



Research Article

Academic Experiences and Resilience of Graduate School Students

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative phenomenological study explored the academic experiences and resilience of graduate students at Southern Capital College (SCC), Misamis Occidental. Fifteen purposively selected graduate students participated in semi-structured interviews. Thematic analysis revealed that their academic experiences were shaped by balancing multiple roles, academic pressure and workload, meaningful and transformative learning, professional and career development, supportive learning relationships, personal sacrifices, and the development of resilience and adaptability. Resilience was demonstrated through persistence amid multiple responsibilities, endurance through academic challenges, self-discipline, inner motivation, support systems, faith, and growth through adversity. Students navigated these demands through strategic time management, organized study practices, problem-solving, support-seeking, psychological and spiritual coping, personal responsibility, and adaptive decision-making. The findings show that resilience among graduate students is not simply endurance but an active process of adaptation, reflection, support-seeking, and sustained commitment. The study underscores the value of responsive academic support, mentoring, flexible learning arrangements, and institutional practices that recognize the intersecting professional, academic, and personal responsibilities of graduate learners.

Keywords: academic experiences, resilience, graduate students, coping strategies, phenomenology, higher education

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Introduction

Graduate education requires students to manage advanced academic work while many continue to fulfill professional, family, and personal responsibilities. For working graduate students, these overlapping demands can create time pressure, fatigue, financial concerns, role conflict, and difficulty sustaining academic engagement. At the same time, graduate study can become a meaningful avenue for professional advancement, personal development, and the strengthening of resilience.

Resilience in higher education refers to the capacity to adapt, persist, and continue functioning despite academic and personal difficulties. Recent studies describe resilience as a dynamic process supported by coping strategies, self-efficacy, motivation, social relationships, and the ability to adjust to changing demands (Fullerton et al., 2021; de Oliveira Durso et al., 2021). Among graduate students, resilience is particularly relevant because academic requirements often intersect with employment, family obligations, and long-term career goals (Collier & Blanchard, 2024; Carsone et al., 2024).

Philippine studies likewise show that working students experience competing school, work, and life demands and rely on planning, persistence, social support, and personal motivation to continue their studies (Agbayani & Paglinawan, 2025; Mutya et al., 2022). Social support has also been associated with academic resilience, while personal resilience can help reduce the effects of stress and anxiety among graduate learners (Permatasari et al., 2021; Oducado et al., 2021). These findings suggest that academic success is influenced not only by intellectual ability but also by how students respond to pressure and mobilize available resources.

This study explored the academic experiences and resilience of graduate students at Southern Capital College (SCC), Misamis Occidental. Specifically, it examined their academic experiences while pursuing higher education, the experiences that demonstrated resilience, and the coping and adaptive strategies they used to navigate academic demands. By focusing on students' lived experiences, the study provides context-based evidence that may guide academic support, mentoring, teaching practices, and institutional programs for graduate learners.

Methods

This study utilized a qualitative phenomenological research design to explore the academic experiences and resilience of graduate students at Southern Capital College (SCC), Misamis Occidental. Fifteen currently enrolled graduate students were purposively selected based on their capacity to provide information-rich accounts of graduate study. Data were gathered through in-depth semi-structured interviews using a researcher-developed interview guide validated by experts. With participants' consent, the interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and anonymized. Data analysis followed an inductive thematic approach involving familiarization, coding, theme development, review, and interpretation of recurring patterns across participants' narratives. Ethical safeguards included informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality, anonymity, secure handling of data, and the right to withdraw. The study focused on graduate students enrolled at SCC during School Year 2025-2026; thus, the findings were contextual to the participants and setting and were not intended for statistical generalization

