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Balancing Academic and Parental Responsibilities: Exploring the Role of University Day-Care Programs for Student Parents

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Abstract

This study is intended to explore how university day-care programs can assist and provide aid to student parents in balancing their studies and parental duties. This study uses qualitative research methodology, with in-depth interviews being employed to explore the experiences, challenges, benefits and attitudes of student parents involved in university day-care facilities. Upon the research, the findings revealed that student parents face complex challenges in managing academic and child care responsibilities, highlighting the importance of effective time management and support systems. Additionally, the quality of day-care services offered by the university significantly influences their ability to face these responsibilities successfully. Feedback from student parents emphasized the need for universities to ensure quality care, provide necessary resources, and implement supportive policies. Moreover, recommendations from these participants include prioritizing a safe environment, credible administration, excellent instructors, appropriate curriculum, sufficient space, sanitation, a variety of activities, and effective communication with parents. Enhancing university day-care programs based on these findings can create a more supportive and inclusive environment for student parents, facilitating their ability to balance academic and parental responsibilities.

Keywords: *day-care, student parents, academic and parental responsibilities, quality*



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Introduction

In order to complete and excel in education while caring for children is a challenging experience for many university students who are parents. Balancing academic responsibilities with child care needs can be challenging, often leading to high stress levels, anxieties and even school dropout (Nelson *et al.*, 2013; Reichlin *et al.*, 2021). University day-care is becoming a potential solution to this problem by providing a beneficial and often free high-quality child care option for university students who are parents (White, 2023). Therefore, by providing a high-quality child care option, for example, universities can attract and retain more student parents (Moreau & Kerner, 2012). Besides, it also can help to increase safe spaces on campus and create a more welcoming environment for all students. That being said, child care can provide many benefits for student parents, including increased academic success, reduced stress levels, improved mental and physical health, an increased sense of community, enhanced career opportunities, and the ability to build relationships with other student parents, learn about child development, and get involved in their children's education (Institute for Women's Policy Research [IWPR], 2011).

Notwithstanding, there are also many challenges associated with university day-care. For instance, one significant challenge is that when establishing a plan of action for on-campus child care at a university, one must take into account the institution's existing regulations and administrative frameworks related to child care provision—noting that formal child care policies vary widely across institutions, and many universities have yet to develop dedicated policies in this area. As such, administrative constraints and limited institutional commitment to child care often become barriers to program development. Additionally, the cost of university day-care can be unaffordable for some students (Friendly & Macdonald, 2014). In any case, despite these challenges and obstacles, it is still crucial that university day-care can be a valuable resource for student parents in order to balance their academic and child

care responsibilities. Beyond that, the program of university day-care eventually can help to reduce stress, improve academic performance, and create a more welcoming environment for all students (Peterson, 2016).

For the context of this study, the UIII (Universitas Internasional Islam Indonesia) day-care center is essential in order to support its students who are also parents by allowing them to maintain their academic pursuits while fulfilling their parental responsibilities effectively and safely. Throughout this research, the significant aim of this study is to examine the experiences and responses of student parents using the day-care services; for instance, by gaining insights into their perspectives, perceptions, and possibly identifying areas for improvement. Regardless, by gaining an understanding of how parents perceive and engage with the day-care program is crucial for enhancing its services and eventually can be a way of addressing any challenges or concerns of this day-care facility. On top of that, by capturing feedback, this research can be a guide for future development and evaluation of the day-care facility within the campus and also ensure it remains responsive and aligned with the evolving requirements of the student parent community. Nonetheless, a child care center can contribute to the overall enhancement of student support services within higher education institutions.

Research Gap

The realm of providing for the needs and experiences of student parents who use university day-care facilities is not well understood and researched. The establishment of specialized and effective support systems is often hindered. This study aims to investigate student parents' attitudes, experiences and perceptions of university day-care services. By doing this, it hopes to close the knowledge gap and offer suggestions for enhancing the current services to better accommodate the special requirements of student parents.

Research Questions

1. How does university day-care support student parents in managing their academic commitments and child care responsibilities?
2. What are the benefits and challenges experienced by student parents who utilize university day-care services?

