























#### 4. Coping Mechanism

Returning to school is a difficult decision for many people, even more so when you are a returnee. Transitioning from work to school is never easy. It can be challenging as one adjusts to new behaviors. Nonetheless, many school returnees eventually adjusted to the challenges of school activities, parenthood, and working student life.

The participants claimed the following to be their coping mechanisms:

##### 4.1. Discipline and Time Management

According to Louisiana State University Shreveport (2020), good time management, strategies, and discipline helped school returnees balance their various responsibilities. P14, who is balancing his work on a farm and studying, reported:

*"Time management both in studies and work."*

P15, who is a mother of two and a 4th-year education student, stated:

*"One of the significant problems that I have a hard time dealing with is juggling my family time and my studies. So, to do that accordingly, I am very disciplined when it comes to my time. I have a list of things that I have to do. I have to do what is hard for me first and then deal with my daughter, and, of course, I cannot do that alone. I always have my family who support me and my decision to go back to school."*

Additionally, P8, 40 years old and a BSBA student said:

*"Kunary sa pag-aaral mayroon kang exam, siyempre focus ka lang wag kang gagamit ng mga gadgets na makakaabala sayo during your pagrereview para kinabukasan exam na, may maisagot ka tapos iwasan din yung bisyo."*

Similarly, P10 and a BSED major in Elementary went to say:

*"Siyempre nalampasan ko yon sa tulong din ng pamilya ko, tulad ng asawa ko bigayan lang kami kapag halimbawa may oras ng klase, may araw ng pasok pinag-uusapan namin yon para ma I adjust yung schedule."*

Evaluating their needs and priorities aids them in deciding what should be taken first and what should be put on hold. In addition, P3, who is taking care of her children at the same time as studying, said that:

*"Nakinig naman mga anak ko, as time goes by nasanay naman sila sa sitwasyon ko."*

Based on the participants' responses, they overcame challenges both inside and outside the school as long as they managed their time wisely and had discipline within them.

##### 4.2. Adjustments, support, and motivation from self and others

Participants often reported that they could return to school and continue their studies with the help of adjusting to the new environment, having support from others, and believing in themselves.

P2 and Education student noted that:

*"Ang ginawa ko nag adjust nalang ako."*

Similarly, P1 said that:

*"I learn to deal with this environment by simply adjusting myself little by little."*

Some factors help school returnees to adjust to academic life. Additionally, support from self, family, and friends assists in overcoming the challenges as a school returnee. Support networks are also essential components that can help these students face the provocation of life both inside and outside the school. Furthermore, support from these certain people can help provide insights, career advice and help in encouraging them to go on. According to P13, who took a different course from the first one, she had noted:

*"My classmates are very supportive, and my teachers understand my situation. That is why I can easily cope AGAIN; when I do not know, I ask my classmates when I am not on board. Because I have no idea sometimes, then, because we have the technology, I can research only when there is time. I can handle it anyway. "*

Likewise, the statement of P11 also found support from her husband:

*"Lagi lang sinasabi sa akin ng asawa ko "Kaya mo yan! Kaya mo yan! matalino ka gawin mo yan para sa mga anak natin"."*

Having this encouragement support from the people around them guides them to become excellent students and gives them the strength that no matter what happens, they have someone on their backs to be there whenever they need them. In addition, Participant 5 sought support from a relationship built inside the school. She stated that:

*"Hindi naman naging hadlang nagkaroon lang ako ng maraming ate, kuya at naging guide ko sila sa pagpasok ko sa mundo ng pag-aaral."*

On the other hand, P7 said otherwise:

*"So yung challenges naman kasi ano lang, wala naman masyadong challenges sakín kasi sinusuportahan ako ng parents ko tsaka kaya ko naman kaya kahit papaano di naman ako nahirapan."*

Support networks made an enormous contribution to the stories of issues and success of school returnees. However, more than that, these students also found the strongest pillar from themselves, P12, a working student went to say:

*"I always look for the opportunity to find money or to earn money. Like, for example, the things I can do as a student while studying, selling goods, or sidelines. These are the ways I overcome my problems and, of course, with the help of friends, relatives, the family sometimes like that, they can help me. "*

Also, P9 added that it is not just about himself but for God:

*"Inisip ko lang na bahala na si God ganon, iniisip ko lang matatapos din naman magpatuloy lang ako tapos nag tiyaga din ako yun lang."Even though it is difficult for adult students to come to school with a huge gap in education and life experiences, still, these students come with reasonably clear educational goals (Stephens C & Worth J. 2011). In the report of the participants, P4 said that:*

*"Nakayanan konaman sya ginusto konadin habang tumatagal."*

Similar to what P6 stated:

*"Pero lumaon nakapag adjust naman ako at napagtagumpayan koyon hindi ako na op at tinanggap nila ako. "*

With the adjustments, support networks, and motivation, these school returnees could conquer their challenges not just as a student but also as a parent and working professionals.

