






Motherhood and Higher Education: Experiences of Student-Mothers at the University for Development Studies, Institute of Distance and Continuing Learning, Sawla Study Centre, Ghana

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ABSTRACT

Student-mothers in distance education programmes must balance traditional domestic roles with their academic pursuits. This study sought to determine the experiences of student mothers in balancing motherhood and higher education at the Institute of Distance and Continuous Learning (ICDL) of the University for Development Studies (UDS), Sawla Study Centre, Ghana. The fundamental theoretical support for this study is grounded in Role Conflict Theory. This study employed a quantitative research approach using a descriptive survey design and guided by the positivist or post-positivist paradigm. A questionnaire was used to collect data from all the 51 student mothers at the IDCL. Descriptive statistics of means and standard deviations were used to analyse the data collected. The study found that student mothers are overwhelmed with various non-academic responsibilities such as cooking, childcare, fetching water, and household chores. The study further indicated that student-mothers who juggle various non-academic activities in their daily lives, while balancing these roles with their academic pursuits, experience negative effects on both their academic performance and family life. The study concludes that student mothers face unavoidable academic obstacles from their non-academic responsibilities. Therefore, the study recommends that IDCL, in collaboration with the Counselling Unit of the university should provide intensive counselling services during freshers' orientation programmes to make them aware of the academic challenges facing female students who conceive or give birth while pursuing their various programmes at the study centres. This study contributes to scholarship by shedding light on the unique challenges faced by student-mothers in distance education, particularly within the context of the IDCL.

Keywords: *Student-mothers, Academic Roles, Non-Academic roles, Family Life, Distance education*

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INTRODUCTION

Women were perceived to be solely belonging to their homes a few decades ago.¹ They were ordered to get married and start a family² rather than working or attending school since a large portion of the

¹ Aaron J Roberto, "Gender Roles: A Sociological Perspective," *The Yale Journal of Biology and Medicine* 89, no. 2 (2016): 272.

² Venkat Pulla, "Strengths-Based Approach in Social Work: A Distinct Ethical Advantage," *International Journal of Innovation, Creativity and Change* 3, no. 2 (2017): 97–114.

financial and other resource-related responsibilities for maintaining the home and family was borne by men.³ However, the demands of modern living have forced women to pursue education and seek employment to financially support their families.⁴ The implication is that women must merge their family responsibilities, careers, and educational goals. Balance of these roles presents challenges that impact student academic and family lives, making it difficult for them to fully achieve their educational potential.⁵

Education is seen as a crucial pillar of growth in all areas of human life,⁶ as there is a broad inherent value to the role that education plays in advancing social, economic and human development in society.⁷ Although education significantly affects socioeconomic growth for both sexes in Sub-Saharan African nations, girls' education is a better predictor of growth than boys' education.⁸ Thus, women's ability to promote national development, which appears to be lacking in the sub-Saharan region, can be harnessed through female education.⁹ For instance, female education increases women's earning potential and supports healthier, better-adjusted families to successfully navigate the challenges of the 21st century.¹⁰

Education, as Thompson posited, is essential for shifting the values and attitudes of females from archaic to contemporary and from being oppressed to being liberated.¹¹ Household decisions are influenced by the level of female education, which also has a bearing on issues such as fertility, the health of the next generation, and the attendance of young girls in schools. Therefore, women's education has significant implications for demographic development.¹² In this context, Upadhyay et al., reported an inverse association between the number of children and women's educational attainment.¹³ They found that early childbirth was associated with having more children than others who started later in life, probably because of education. Additionally, the education of a mother and the well-being of her family are also directly related.¹⁴ That is to say, mothers who have received education are much more likely to demand prompt treatment and use preventive healthcare services for their families.¹⁵ Additionally, such mothers provide their children with an improved nutritional standard, which has been reported to reduce child mortality by 5-10% for every additional year of schooling.¹⁶ The numerous advantages of the education of women are accumulative in the sense that they reinforce one another over time and are passed down through generations.

³ Catherine E McKinley et al., "A Dad Can Get the Money and the Mom Stays at Home": Patriarchal Gender Role Attitudes, Intimate Partner Violence, Historical Oppression, and Resilience among Indigenous Peoples," *Sex Roles* 85, no.9(2021):499–514.

⁴ Q. Ainiyah, "The Urgency of Women's Education in Facing Modern Society," *Halaqa: Islamic Education Journal* 1, no. 2 (2017): 97–109.

⁵ A. M. Laniran and T. J. Laniran, "Socio-Cultural Career Progression Barriers for Women in Academics: A Case of the Federal College of Education (Special) Oyo, Nigeria," *Asian Res. J. Arts Soc. Sci.* 2 (2017): 1–10.

⁶ Alex Kojo Appiah and Kweku Esia-Donkoh, "Teacher Job Performance: The Role of Head Teachers' Supervisory Styles in Public Basic Schools in Mankessim Circuit," *Research Journal of Education* 4, no. 12 (2018): 212–20.

⁷ Onyesom Moses and Ashibogwu Nze Kingsley, "Towards Quality Assurance in Business Education in Nigeria: Constraints and Control," *Asian Journal of Business Management* 5, no. 3 (June 15, 2013): 306–12, <https://doi.org/10.19026/ajbm.5.5327>.

⁸ Mina Balioune-Lutz and Mark McGillivray, "The Impact of Gender Inequality in Education on Income in Africa and the Middle East," *Economic Modelling* 47 (2015): 1–11.

⁹ Victor Sulla and Precious. Zikhali, *Overcoming Poverty and Inequality in South Africa: An Assessment of Drivers, Constraints and Opportunities* (Washington, DC: World Bank Group, 2018), <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/530481521735906534/Overcoming-Poverty-and-Inequality-in-South-Africa-An-Assessment-of-Drivers-Constraints-and-Opportunities>.