Literature Review

Theory of Human Motivation

It must be admitted that people can reach a higher level of potential if they have satisfied their basic needs (i.e. physiological needs and safety). Based on the theory of human motivation by Maslow (1943), there are five stages in the hierarchy of needs (physiological, safety–security, belongingness, esteem and self-actualization). According to Maslow, if people’s physiological, safety, and belonging needs are met, they are then able to pursue satisfying their ‘higher needs’ (self-esteem and self-actualization). In contrast, those who struggle to satisfy their basic needs (physiological and safety), have difficulty fulfilling their psychological needs (belongingness and self-esteem) and self-fulfillment needs. Some are reluctant to use this theory since it would be very difficult to equalize people’s needs and create the needs as a hierarchy. This aligns with criticism that claims Maslow’s theory for being too culture-focused (Yang, 2003). However, Maslow’s hierarchy of needs is still frequently recognized as a potential framework for a deeper comprehension of the needs of the individual, especially in relation to quality of life. Davis-Sharts (1986) also found empirical support for this theory across a wide range of nations and cultures.

In the case of mature students in higher education (HE) who mostly also have caring responsibilities for a young child, there is certainly a barrier to engaging in education and training. Osborne *et al.* (2004, as cited in Brooks, 2012) claimed fathers were frequently hesitant to enrol in

a full-time HE courses because they perceived this as conflicting with their role as the breadwinner, and women experienced gendered expectations that they would be the primary caregiver regardless of the demands of their university courses. Therefore, student parents need a strong support system in order to elevate their motivation to continue their higher education.

Maslow (1943) argued that every person can experience personal growth when they fulfill their fundamental demands. For student parents, catering for dependent children is also part of an essential demand that needs to be fulfilled. Hence, having someone that can be relied on for protecting their children would be beneficial for their personal development. University day-care can be a potential alternative to support mature students in HE who still have caring responsibilities for their young children.

Child Care Arrangements

In the United States, the common definition of child care is non-custodial care given to a child while a parent or guardian is at work or attending school (Blank, 1997; Hayes *et al.*, 1990; Klein, 1992; McNeil, 2005; Steinfelds, 1973). Then, McNeil (2005) explained that the typical age range for children receiving child care is generally 12 years old or younger. In Indonesia, it is customary to depend on grandparents and other relatives for assistance in taking care of children. Based on the Sociocultural and Education Module of Indonesia's 2018 National Socioeconomic Survey, approximately 47 percent of mothers have had to leave their children under the age of five behind when participating in activities outside the home. Nearly half of these mothers mentioned that their children were under the care of their grandparents (Smeru Research Institute, 2022). Nevertheless, depending on grandparents for child care has implications for families, as some parents have experienced

disagreements concerning parenting approaches and disciplinary measures. As a consequence, day-care services could be a solution.

Much research has looked at the connection between mothers' needs for child care and their happiness with those outcomes. For instance, Steiber (2009) discovered a connection between child care obligations and the experience of work-to-family conflict. Time-based conflicts were more likely to occur in households with three or more children, particularly if the youngest child was under three years old. Arpino and Luppi, (2020) also investigated whether various combinations of paid and unpaid child care arrangements are related to the degree of satisfaction that working women have with work-family balance. In addition, Moon and Hasan (2022) explored if the working parents' impression of the need for child care centers for their job productivity is connected to their worries and anxiety about their dual duties; maintaining work efficiency and providing good parental child care. Those studies mostly explore working parents' perspectives on perceiving child care responsibility. However, the studies that focus on the influence of child care arrangements on student-parent satisfaction and life balance are still limited. Therefore, this research more specifically focuses on the perspective of student parents, who are continuing their study in HE, who rely on the university day-care service for taking care of their children.

Methodology

Research Design

By describing the academic and parental responsibilities, the researchers used a qualitative approach based on a descriptive case study to investigate the role of university day-care programs for student parents. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), qualitative research aids researchers in investigating, discovering and comprehending the meanings that individuals or groups ascribe to social or individual

interaction. The process includes developing research questions and procedures, data collection in the participant's environment, inductive data analysis building from particulars to general themes, and the researchers interpreting the data's meaning.