## 5. Developments and Achievements

In addition to investigating the stories of issues and success of school returnees, participants also discussed the achievements they gained when they started to study again.

### 5.1. Self Confidence

Participants were asked during the interview about the achievements or the things they have developed as they returned to school. The researchers offered time for the participants to think about the question. During one of the interviews, P6 said that:

*"It is self-confidence."*

Many participants answered that their self-confidence developed when they returned to school again. Similarly, P8 also said the same thing, she stated:

*"Self-confidence din na develop ko din talaga siya kasi dati ayoko talagang humaharap sa ibang tao, hanggang ngayon din naman pero kung I cocompare mo sa dating ako, feel ko naman na mas naging ano ako (she mean naging sociable? haha) tsaka stronger yun lang mas positive na ako ngayon."*

Correspondingly, P11 answered that through the help of gaining more confidence, she was able to meet lots of people and helped her in her studies. She went to say:

*"My self-confidence also increased, I was able to meet many people, and I was able to speak to many people, my memory also boosted a bit because I just stayed at home for a long time."*

Having self-confidence also helped these students have good communication skills that resulted in gaining more friends. P8 stated:

*"Tumaas din self-confidence ko, nakakaharap ako ng madaming tao, nakakapag salita ako sa maraming tao, medyo nag boost din yung memory ko dahil nga na stay lang ako sa bahay ng matagal na panahon, medyo gumana na siya ngayon."*

In parallel to P12's statement:

*"Yes, many things have changed. Example of this is, kung makapal man ang mukha ko mas kumapal pa mukha ko. And then I learned how to speak English nicely and sometimes fluently. It helps me a lot to talk with people with confidence and last, is I gain many friends."*

Building self-confidence helped these sets of students overcome the fear of returning to school again and enabled them to build good relationships with their co-students, and helped them be better students than they were before.

### 5.2. Knowledge, Sacrifices, and Experience

Returning to school was a callous decision faced by the study participants. Many of them sacrifice their work to have better life opportunities that will achieve their life goals and help their family. Many of these participants shared their stories about how they decided to go to school again and what they had to let go to pursue the field they wanted to be in. P2 shared about letting go of her job to have a more positive outcome as she returned to studying again. She reported:

*"Dati kase may trabaho ako, yon sinakripisyo ko, dati kase nakakatulong nako sa family ko, Ginive up ko trabaho ko para sa pag-aaral."*

Similarly, P4 also quits his job to pursue education. He said:

*"Yung trabaho ko dati, dati kase may trabaho ako so sinakripisyo koyon."*

Participant 6 also said the same thing.

*"May trabaho kase ako so ginive up koyon para mag-aral muli."*

P10 also faced a tough challenge because he built his own family at an early age, and things did not go as planned, he noted:

*"Hindi naman lahat ng plano mo masusunod, may mga pagkakataon na biglang mangyayari mababago yung plano siyempre kailangan ano ka lang healthy lang para maka isip ka ng bagong plano. "*

Another participant shared her story of sacrifices and how she is doing everything to make herself the successful person she is aiming for. She went on to say:

*"Ever since I started schooling at NEUST, I said to myself that when I graduate or when I finish my four-year journey here in NEUST, I would like myself to have a Latin award. Since the first semester, I have taken care of my grades. I am a very grade-conscious person. I asserted much effort and did everything that I did. So far, so good. Sacrifice Kasi says like I worked a lot before, I decided to sacrifice those. I quit my job for four years, of course. I ask for my mom's help para makatapos ako. Kasi wala naman mawawala, meron pala nawalan ka ng trabaho but you gained a lot of knowledge, experience and after 4 years look where you are. Where are you, diba?"*

If some sacrificed the job they had, on the other hand, P5 let go of her previous program she was into to go after another program where she found a bit challenging. She noted:

*"Siguro ang sinakripisyo ko yung gusto kong marating kase tourism talaga gusto ko hindi educ pero sabi nga eto nato igrab na natin."*

Although these students experienced difficulty at an early age, that led them to stop education for a while and, after some time, decided to return to have new experiences and to gain more knowledge that would help them effectively. Furthermore, it was evident as P14 learned new things when he returned to school, he noted:

*"Somehow, I also learned a lot. When I went back to school, I was happy that I understood and learned new things, and returning to school nowadays is very different. "*

Like P1 and P3, other participants noted that returning to school helped them improve their attitudes and personalities. P1 said:

*"My self-esteem was improved, and my social life was developed."*

P3 stated,

*"Lakas ng loob kase hindi biro mag-aral kaya kapag nagdesisyon ko haharapin mo. Lalo na educ kinuha ko hindi madali."*

Even though it is indeed tough to balance studying and other responsibilities, it makes these students become the person they want to be, learns new things, and have a good relationship with other students even though there are few gaps in their age, P13 noted:

*"First of all, I am happy because of the new environment. I meet new people because they are still young. It is very refreshing in the social aspect because of their way of living and thinking. After learning, of course, there is an improvement because, since I am in my 3rd year again, the theories I did not know before related to my course I know now. That is why it is tough to synchronize life when you have a family while studying. "*

Participants' responses illustrated most of what they felt when they returned to school and believed that they gained knowledge and skills that helped them to become successful students.

## 6. Future Expectations

Returning to school is motivated by the expectations of these school returnees. These expectations motivate students to work harder and complete their tertiary education. These expectations may act as self-fulfilling prophecies, motivating students to strive to meet them. Additionally, the study participants discussed their expectations following completion of their tertiary education and how they intend to apply their knowledge in the field to which they aspire.

### 6.1. Career Development and Life Opportunities

Career development is defined as a life-long process of learning and work. It is also associated with the transition towards personal decisions about someone's future (Hiebert B. Borgen W. Schober K. 2010). Career development is one of the things the participants are holding to, the reason they return to studying. They have their plans that they expect when they finish their tertiary education. Some participants of this study answered that they anticipate having a better job when they finish their studies. Moreover, P6 answered that she expected to find a good job, quoted:

*"Find a job."*

Similarly, P10 gave a broader response to the question:

*"Ang inaasahan ko kapag naka graduate ako yun nga madaming opportunity, madaling makapagtrabaho or mas madali makahanap ng trabaho."*

It also gave confidence for the participants to have a stable job because of their Bachelor's Degree in the future. P1 said that:

*"In terms of my career, I expect a better job than I had before since I am more advanced in terms of educational requirements."*

P2 also believed that having a 4-year course will be an advantage in finding a stable job. She responded with:

*"Maghahanap ng trabaho diba kase kapag 4 years course madaling makahanap ng trabaho kesa sa dati kong course 2 years lang mahirap".*

Similar to what P3 said:

*"Nabi-vision ko na yung better future kasi mas marami ng magiging posible na mangyayare kapag nakapag tapos kana."*

Participants also expect better life opportunities for themselves and their families, just like what P9 said:

*"Siyempre, una dito better life kasi mas makakakuha na ako ng better opportunities tapos ine-expect ko na din na magagawa ko na yung mga gusto ko while nakakatulong ako sa family ko."*

They were confident that they would be excellent professionals in the field they had chosen because of the experiences they gained from balancing their studies and other responsibilities. The straddling voice emphasizes the value of academic knowledge as well as fundamental knowledge, and how students can apply what they've learned in school to their professional futures, as previous studies have shown. P12 stated:

*"Well, I do believe that I can use my abilities and capabilities and I can find an excellent job, and I can have my way to express my credibility as a student from NEUST."*

P13 gave emphasized using the concepts she learned while studying, went to say:

*"Of course, I am hoping to use what I studied. I want to be a teacher so that the job is more stable and hopefully soon."*

Some of the participants are assured that to find a job the moment they finish their tertiary education. Some also have other plans before they find work, most specifically those who have their course a licensure examination like those taking up the Education Program. When asked, P15 noted:

*"First and foremost, I am expecting to earn my license and then get a job."*

P5 also agreed to this statement, she said,

*“Actually LET, tapos maghahanap ng trabaho sa private school which is meron na akong aaplayan.”*

When P4 was also asked the same question, he also answered that He would take a licensure exam and find a job. He stated:

*“Maghahanap ng trabaho tapos magte-take ng LET.”*

While some of these participants are positive about what they will do in the future, some are also thinking twice about their steps.