¹⁰ Miriam Liss and Holly H Schiffrin, *Balancing the Big Stuff: Finding Happiness in Work, Family, and Life* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2014).

¹¹ J. Thompson, *Learning Liberation: Women's Response to Men's Education*, vol. 14 (Milton Park, Abingdon: Taylor & Francis, 2017).

¹² Muneera Houth, Syed Shahabuddin Hashmi, and Rukshanda Zazar, "Women Empowerment Vis-A-Vis Social Development in Globalized World," *Pakistan Journal of Gender Studies* 23, no. 1 (2023): 77–90.

¹³ Ushma D Upadhyay et al., "Women's Empowerment and Fertility: A Review of the Literature," *Social Science & Medicine* 115 (2014): 111–20.

¹⁴ Kelly Musick, Ann Meier, and Sarah Flood, "How Parents Fare: Mothers' and Fathers' Subjective Well-Being in Time with Children," *American Sociological Review* 81, no. 5 (2016): 1069–95.

¹⁵ N. P. Stromquist, *Women in the Third World: An Encyclopedia of Contemporary Issues* (Routledge, 2014); M. Sutton, "Girls Educational Access and Attainment," *Women in the Third World: An Encyclopedia of Contemporary Issues*, 1998.

¹⁶ Karen A Grépin and Prashant Bharadwaj, "Maternal Education and Child Mortality in Zimbabwe," *Journal of Health Economics* 44 (2015): 97–117.

Until the mid-1990s, most educational development initiatives concentrated on basic and secondary education, which was asserted to have a higher rate of return and to be essential in reducing poverty than even university education.¹⁷ In this regard, universities were typically viewed by development partners as "white elephants" (institutional enclaves) that had no direct impact on the progress of African communities. Awkwardly, for many years, the World Bank has supported this viewpoint.¹⁸ However, it is important to note the World Bank's paradigm shift, which is demonstrated by its involvement with the "Joint Japan-World Bank Graduate Scholarship Programme and its study on building knowledge societies, *New Challenges for Tertiary Education.*" The programme recognises higher education as a key driver of development in the emerging knowledge economy, where economic growth increasingly relies on knowledge and information technology.¹⁹ Therefore, university education is essential for preparing highly competent professionals to guide national policies and oversee administrative management, thereby promoting national development. Despite all universities in Ghana implementing affirmative action to boost female student enrolment and having gender offices to support their welfare, the operational conditions within these universities often clash with the traditional cultural beliefs of the role of a woman in the family, which remain largely unchanged and can hinder the intellectual growth of women.²⁰

Generally, mothers who are students typically face obstacles that they must overcome to successfully pursue and achieve their educational goals.²¹ As part of a study on the needs of students with childcare responsibilities, Lidgard found that student-parents faced significant challenges in managing the dual roles of parenting and studying because they struggled to balance their academic workload with family duties.²² Therefore, the time spent by student mothers is restricted by competing demands from family, work, and social activities.²³ Given these potential conflicts in time management, student mothers aim to find a balance between education and family obligations.²⁴ Consequently, the current need for permanent knowledge updates and household responsibilities has led many mothers to pursue distance education.²⁵ Distance learning has become a pattern that is integrated into the lives of women who desire to pursue higher education. However, in these circumstances, the time dedicated to academic activities can create conflict in motherhood because they have to balance their family responsibilities, academic commitments, and professional work patterns if they are employed.²⁶ Research on mature students has shown that managing work, study, and family life is particularly challenging.²⁷ Al-Asfour et al., also identified dealing with family issues

¹⁷ Karen Mundy and Antoni Verger, "The World Bank and the Global Governance of Education in a Changing World Order," *The Handbook of Global Education Policy*, 2016, 335–56.

¹⁸ Frank Leautier, "Indigenous Capacity Enhancement: Developing Community Knowledge," *Indigenous Knowledge: Local Pathways to Global Development. The World Bank, Washington, District of Columbia*, 2004, 4–8.

¹⁹ Olga Bain and William Cummings, "Higher Education in the Era of Knowledge Economy," *Universities in the Knowledge Society: The Nexus of National Systems of Innovation and Higher Education*, 2021, 33–47.

²⁰ O. Kwapong, "The Roman Catholic Church and Social Justice in Ghana," *Journal of Religious Studies* 20, no. 2 (2011): 35–50; Jecty Efua Amoabea et al., "Marriage, Family and Schoolwork: A Case of Married Female Undergraduate Students at the University of Ghana," *Gender and Behaviour* 18, no. 2 (2020): 15476–86.

²¹ Xiao Ding et al., "Characteristics and Outcomes of School Social Work Services: A Scoping Review of Published Evidence 2000–June 2022," *School Mental Health* 15, no. 3 (September 16, 2023): 787–811, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12310-023-09584-z>; S. M. Ramirez, "Overcoming Barriers: The Chicana/Latina Mother in Higher Education" (California State University, 2017).

²² C Lidgard, "A Christchurch College of Education Perspective of the NZUSA 2003 Student Parent Survey: A Survey of the Needs of Students Who Care for Children," *Christchurch: Christchurch College of Education*, 2004.

²³ Christine A Fambely, "Committed to Yourself or Have Yourself Committed: Balancing Family Life with Student Success," *Canadian Journal of Dental Hygiene* 54, no. 1 (2020): 16.

²⁴ Margaret W Sallee, "Adding Academics to the Work/Family Puzzle: Graduate Student Parents in Higher Education and Student Affairs," *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice* 52, no. 4 (2015): 401–13; J. Bratton et al., *Human Resource Management* (London : Bloomsbury Publishing, 2021).

²⁵ Bratton et al., *Human Resource Management*; Michael Simonson, Susan M Zvacek, and Sharon Smaldino, *Teaching and Learning at a Distance: Foundations of Distance Education 7th Edition* (Information Age Publishing, 2019).