Participant Selection

Purposive selection is used to select research participants. According to Creswell, purposeful sampling 'identifies and selects individuals or groups of individuals who are mostly conversant about or experienced with a phenomenon of interest' (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Creswell, 2008; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). Keeping this in mind, the researchers believe that the approach is relevant to employ in this study because the participants ought to meet the following criteria: graduate or postgraduate student parents with a child in the university day-care program. Based on those criteria, the researchers purposefully selected participants for the current study. The study sought five participants—two mothers and three fathers—whether national or international graduate or postgraduate student parents at the Indonesian International Islamic University (UIII). This school was selected because access was more straightforward, and participants were willing to participate in the study.

Upon recruiting the five participants, researchers sent the interview guide questions to the participants three days prior to the interview. This allowed the participants to familiarize themselves with the interview spectrum and be prepared for the type of questions they may be potentially asked.

Data Collection

An online and offline interview were used to collect study data. An interview, according to Gay *et al.* (2012), is typically designed to purposefully interact with one or more people to obtain specific information from the other party. Researchers can obtain important

information from participants through interviews that they would not be able to obtain simply by observing them. Based on that fact, researchers believe that the interview is the most appropriate instrument for data collection because it allows researchers to ask participants specific questions. Also, it allows researchers to ask follow-up questions to clarify any doubt or concern raised during the interaction.

In addition, the researchers used a WhatsApp text to collect additional information; as a result, the researchers thought to use additional instruments containing similar questions asked in interview sessions; this would equally give the participants a chance to elaborate more on their answers during their leisure time.

Analysis Procedures

Thematic analysis is used in this study. To generate the themes from the data, researchers employed Miles and Huberman's (1994) suggested steps when analyzing data, and the steps were: data collection, data reduction, data display, and conclusion. The researchers began data analysis immediately after the interviews by transcribing the interview audios. After transcription, the researchers started reducing the data by selecting essential phrases, sentences and words, and displayed them for further analysis. From the displayed data, researchers developed the themes discussed below.

Ethical Issues

Permission was obtained from the participants, and the purpose of the study was clearly stated. Participants were free to choose whether to participate in the study. They would also be able to withdraw whenever they felt uncomfortable in maintaining their identity, and any information shared by participants would be kept private.

Analysis and Discussion

In the analysis section, we conducted interviews with five participants—two student mothers (Participants A and B) and three student fathers (Participants C, D and E)—to gain a detailed understanding of maintaining a healthy study-life balance and the importance of child care for student parents. These interviews allowed us as researchers to gather detailed information and insights from all participants. The analysis focuses on six themes: (1) the challenges of balancing academic and child-rearing responsibilities; (2) the importance of maintaining a healthy work-life balance; (3) the significance of child care for student parents; (4) factors that determine effective day-care services; (5) policies and practices that can better support student parents; and (6) additional services and resources. The findings are interpreted through the lens of Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, which posits that individuals can only pursue higher-order needs—such as esteem and self-actualization—once their foundational needs of safety, security and belonging are adequately met.

The Challenges of Balancing Academic and Child-Rearing Responsibilities

From the perspective of Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, the challenges of balancing academic and child care responsibilities are fundamentally rooted in safety and belonging needs. When student parents cannot ensure a safe, reliable and nurturing environment for their children, their capacity to focus on academic self-actualization is significantly compromised. This theme explores how these challenges manifest differently across student mothers and student fathers.

Balancing academic and child care responsibilities poses challenges for parents pursuing a graduate degree, as discussed by all five participants. Participant A, a student mother, shares the struggles of being

a first-time mother and student, highlighting the emotional difficulty of leaving her child at day-care and the constant juggle between academic commitments and child care. As she said:

It is quite tough to handle when being a mother and getting a Ph.D. It is much more difficult when you are a first-time mother with no prior experience. I'll relate my story because my spouse and I are both students. A Ph.D. and having a kid are both essential to me, so balancing academic and child care commitments is challenging. However, we must exercise extreme caution in determining what our child needs. To be honest, dropping my child off to day-care in the morning and seeing him cry while leaving him there is incredibly difficult for me.