P7, a BSED student might not use his Bachelor's Degree and find another job, he stated:

*“Siguro hindi naman ako magtuturo, mag aabroad na lang ako, mag aapply na lang ako sa abroad.”*

In the case of others, they do not expect to have a job on the Degree they finished, although they will try and resort to finding another job. P8 said:

*“Hindi ko naman inaasahan na makapasok agad ako sa trabaho pero kine claim ko na magkakaroon ako ng trabaho dahil siyem-pre nakapag tapos ako ng pag-aaral doon mapupunta yon, so meron akong aasahan.”*

Similar to what P14 has in mind, he noted:

*“Right now, I think it is hard to apply when you graduate because of the online class. However, now I am thinking of another job if I will not be able to use my course.”*

Likewise, P11 is also worrying adding the fact that it is a bit too hard to find a job now in the pandemic, she said:

*“Sa ngayon kasi dahil nga may pandemya, hindi ko masyadong sure kung paano na yung ating kinabukasan sa pag eeduc, mahirap magkaroon ng trabaho dahil yung kapatid ko matagal na din siyang graduate ng teacher hanggang ngayon di pa rin siya na lin.”*

From the participants' responses, some expect that their decision to return to school will bring them career development and better life opportunities. Although some are worried about what their future may bring, they still expect that it will bring change to themselves and the people around them.

The following themes have emerged from the data:

Table 1

*Summary of Codified Responses*

**REASONS**

Family

Self-Improvement

School Accessibility

Job Opportunities

**MOTIVATIONS**

Family

Environmental Factors

Self-Development

Job Stability

**CHALLENGES**

Physical And Social Adjustment

Time Management

Financial Aspect



**Chosen Course****COPING MECHANISMS**

Discipline And Time Management

Adjustment, Support, And Motivation From Self And Peers

**DEVELOPMENTS AND ACHIEVEMENTS**

Self-Confidence

Knowledge, Sacrifices And Experience

**FUTURE EXPECTATIONS**

Life Opportunities And Career Development

**Conclusion**

It is concluded in the study that the main reasons of school returnees in go back to school and pursue to finish education are the expectations of participants for better job opportunities after having a Bachelor's degree, the accessibility of school, influence, and support of family, and dedication to improve oneself. Motivation is also related to participants' life stages as school returnees. It is identified that environmental factors such as family and peers, job stability in the future, and self-development are the following motivations that emerged from the data collected. It is also found that the challenges encountered by school returnees are linked to the adjustment to the environment and people, course issues, and financial problems. Many school returnees face different struggles in their studies. At the same time, the fruit of these challenges is the achievements they gained as they learned how to balance being a student, a parent, and a working professional. In discussing the management of coping with the challenges in studying, the students reported that the key in coping with these challenges are adjusting to the environment they are into, having proper time management of the things they will do as a student, as an employee, and as a parent to their children, and having support networks that help them to give a morale boost in continuing their studies. As to the expectations of school returnees when they finish their tertiary education, the answers that emerged were to take licensure examination and, finally, seek a better job that will benefit them since they have already finished their Bachelor's Degree.

The local government should help the areas far from civilization to increase students' access to college schools and universities. It is recommended to provide free transportation to accommodate students living far from their schools to carry them to their respective school colleges. Schools should also help find scholarships from public and private sectors to support students to aid their college finances. The most relevant challenge returnee students addressed was students' physical and social adjustment. Researchers recommend that teachers monitor their students' regarding the problems they are dealing with in the environment and the people around them. It is also recommended that students help their classmates (returnee students) adjust by being friendly and open to offering help if they need it.

**Acknowledgment**

Profound thanks are hereby expressed to the following individual who has made this research possible. To Zarina M. Pajarillaga, Claudine Gay A. Bote, Celine Joi C. Pajarillaga, Donna Rose P. Rueda, Anne Pauline Mateo and Jamela G. Maducdoc, my BSED English students; to the participants who provide us with the needed information for this research, and to all who, in one way or another, made this work possible.

**References**

- [1] J. S.R. Chakravarty & C. D'Ambrosio, "The measurement of social exclusion," German Institute for Economic Research, <http://www.diw.de/deutsch/produkte/publikationen/diskussionspapiere/docs/papers/dp364.pdf>, (2003).
- [2] M. Warschauer, "Technology and social inclusion: rethinking the digital divide," Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, (2003).
- [3] J.P. Haisken-DeNew & C. D'Ambrosio, "ICT and socio-economic exclusion," [http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=433220](http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=433220) [accessed 28/11/04], (2002).
- [4] B. Parsad & L. Laurie, "Distance Education at Degree-granting Postsecondary Institutions: 2006-07," Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics. <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2009044>, (2008).
- [5] J.M. Ross-Gordon, "Adult Learners in the Classroom," In "Meeting the Special Needs of Adult Students," edited by Deborah Kilgore and Penny J. Rice, special issue, *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education* 102: 43-52. (2003).
- [6] C. B. Rumann, Corey B., & F. A. Hamrick, "Student Veterans in Transition: Re-Enrolling after War Zone Deployments." *Journal of Higher Education* 81: 431-458, 2010.
- [7] T. Rocco, "Helping Adult Educators Understand Disability Disclosure," *Adult Learning* 12 (2): 10-12, (2001).