²⁶ Bratton et al., *Human Resource Management*; Stephanie M Mazerolle and Jessica L Barrett, "Work-Life Balance in Higher Education for Women: Perspectives of Athletic Training Faculty," *Athletic Training Education Journal* 13, no. 3 (2018): 248–58.

²⁷ B. Merrill, *Gender, Change and Identity: Mature Women Students in Universities.* (Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2019).

and problems at home as significant barriers that hinder or limit mothers' ability to pursue their higher education goals.²⁸

Merrill also stressed the issue of emotional challenges, especially for student mothers whose partners are unsupportive and feel vulnerable about their (wife) participation in higher education.²⁹ Dowling and Osborne elaborated on the common anxieties among mothers, which include; meeting the burdens of the family, insufficient time, fear of failure, tension, setting priorities, and balancing family issues with academic commitments as the challenges of student-mothers pursuing higher education.³⁰ In this regard, Kachchaf et al., identified caregiving duties, financial constraints, and lack of career guidance as the three primary obstacles hindering women's progression in higher education.³¹ To support this, Walkup confirms the specific challenges faced by these mother-teachers, including time constraints due to balancing academic work, childcare, and domestic responsibilities.³² Additionally, student mothers experience feelings of exclusion because tertiary education providers often inadequately address their specific needs, emotional trauma related to childcare arrangements, and guilt stemming from the conflicting roles of "mother" and "student".³³

The most frequent issue that affects mothers who are also students is probably finding childcare funding.³⁴ Students who are also mothers often believe that additional financial difficulties negatively affect them and that they must rely heavily on their partners and/or families' supportive assistance.³⁵ Perna stated that the lack of integration between home life and university commitments usually forces university students to develop strategies but prioritise their family activities over their studies.³⁶ Balance between traditional household roles and the completion of professional studies can cause significant anxiety among students.³⁷ However, the presence of supportive individuals, such as close friends, family members, and husbands, is essential in influencing how effectively mothers handle their traditional roles and their academic pursuits. Edwards discovered that student mothers developed a range of strategies to separate and integrate their roles as parents and students.³⁸ These women incorporated studying alongside their usual household duties, prompting them to adopt new or expanded methods to handle childcare and domestic tasks. Because of these challenges, many mothers seeking further education have turned to distance learning opportunities available at certain higher education institutions.

Distance learning in developing nations evolved as a strategy to expand educational access for qualified postsecondary applicants who are unable to secure admission because of the inadequate capacity of existing tertiary institutions.³⁹ The mode of delivery in Ghana is mainly based on face-to-face tutorials held every two weeks on a satellite campus of the university. Currently, all public universities in Ghana offer academic programmes in both regular on-campus and distance learning

²⁸ Ahmed Al-Asfour et al., "Saudi Women's Work Challenges and Barriers to Career Advancement," *Career Development International* 22, no. 2 (2017): 184–99.

²⁹ Merrill, *Gender, Change and Identity: Mature Women Students in Universities*.

³⁰ E. Dowling and E. Osborne, *The Family and the School: A Joint Systems Approach to Problems with Children* (Milton-Park Oxford: Routledge, 2020).

³¹ Rachel Kachchaf et al., "Career–Life Balance for Women of Color: Experiences in Science and Engineering Academia.," *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education* 8, no. 3 (2015): 175.

³² V. Walkup, "To Publish or Not to Publish: A Discussion of Reporting and Disseminating Research into the Experiences of Students Who Are Mothers Returning to Higher Education," *36th Annual Standing Conference on University Teaching and Research in the Education of Adults*, 2006.

³³ Tricia van Rhijn, "Barriers, Enablers, and Strategies for Success Identified by Undergraduate Student Parents," 2014.

³⁴ Claire Wladis, Alyse C Hachey, and Katherine Conway, "No Time for College? An Investigation of Time Poverty and Parenthood," *The Journal of Higher Education* 89, no. 6 (2018): 807–31.

³⁵ Courtney Kensinger and Dorlisa J Minnick, "The Invisible Village: An Exploration of Undergraduate Student Mothers' Experiences," *Journal of Family and Economic Issues* 39 (2018): 132–44.

³⁶ L. W. Perna, *Understanding the Working College Student: New Research and Its Implications for Policy and Practice* (Milton Park, Abingdon: Taylor & Francis, 2023).

³⁷ Merrill, *Gender, Change and Identity: Mature Women Students in Universities*.

³⁸ R. Edwards, *Mature Women Students Separating and Connecting Family and Education* (London: Taylor & Francis, 1993).

³⁹ M Burns, "Distance Education for Teacher Training: Modes, Models, and Methods" (Washington, DC: Education Development Center, 2023).

modes. In many distance learning institutions, the percentage of female students enrolled tends to be higher than that in on-campus programmes in Africa.⁴⁰

These student mothers juggle multiple roles: mother, employee, and student. Balance of these responsibilities can lead to high levels of stress and anxiety, difficulties in meeting academic requirements, challenges in meeting family obligations, financial stress, and limited support from partners. Consequently, these difficulties sometimes hinder students from achieving their educational goals. Distance education, however, provides a pathway for these mothers to integrate their roles as professionals, students, wives, and parents. Unlike traditional education (mainstream/regular), where mothers typically leave home to stay on campus and attend to their studies, distance learning allows them to remain at home, blending their family roles with academic commitments, although not without challenges. The accessibility of university education poses overwhelming difficulties for student-parents who must fulfil childcare responsibilities, work full-time to support their dependents and sustain their family's well-being. Extensive research has explored the challenges faced by nursing mothers and pregnant women pursuing education in traditional campus-based systems.⁴¹ However, there is a dearth of studies that focus on the experiences of nursing mothers who combine motherhood and higher education through distance education programmes, particularly in the Savanna Region of Ghana. This study aims to address this gap by exploring the experiences of mother students pursuing higher education at the IDCL Sawla Study Centre. Specifically, it explored the non-academic roles of student mothers and their impact on academic life, how academic pursuits influence their family lives as student mothers at the IDCL.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The fundamental theoretical support for this study is grounded in Role Conflict Theory. According to Wolf, as cited in Adofo, the term "role conflict" denotes a situation where there is discord between two or more roles a person occupies or within the same role due to conflicting expectations, demands, beliefs, or attitudes.⁴² Wolf (as cited in Adofo, 2013) distinguished between two types of role conflict: intra-role conflict, which involves contradictory burdens within the same role, and inter-role conflict, which involves conflicting expectations from diverse roles within the same individual.

