Philippines. Official Gazette. <https://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/2017/08/03/republic-act-no-10931/>
6. Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2017). *Self-determination theory: basic psychological needs in motivation, development, and wellness*. 2017. NY: The Guilford Press. <https://www.urmc.rochester.edu/community-health/patient-care/self-determination-theory.aspx>.
7. Sartika, S. & Nirbita, B. (2023). Academic resilience and students' engagement in higher education: study on post-pandemic behaviour. *Edu Sciences Journal*, 4(1), 29-34. <https://doi.org/10.30598/edusciencevol4iss1pp29-34>
8. Sturges, D., Maurer, T. W., Allen, D., Gatch, D. B., & Shankar, P. (2016). Academic performance in human anatomy and physiology classes: a 2-yr study of academic motivation and grade expectation. *Advances in Physiology Education*, 40(1), 26–31. <https://doi.org/10.1152/advan.00091.2015>
9. Usman, M. T. et al. (2016). Parents' Socio-Economic Status and Students' Academic Performance in Nigeria Educational System. *International Journal of Education and Information Technology*, 2(3), 14-18. <http://www.aiscience.org/journal/ijeit>
10. Triyono, B.M., Mohib, N., Kassymova, G.K., Pratama, G.N.I.P., Adinda D., Arpentieva, M.R. (2020). The Profile Improvement of Vocational School Teachers' Competencies. *Vysshee obrazovanie v Rossii Higher Education in Russia*. 29(2), 151-158. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31992/0869-3617-2020-29-2-151-158>
11. Wallace, S., Schuler, M., Kaulback, M., Hunt, K., & Baker, M. (2021). Nursing student experiences of remote learning during the covid-19 pandemic. *Nursing Forum*, 56(3), 612-618. <https://doi.org/10.1111/nuf.12568>
12. Vyskocil, G. M. (2018). *Challenges needs and experiences of single parent student mothers in Higher Education*. Electronic Theses, Projects, and Dissertations. 612. <https://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/etd/612>