Results and Discussions

Academic Experiences of Graduate Students

Table 1. Emergent Themes on the Academic Experiences of Graduate Students

Emergent Theme	Core Meaning
Balancing Multiple Roles and Responsibilities	Students simultaneously managed work, study, family, and personal responsibilities, making time allocation and role coordination central concerns.
Academic Pressure and Workload Demands	Heavy requirements, deadlines, thesis writing, stress, and fatigue intensified the demands of graduate study.
Meaningful and Transformative Learning Experience	Despite difficulties, students viewed graduate study as challenging but rewarding and as a source of

	meaningful learning.
Professional and Career Development	Graduate education strengthened professional competence, confidence, leadership capacity, and career aspirations.
Transformation of Learning Perspective	Students reported changes in how they understood learning, reflection, and the application of knowledge.
Supportive Learning Environment	Professors, classmates, peers, and collaborative experiences provided academic and emotional support.
Personal Sacrifices and Resilience	Students sacrificed leisure, rest, family time, and personal comfort to meet academic responsibilities.
Development of Resilience and Adaptability	Repeated challenges strengthened persistence, flexibility, self-discipline, and the ability to adjust.

The findings show that graduate study was experienced as a continuing negotiation among professional, academic, family, and personal roles. Participants frequently described limited time, competing schedules, demanding requirements, deadlines, and thesis-related work. These experiences are consistent with Agbayani and Paglinawan (2025), who reported that graduate working students must continuously manage school, work, and life demands. The pressure was therefore not produced by academic tasks alone but by the interaction of academic expectations with responsibilities outside the university.

At the same time, participants did not describe graduate school only as a source of difficulty. They considered the experience meaningful and transformative because it strengthened knowledge, professional competence, confidence, and career direction. The supportive learning environment created by professors and peers also helped students sustain engagement. This supports evidence that social and academic support contributes to adjustment and resilience in higher education (Permatasari et al., 2021; Warshawski, 2022).

Personal sacrifice was a recurring part of the academic journey. Students reduced leisure, rest, and family time to complete requirements, yet these sacrifices were often interpreted as investments in long-term professional and personal goals. Over time, managing repeated pressures developed adaptability and resilience. This pattern supports the view of resilience as a process that develops through the interaction of demands, resources, and coping responses rather than as a fixed personal trait (Fullerton et al., 2021; de Oliveira Durso et al., 2021).

Experiences Demonstrating Resilience

Table 2. Emergent Themes on Experiences Demonstrating Resilience

Emergent Theme	Core Meaning
Persistence Amid Multiple Responsibilities	Students continued their studies while managing employment, family duties, time constraints, and competing roles.
Endurance Through Academic Challenges	They persisted through deadlines, thesis difficulties, workload, stress, and fatigue.
Personal Sacrifice as a Form of Resilience	Leisure, rest, family time, and personal comfort were intentionally reduced to meet academic goals.
Adaptive Coping and Problem-Solving Strategies	Students adjusted plans, divided difficult tasks, sought solutions, and modified strategies when challenges emerged.
Inner Motivation and Goal-Driven Persistence	Personal goals, career aspirations, and determination encouraged students to continue despite setbacks.
Social and Emotional Support Systems	Family, peers, classmates, professors, and other significant persons provided encouragement and practical assistance.
Growth Through Adversity	Challenges became opportunities to strengthen confidence, self-discipline, adaptability, and

	commitment.
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Resilience was evident in the participants' decision to continue despite competing responsibilities, academic pressure, fatigue, and personal sacrifice. Persistence was not passive endurance; it involved repeatedly reorganizing priorities and continuing to work toward academic goals even when progress became difficult. Collier and Blanchard (2024) similarly identify multiple personal and contextual factors that contribute to graduate student resilience, while Oducado et al. (2021) emphasize the protective role of personal resilience among Filipino graduate students.

Inner motivation and goal orientation gave meaning to participants' persistence. Career advancement, professional improvement, and personal aspirations helped them tolerate temporary sacrifices. At the same time, resilience was socially supported. Encouragement from family, classmates, peers, and professors reduced isolation and provided emotional or practical assistance. This is consistent with studies linking perceived social support with academic resilience and adjustment (Permatasari et al., 2021; Warshawski, 2022).