Different individuals may have different views on the requirements and expectations that define a specific role. A woman may, in one context, view being a good mother as involving holding a job outside the home, while in another context, she may believe that offering socio-emotional support to her family is essential to fulfilling her maternal role. This leads to the experience of intra-role conflict. Inter-role conflict occurs when the demands and expectations of one role clash or interfere with those of another. Parsons stated that social institutions are essential for the effective functioning of society because they assign roles and statuses to individuals.⁴³ Each status entails specific roles that individuals are expected to perform consistently. Parson emphasises the importance of shared social expectations based on individual social status. Research on role conflict reveals both positive and negative consequences, with a significant focus on the challenges associated with managing numerous roles.

Another instance of role conflict theory is role overload. Role overload refers to a situation in which individuals lack sufficient resources, such as time and energy, to meet the demands of all their roles.⁴⁴ This role overload and role conflict, often result in difficulties in meeting role expectations, a

⁴⁰ Winner D Chawinga and Paxton Zozie, "Information Needs and Barriers to Information Sources by Open and Distance Learners: A Case of Mzuzu University, Malawi," *South African Journal of Information Management* 18, no. 1 (2016): 1–12; Kwapong, "The Roman Catholic Church and Social Justice in Ghana."

⁴¹ Kobina Esia-Donkoh, "Child-Rearing Practices among Student-Mothers at University of Cape Coast, Ghana," 2014; A. B. Osafo, "Challenges and Coping Strategies of Student Mothers of UCC College of Distance Education: The Case of the Cape Coast Centre" (University of Cape Coast, 2016).

⁴² S. Adofo, "Challenges and Coping Strategies of Student Nursing Mothers in Tertiary Institutions in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana" (University of Ghana, 2013).

⁴³ T. Parsons, *The Systems of Society. Englewood Cliffs* (New Jersey: Prentice-HallPub. Co., 1971).

⁴⁴ Osafo, "Challenges and Coping Strategies of Student Mothers of UCC College of Distance Education: The Case of the Cape Coast Centre."

phenomenon known as role strain.⁴⁵ Role strain can have to various negative psychological and physical consequences. In many cultures, women experience stress from balancing work and family responsibilities.⁴⁶ For instance, the stress and challenges experienced by students' mothers can lead to psychological, emotional, and physical strain, affecting their ability to engage effectively in their academic programmes. Some student mothers may even drop out due to these pressures, with others facing the additional challenge of managing pregnancy or caring for newborns alongside their studies, which further increases their burden and can result in examination failures or missed lectures due to domestic responsibilities.⁴⁷ This degree of conflict differs across cultures due to differing perceptions of gender roles and the allocation of time between work and domestic responsibilities.⁴⁸ Consequently, nursing mothers often face role conflicts as they juggle various responsibilities, forcing them to constantly prioritise which role to address at any given time. This leaves nursing mothers with little or no free time.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study adopted a quantitative approach using a descriptive survey design to explore the experiences of student mothers as they combine motherhood and higher education. This is because a descriptive survey is commonly used to gather information on individuals' attitudes, opinions, and behaviours, as it provides a structured method to understand various aspects of the human condition, particularly in education and social science contexts.⁴⁹ The post-positivist paradigm is ideal for this quantitative research because it aligns with its focus on objectivity, measurement, and statistical analysis.

Participants

The study population consisted of all nursing mothers pursuing distance learning programmes at the ICDL. The total current number of nursing mothers in the programme is fifty-one (51). Thus, census sampling was used to select all the student-nursing mothers who would participate in the study. Census sampling in quantitative studies, particularly within descriptive survey designs, serves as a robust method for collecting comprehensive population data, particularly when the population is small.⁵⁰ This approach ensures that every member of the target population is included, thereby enhancing the reliability and validity of the findings.⁵¹

Data Collection Instrument

In this study, a self-administered and adapted questionnaire from Osafo with her permission was used as the primary data collection instrument.⁵² The questionnaire used a four-point Likert scale: Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Uncertain (U), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD). Part A (self-administered) included the demographic characteristics of the participants, such as age, level and programme of study. Part B (adapted) surveyed the non-academic roles performed by nursing mothers, and it comprised 15 items. Part C (adapted) focused on how these non-academic roles influenced the academic lives of students-mothers, comprising 15 items. Finally, Part D (adapted) surveyed the

⁴⁵ Stephanie J Creary and Judith R Gordon, "Role Conflict, Role Overload, and Role Strain," *Encyclopedia of Family Studies*, 2016, 1–6.

⁴⁶ Steven C Hayes and Kelly G Wilson, "Mindfulness: Method and Process.," *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice* 10, no. 2 (2003): 161.

⁴⁷ M N Egenti and F E O Omoruyi, "Challenges of Women Participation in Continuing Higher Education Programme: Implications for Adult Women Counselling and Education," *Edo Journal of Counselling* 4, no. 1–2 (2011): 131–43.

⁴⁸ Jessica L Borelli et al., "Gender Differences in Work-Family Guilt in Parents of Young Children," *Sex Roles* 76 (2017): 356–68.

⁴⁹ Ernest W Brewer, Geraldine Torrisi-Steele, and Viktor Wang, "Survey Research: Core Principles and Discussion Points," in *Scholarly Publishing and Research Methods Across Disciplines* (IGI Global, 2019), 257–76.

⁵⁰ W. G. Zikmund et al., *Business Research Method*, 8th ed. (Cengage Learning, 2010); Hamed Taherdoost, "Sampling Methods in Research Methodology; How to Choose a Sampling Technique for Research," *International Journal of Academic Research in Management (IJARM)* 5 (2016).

⁵¹ Dalowar Hossan, Zuraina Dato'Mansor, and Nor Siah Jaharuddin, "Research Population and Sampling in Quantitative Study," *International Journal of Business and Technopreneurship (IJBT)* 13, no. 3 (2023): 209–22.

⁵² Osafo, "Challenges and Coping Strategies of Student Mothers of UCC College of Distance Education: The Case of the Cape Coast Centre."

influence of the academic pursuits of student-nursing mothers on their family lives. The questionnaires were validated by two experts in educational management and planning who concentrated on evaluating the items' clarity, wording, relevance, and adequacy in relation to the variables of interest. Based on feedback from the participants, certain items in the adapted instrument were revised. Additionally, a pilot study was carried out with ten student-nursing mothers from the ICDL, Tamale study centre to gather participant feedback on the items and to determine the instrument's reliability. The reliability of the instrument was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha, resulting in a reliability coefficient of (0.765; 0.778, 0.789) for Parts A, B, and C, respectively. These scores were above the recommended minimum threshold of 0.7,⁵³ indicating that the instrument is highly reliable.

Data Analysis

To determine the degree to which student-mothers juggle academic and non-academic roles and the influence on their academic pursuits and family lives in distance education programmes, descriptive statistics were applied. The frequency, percentages, means, and standard deviations were generated. The idea of using descriptive statistics was to ensure a better and easier presentation of the results for analysis.⁵⁴

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were paramount throughout the research process. Ethical approval was obtained from the head of the Department of Educational Management and Policy Studies at the University for Development Studies during the data collection phase. Moreover, the team sought permission from the Director of the UDS, ICDL to survey with their students. In addition, the permission and consent of students were obtained, and the purpose of the study was explained to them before data collection. Data were collected at the ICDL, Sawla study centre where participants met during their free or break periods. The questionnaires were self-administered and took participants 10 to 15 min to complete. A 100% return rate of was achieved as we were able to retrieve all the completed questionnaires. The participants were assured of their anonymity, confidentiality of the information provided and their voluntary participation as they could decide at any point in time to stop participating in the study. Again, each participant signed an informed consent form before being allowed to participate in the study.

PRESENTATION OF RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Demographic Data

The demographic details of the respondents who participated in the study are described in this section. These characteristics included age, level of programme, and type of programme.

Table 1: Demographic Variables of Participants

Variable		f	%
Age	Less than 20 years	4	7.8
	21-25 years	11	21.6
	26-30 years	12	23.5
	31-35 years	16	31.4
	36-40 years	6	11.8
	40 years	2	3.9
	Total	51	100.0
Level	100	12	23.5
	200	11	21.6

⁵³ Darren George and Paul Mallery, *IBM SPSS Statistics 26 Step by Step* (Routledge, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429056765>; U. Sekaran and R. Bougie, *Research Methods for Business: A Skill Building Approach* (New York: Wiley, 2016).

⁵⁴ George Fulk, "Descriptive Statistics, an Important First Step," *Journal of Neurologic Physical Therapy* 47, no. 2 (2023): 63; D. Selvamuthu and D. Das, *Descriptive Statistics. In Introduction to Probability, Statistical Methods, Design of Experiments, and Statistical Quality Control* (Singapore: Springer Nature Singapore, 2024).

	300	27	52.9
	400	1	2.0
	Total	51	100.0
Programme of Study	B.Ed. Basic Education	25	49.0
	B.Ed. Early Childhood Education	10	19.6
	Diploma in Basic Education	16	31.4
	Total	51	100.0

Source: Field Survey (2024)

The results in Table 1 show that the majority of respondents fell within the age range of 26-35 years, comprising 77.5% of the total sample. This suggests that a significant proportion of student-mothers pursuing distance education were in their late 20s to mid-30s, which is a critical period in which most ladies marry start their childbearing and perform family responsibilities. Additionally, there may be probable pressure to have an additional child (ren) even though they are in school. Regarding the level of study, the majority of the student-mothers were in their third year (Level 300) (52.9%), followed by Level 100 (23.5%), Level 200 (21.6%), and finally Level 400 (2.0%). These findings imply that the majority of respondents were in the third year of their programmes, suggesting that a significant proportion of student mothers were midway through their academic programmes and were aware of the challenges of balancing their academic commitments with family responsibilities in pursuing their studies. Finally, Table 1 reveals that the most prevalent programme offered was B.Ed. Basic Education, accounted for nearly half (49.0%) of the participants, followed by Diploma in Basic Education (31.4%) and Bachelor of Education, Early Childhood Education (19.6%). This implies that virtually all participants were trained to become teachers in schools. This aligns with Bustillo et al. who noted that many student-mothers choose educational programmes that can offer better work-life balance post-graduation, such as teaching-related careers.⁵⁵

Non-academic roles performed by student mothers in their lives

To understand the non-academic roles performed by student mothers striving to pursue higher education, it is essential to consider the various responsibilities they undertake beyond their academic commitments, which often result in role conflict for these student mothers. The results in Table 2 generally indicate that student mothers generally agreed to perform many non-academic roles, which is evident from the overall mean and standard deviation (M=3.43; STD=0.56).

Table 2 Non-academic Roles of Student-Mothers of IDCL, perform in their lives.