Participants also described growth through adversity. Repeated exposure to demanding academic situations strengthened confidence, discipline, flexibility, and problem-solving. Their narratives therefore show resilience as both a response to present difficulties and a developmental outcome of successfully managing those difficulties.

Coping and Adaptive Strategies

Table 3. Emergent Themes on Coping and Adaptive Strategies

Emergent Theme	Core Meaning
Strategic Time Management and Prioritization	Students scheduled study periods, prioritized urgent tasks, and organized daily responsibilities.
Goal-Oriented and Organized Study Practices	They set clear goals, prepared in advance, reviewed plans, and maintained consistent study routines.
Utilization of Support Systems	Students sought assistance, guidance, encouragement, and collaboration from professors, classmates, family, and peers.
Psychological and Emotional Coping Strategies	They used self-talk, reflection, emotional regulation, rest, and other strategies to manage stress.
Spiritual and Personal Grounding Practices	Faith, prayer, reflection, and personal values provided direction and emotional stability.
Personal Responsibility and Commitment	Students emphasized accountability, discipline, perseverance, and ownership of academic responsibilities.
Adaptive Decision-Making and Lifestyle Adjustment	They modified routines, reduced nonessential activities, and made practical choices in response to academic demands.
Problem-Solving and Task Management	Complex requirements were broken into manageable steps and addressed through systematic action.

Time management and prioritization were the most practical ways participants controlled competing demands. Scheduling, advance preparation, breaking tasks into smaller steps, and setting clear goals allowed students to make progress despite limited time. These behaviors reflect adaptive coping because they directly address the source of academic pressure rather than merely reacting to stress (Valladolid, 2021; Fullerton et al., 2021).

Support-seeking was equally important. Participants used academic guidance from professors, peer collaboration, family encouragement, and other interpersonal resources when challenges exceeded what they could manage alone. Psychological strategies such as reflection and emotional regulation were complemented by spiritual practices, particularly faith and prayer. These approaches helped students maintain perspective and emotional stability while continuing their academic responsibilities.

Finally, students demonstrated personal responsibility through discipline, commitment, and lifestyle adjustment. They reduced nonessential activities, changed routines, and accepted short-term sacrifices to protect their academic goals. The combination of structured planning, support-seeking, emotional and spiritual coping, and adaptive decision-making suggests that resilience was sustained by multiple strategies rather than by a single coping mechanism.

Conclusions

The study concludes that the academic experience of SCC graduate students is shaped by the simultaneous demands of graduate study, employment, family responsibilities, and personal life. These demands create workload pressure, time constraints, stress, fatigue, and sacrifice, but graduate education is also experienced as meaningful, professionally valuable, and personally transformative. Supportive relationships with professors, peers, classmates, and family help students remain engaged. Resilience is demonstrated through persistence, endurance, self-discipline, inner motivation, support-seeking, faith, and the ability to grow through adversity. Students actively manage challenges through time management, organized study practices, problem-solving, psychological and spiritual coping, personal responsibility, and adaptive lifestyle decisions. Thus, resilience among graduate students is best understood as an active and developing process of adjustment rather than simple endurance.

Recommendations

Graduate students are encouraged to use structured time management, realistic goal setting, support-seeking, and regular self-reflection to manage competing responsibilities. SCC administrators and faculty may strengthen mentoring, academic advising, flexible learning support, and accessible psychosocial services for working graduate students. Prospective graduate students may be oriented to the actual academic, professional, and personal demands of graduate study before enrollment. Families and significant others may be included in awareness efforts that emphasize the importance of emotional and practical support. Future researchers may examine graduate student resilience across institutions, programs, and learner groups and may use longitudinal or mixed-method approaches to determine how resilience changes over time.

Conflict of Interests

The author declares that they have no conflicts of interest

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