Role	SD (%)	D (%)	A (%)	SA (%)	M (STD)
I cook for my family every day.	2 (3.9)	2 (3.9)	4 (7.8)	43 (84.3)	3.73 (0.72)
I take care of my children and wards every day.	2 (3.9)	4 (7.8)	5 (9.8)	40 (78.4)	3.63 (0.79)
I fetch water for my family every day.	2 (3.9)	6 (11.8)	9 (17.6)	34 (66.7)	3.47 (0.86)
I wash my family every day.	5 (9.8)	8 (15.7)	11 (21.6)	27 (52.9)	3.18 (1.03)
I help with farm work every day.	13 (25.5)	8 (15.7)	6 (11.8)	24 (47.1)	2.80 (1.28)

⁵⁵ Rouie Christine T Bustillo, Rouie Christine T Bustillo, and Jay Ann Vie Sayson, "Navigating The Dual Roles: Understanding The Unique Challenges Of Student-Mothers In Pursuit Of Higher Education," *Ignatian International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research* 2, no. 2 (2024): 58–69.

I must send my children to school and bring them home every day.	6 (11.8)	5 (9.8)	5 (9.8)	35 (68.6)	3.35 (1.07)
I help my wards with their homework every day.	6 (11.8)	6 (11.8)	5 (9.8)	34 (66.7)	3.31 (1.09)
I must report to my workplace every day.	3 (5.9)	2 (3.9)	6 (11.8)	40 (78.4)	3.63 (0.82)
I must send my child/children to the hospital when they are sick.	4 (7.8)	2 (3.9)	7 (13.7)	38 (74.5)	3.55 (0.90)
It is my duty to tidy up my house/home every day.	1 (2.0)	2 (3.9)	4 (7.8)	44 (86.3)	3.78 (0.61)
It is my duty to satisfy the sexual pleasures of my husband at any time.	7 (13.7)	3 (5.9)	9 (17.6)	32 (62.7)	3.29 (1.08)
Overall Mean					3.43
Overall Standard Deviation					(0.56)

Source: Field Survey (2024), N = 51; Strongly Disagree (SD) =1; Disagree (D) =2; Agree (A) =3; and Strongly Agree (SA) = 4.

Table 2 shows that the majority of respondents strongly agree or agree that they are responsible for various domestic tasks, such as cooking (M=3.73; STD=0.72), childcare (M=3.63; STD=0.79), fetching water (M=3.47; STD=0.86), and housekeeping (M=3.78; STD=0.61). Furthermore, the table suggests that student-mothers are also heavily involved in childcare-related activities, including taking children to school (M=3.35; STD=1.07) and assisting with homework (M=3.31; STD=1.07). Additionally, Table 2 shows that the student-mothers face challenges in balancing their caregiving responsibilities with other obligations, such as employment (M=3.63; STD=0.82), farm work (M=2.80; STD=1.28), and attending to their husband’s sexual needs (M=3.29; STD=1.08).

The Influence of Non-Academic Roles on Academic Pursuits

Table 3 presents the challenges faced by student mothers in their academic pursuits while performing their non-academic roles. The enormous dual roles performed by student mothers tend to affect their academic activities.

Table 3: Influence of Non-Academic Roles on Academic Pursuit

Statement	SD (%)	D (%)	A (%)	SA (%)	M (STD)
I am unable to attend face-to-face lectures frequently because of the numerous non-academic activities I undertake.	6 (11.8)	7 (13.7)	10 (19.6)	28 (54.9)	3.18 (1.07)
As a student-mother, I am unable to get adequate time to learn.	7 (13.7)	7 (13.7)	14 (27.5)	23 (45.1)	3.04 (1.08)
As a student-mother, I am unable to prepare well for and focus on examinations.	5 (9.8)	6 (11.8)	13 (25.5)	27 (52.9)	3.22 (1.01)
My activities as a student mother always make me attend lectures late.	8 (15.7)	4 (7.8)	9 (17.6)	30 (58.8)	3.20 (1.13)
The many house chores I perform make me sleep in class.	9 (17.6)	4 (7.8)	15 (29.4)	23 (45.1)	3.02 (1.12)
Due to my activities carried out at home, as a student-mother, I occasionally forget the time for face-to-face interviews and tutorials, and I sometimes miss my lessons.	15 (29.4)	11 (21.6)	7 (13.7)	18 (35.3)	2.55 (1.25)

Due to my activities as a student-mother, I mostly report late at examination centres.	4 (7.8)	3 (5.9)	15 (29.4)	29 (56.9)	3.35 (0.91)
Due to my activities as a student-mother, I am unable to finish and submit assignments on time.	10 (19.6)	11 (21.6)	5 (9.8)	25 (49.0)	2.88 (1.23)
Due to my activities as a student-mother, I am unable to attend group discussions most often.	10 (19.6)	7 (13.7)	10 (19.6)	24 (47.1)	2.94 (1.19)
The non-academic activities I participate in are responsible for my poor grades.	7 (13.7)	5 (9.8)	13 (25.5)	26 (51.0)	3.14 (1.07)
Overall Mean					3.05
Overall Standard Deviation					(0.77)

Source: Field Survey (2024), N = 51; Strongly Disagree (SD) =1; Disagree (D) =2; Agree (A) =3; and Strongly Agree (SA) = 4.

Table 3 shows that the mean of the statements ranged from 2.55 to 3.35 with a standard deviation of 0.91–1.25. An overall mean of (M=3.05) with a standard deviation of (STD=0.77) was obtained from the statements. The interpretation is that, generally, the respondents agreed that performing non-academic roles affected their academic pursuits.

Respondents agreed that they could not attend lectures regularly due to several non-academic roles they performed (M=3.18; STD=1.07) and were always late when attending lectures (M=3.20; STD=1.13). Table 4.3.2 also indicates that the student-mothers could not allocate enough time to study (M=3.04; STD=1.08) and to attend group discussions regularly (M=2.94; STD=1.19). The table further shows that the students’ mothers agreed that the pressures of their non-academic roles make it difficult for them to finish and submit assignments on time (M=2.88; STD=1.23).

Table 3 suggests that these non-academic roles result in students’ mothers inability to prepare well and focus during examinations (M=3.22; STD=1.01). These challenges are also evident in their late arrival at examination centres (M=3.35; STD=0.91) and sometimes they forget the time for lectures and tutorials leading to absenteeism (M=2.55; STD=1.25). Eventually, this has made them perceive that the non-academic roles they undertake are liable for the poor grades that they normally attain (M=3.14; STD=1.07).

The Influence of Academic Pursuits on Family Lives

Table 4 presents the responses of the student-mothers on items on the effect of their academic pursuits on their family lives.

Table 4: Influence of Academic Pursuits on Family Lives

Statement	SD (%)	D (%)	A (%)	SA (%)	M (STD)
I mostly have less time for my husband because of my studies.	0 (0.0)	3 (5.9)	11 (21.6)	37 (72.5)	3.67 (0.59)
My academic activities have generated conflicts between me and my partner.	9 (17.6)	4 (7.8)	14 (27.5)	24 (47.1)	3.04 (1.13)
I usually have less time for my wards.	12 (23.5)	6 (11.8)	11 (21.6)	22 (43.1)	2.84 (1.22)
I am unable to often go when arranged on weekends.	4 (7.8)	6 (11.8)	11 (21.6)	30 (58.8)	3.31 (0.97)
Due to my studies in distance education, I am unable to breastfeed my newborn child well.	3 (5.9)	6 (11.8)	11 (21.6)	31 (60.8)	3.37 (0.92)

I am unable to have good sleep at night because of my studies.	15 (29.4)	11 (21.6)	7 (13.7)	18 (35.3)	3.51 (0.78)
I often skip breakfast because I am a student-mother.	0 (0.0)	7 (13.7)	17 (33.3)	27 (52.9)	3.39 (0.72)
Overall Mean					3.31
Overall Standard Deviation					(0.60)

Source: Field Survey (2024), N = 51; Strongly Disagree (SD) =1; Disagree (D) =2; Agree (A) =3; and Strongly Agree (SA) = 4.

The results in Table 4 show that the respondents generally agreed on the impact of academic pursuits on their family lives. This is evident from the overall mean score and standard deviation of (M=3.31, STD=0.60), which implies the general agreement among respondents, with little variation from their responses as indicated by the low standard deviation.

Table 4 shows that student-mothers strongly agreed that due to their academic commitments, they usually have limited time for their partners or husbands (M=3.67, STD=0.59) and their children (M=2.84, STD=1.22). The table further indicates that this impact extends to the ability of mothers to adequately breastfeed their newborn children adequately (M=3.37, STD=0.92). Considering this revelation from Table 4, there is no doubt that the student-mothers agreed that their academic-related tasks generate conflicts between themselves and their partners or husbands (M=3.04, STD=1.13).

Table 4 further suggests that the respondents agreed that they cannot attend family meetings and gatherings scheduled for the weekends (M=3.31, STD=0.97). The respondents also agreed that due to their academic activities, they were unable to have enough sleep at night (M=3.51, STD=0.78). This impact extends to students’ mothers sometimes skipping breakfast or making breakfast for the family to attend to their academic work (M=3.39, STD=0.72).

DISCUSSIONS

This study aimed to determine the experiences of student-nursing mothers combining motherhood and higher education at the IDCL, UDS, Sawla Study Centre. Thus, the study considered the non-academic roles performed by these student mothers and the influence of their academic pursuits on their family lives.

The study found that student-mothers at the Sawla Study Centre, IDCL, UDS are significantly burdened with various hectic non-academic activities such as cooking, childcare, fetching water and household chores, which they must manage daily alongside their academic pursuits. These results are consistent with longitudinal data from Noonan, which was derived from the National Survey of Families and Households, indicating that the time spent on household chores by women negatively impacts their education, with a stronger effect observed for women than men.⁵⁶ Similarly, this correlation echoes the outcomes of the Bureau of Labour Statistics, which suggest that women spend significantly more time than men on tasks such as food preparation, interior cleaning, and laundry on average days.⁵⁷ The performance of these household duties invariably affects the ability of women to engage in other activities, whether at home, at work, or at school.

Shindano and Babune posit that poor academic achievement among female students is a result of their overburdened household chores.⁵⁸ The study found that student mothers play extensive non-academic roles that significantly impede their academic activities. They reported that their household chores, childcare responsibilities, and other non-academic duties frequently caused them to miss lectures, arrive late for classes, and perform poorly in examinations due to inadequate preparation

⁵⁶ Mary C Noonan, “The Impact of Domestic Work on Men’s and Women’s Wages,” *Journal of Marriage and Family* 63, no. 4 (2001): 1134–45.

⁵⁷ Bureau of Labour Statistics, “ American Time Use Survey,” 2015, https://www.bls.gov/news.release/archives/atus_06242016.pdf.

⁵⁸ Shemsa Othman Shindano and George Julius Babune, “Practices of Free Education in Secondary Schools in Central District Zanzibar,” *Int. J. Sci. Res. in Multidisciplinary Studies* Vol 9, no. 7 (2023).

and concentration. These findings corroborate Bogi et al., who described motherhood as a complex and wonderful journey that becomes even more challenging when mothers pursue education alongside their numerous traditional family responsibilities.⁵⁹ The authors established that the role conflicts experienced by the students' mothers affect their performance both at home and in their academic endeavours. The difficulties they encountered as a result of role conflict included failure to attend lectures, tutorial sessions and group discussions regularly as well as an inability to prepare regularly for examinations.⁶⁰ Similarly, the findings confirm Osafo's finding that student mothers have unavoidable obstructions that come from their non-academic responsibilities.⁶¹ The authors indicated that these impediments included not having ample time for studies and not being able to prepare well for lectures and examinations, leading to a loss of concentration as well as an inability to submit assignments and other academic works on time. In line with this, Egenti and Omoruyi posit that the pressure and distress that student-nursing mothers encounter render them psychologically ill-disposed towards their academic programmes.⁶² Kubeka indicated that student mothers often face challenges in adequately preparing for examinations due to the attention they must pay to their babies, leading to a lack of concentration and focus during study sessions and while writing examination papers.⁶³ This has resulted in some student mothers dropping out of programmes. Given this, Opit et al, when non-academic roles conflict with academic pursuits, student mothers would rather forgo academic tasks than abandon their babies, particularly on crucial occasions when their babies fall ill.⁶⁴

Generally, student mothers combine academic work with their traditional roles, which requires tremendous time, effort, and energy. These mothers may give relatively more dedication and attention to their academic-related activities at the expense of family responsibilities, which could resolve problems. This is evidenced by the high level of agreement among participants regarding reduced time for their partners and children, the inability to attend family gatherings leading to increased tension and conflicts within the family, and the negative effects on their health and family well-being. For instance, Mulrenan et al. found that as mothers juggle their academic pursuits with household responsibilities, this leads to various issues in managing their families.⁶⁵ These student-mothers often experience fatigue due to their dual workload, which can negatively impact their relationships with their husbands and children, limiting the attention and maternal affection they can provide. Although a substitute figure like nannies or babysitters can help meet a child's needs, they cannot replace the mother. Hence, student mothers face the significant problem of balancing their responsibilities as mothers or wives with their school work. In line with this, a study conducted by Suiter found a decline in marital happiness among couples during the period in which their wives were enrolled as students.⁶⁶ The implication is that marital happiness and serene family relationships among the student-mothers of Sawla Study Centre IDCL, UDS are comparatively less than before their enrolment in their programme of study. Similarly, the happiness of partners or husbands may be significantly lower than when their wives did not pursuing studies. As a result, this places immense pressure on student mothers in their attempt to fulfilling their roles as students, workers, and mothers. Hence, in such instances, the academic achievement of these mothers suffers as they may face

⁵⁹ Rolanda Bogi et al., "Coping with Motherhood and Education: Revealing Strategies of Student Nursing Mothers in Distance Education Programs in the Upper West Region, Ghana," *Journal of Advanced Research in Women's Studies* 1, no.2(2023): 1–18.

⁶⁰ Bogi et al., "Coping with Motherhood and Education: Revealing Strategies of Student Nursing Mothers in Distance Education Programs in the Upper West Region, Ghana."

⁶¹ Emmanuel N-B Quarshie et al., "Some Epidemiological Characteristics of Perpetrators and Victims of Incest in Contemporary Ghana: Analysis of Media Reports," *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse* 26, no. 2 (2017): 121–39.

⁶² Egenti and Omoruyi, "Challenges of Women Participation in Continuing Higher Education Programme: Implications for Adult Women Counselling and Education."

⁶³ Cebisile Clementine Kubeka, "Balancing the Role of Student and Motherhood: The Experience of Students at the University of KwaZulu-Natal" (University of KwaZulu-Natal, 2016).

⁶⁴ Elizabeth Opit, Nabukeera Madinah, and Ms Namubiru Aisha, "Original Paper Balancing Dual Roles in the Face of Missing On-Site Child Care Arrangements: Lived Experiences of Breast-Feeding Student Mothers at Kyambogo University," *World J Educ Res*, 2020.

⁶⁵ Patrick Mulrenan et al., "'My Achievement Will Be Their Achievement': The Challenges of Role Modelling for Student Parents at UK Universities," *Journal of Further and Higher Education* 47, no. 1 (January 2, 2023): 105–17, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2022.2099734>.

⁶⁶ J. Suiter, *Marital Happiness and Returning Women Students and Their Husbands: Effects and Remedies* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2008).

difficulties in concentrating on effective academic work, leading to poor grades and low class at the end of the programmes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are made in light of the findings of this study. It is recommended that student mothers should share their duties with their partners, husbands, or individuals they consider appropriate. In return, their partners or chosen individuals should fully support student mothers to help reduce their routine schedules and duties, allowing more time for their studies. The UDS, IDCL and Sawla Study Centre should also implement supportive measures such as providing access to affordable childcare services, flexible lecture schedules and counselling services. Hence, the study recommends that the counselling unit of IDCL, as part of the orientation programme, offer comprehensive counselling services to all female students to sensitise them to academic challenges they may face if they conceive or give birth during their studies. Finally, student mothers should communicate the implications of joining the IDCL programme to their families, particularly their partners or husbands, so that they fully comprehend their decisions and can provide the necessary support when necessary.

CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of the study was to determine the experiences of student mothers in balancing motherhood and higher education at the ICDL, UDS, Sawla Study Centre. Based on the findings of the study, it can be concluded that student mothers at the Sawla Study Centre have many laborious non-academic roles to undertake in their homes, and as a result, they have very limited time for their studies and academic activities. Moreover, the dual burden of academic and extensive non-academic roles creates significant challenges for mothers, leading to reduced academic engagement or participation. The responsibility of managing household duties, such as caring for children and attending to their partners often leave student mothers with limited time and energy for their studies, thereby hindering their educational progress. The inference is that student mothers face inevitable academic challenges arising from their assumed non-academic responsibilities. In another breath, it became clear in this study that the academic activities that student-mothers undertake have a negative influence on their family lives, from which it is inferred that the success of student-mothers' academic exploits is at the expense of the time they should have with their families.

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