Participant B, also a student mother, emphasizes the significance of routines and time management. Her account is particularly telling in terms of the gendered burden: beyond academic demands; she manages the full spectrum of domestic responsibilities—preparing meals, monitoring children's schoolwork and coordinating household logistics—before attending to her own studies late at night. She asserted:

I have three children: 13 yo (male, 1st grader junior high school), 7 yo (2nd grader primary school), and 5 yo (female, kindy level day-care UIII). I have a daily schedule for my family and me. In the morning, I do routines such as preparing food for breakfast and kids' snacks for school and getting ready for myself. After coming back from campus, I check my kids' progress at school, cook for dinner, and have free time after dinner with my schedule. I start reading or

doing my assignment after they go to bedtime or on the weekend if my husband is not on duty. Usually, I sleep at 11.00 WIB every day. Mostly, I did my assignment on campus. I try not to do many assignments at home.

This account contrasts markedly with those of student fathers in this study. While student fathers (Participants C, D and E) acknowledged the difficulty of balancing academic and child care responsibilities, none described a comparable accumulation of domestic labor layered onto their academic schedule. This distinction suggests that the burden carried by student mothers extends beyond child care itself to encompass broader household management responsibilities, consistent with gendered expectations identified by Osborne *et al.* (2004, as cited in Brooks, 2012).

Participant C, a student father, discusses the challenges faced as a foreign student without extended family support, noting that spousal support makes effective time management achievable. As he emphasizes: “It is not an easy task, especially when studying in another country where no cousins and relatives exist. But it is possible to manage the time when you have the support from a wife so it can be possible to manage time.”

Participant D, a student father, acknowledges the difficulties of balancing academic and child care responsibilities, particularly in households where both parents are students. As he shares:

Pursuing a Ph.D. course and having a child is a daunting experience, especially for those whose both parents are students. It is quite difficult to manage both academic and child care responsibilities but you have to be very cautious of what your child’s needs are. Balancing is a bit difficult especially when you drop your child in the morning and you

see him crying while leaving him in the child care, but it takes time for a child and parents to go through this journey. There are many other needs of the child that need to be taken into account, what he needs in the day-care and what should I bring besides his food. Or what if he got sick—your academic journey can also be impacted, especially for the mother parent.

Participant E, a student father, shares a positive experience, emphasizing the importance of time management, support systems, and task prioritization. He outlined:

As a student parent, my experience has been incredibly rewarding. Balancing academic responsibilities with child care responsibilities requires effective time management and support systems and I have found that establishing a consistent routine and prioritizing tasks have been essential. Additionally, I have relied on the support of family, friends and child care professionals to ensure that my child's needs are met while I focus on my studies. It has been a challenging but fulfilling experience, and I am proud of the progress I have made academically while also being present for my child.

Through Maslow's lens, these accounts reveal that all five participants are navigating unmet safety and belonging needs before they can fully engage with academic self-actualization. A clear gender distinction is evident: student mothers (A and B) predominantly describe challenges rooted in emotional and caregiving burdens—the distress of separation and the weight of domestic routines layered onto academic

demands. Student fathers (C, D and E), while acknowledging similar difficulties, frame their challenges more in terms of logistical management and reliance on spousal support, with none describing the compounded domestic labor evident in the mothers' accounts. This pattern aligns with Osborne *et al.* (2004, as cited in Brooks, 2012), who found that mothers face persistent gendered expectations as primary caregivers, while fathers experience tension primarily around time management and provider identity. Until these foundational safety and belonging needs are secured—primarily through reliable child care—neither group can fully direct their energy toward academic achievement.

The Importance of Maintaining a Healthy Work-Life Balance

Maslow's framework suggests that belonging needs—feeling supported, connected and secure within one's environment—are a prerequisite for higher functioning. For student parents, the availability of on-campus day-care directly addresses these needs by providing a proximate, trustworthy environment for their children, thereby reducing anxiety and enabling greater academic engagement. This theme examines how student mothers and student fathers perceive the importance of work-life balance and the role of day-care in facilitating it.

Participant A, a student mother, highlighted the challenges of balancing parenthood and academics without prior experience, emphasizing vigilance for potential issues. She stated:

I believe it is critical for parents who want to further their education. We've seen it, and without direct experience, you can't contribute effectively to your responsibilities as a student. I don't think we've had any problems with this child yet, but there are a few little things we should be aware of.

Participant B, a student mother, emphasized the necessity of on-campus day-care services, providing convenience and allowing her to focus on her studies. She said:

Having day-care on campus is a must, especially for a university that accepts students with child (children) under 7 yo. Not all parents have support systems, such as an extended family (grandmother, grandfather or other relatives) that can be trusted to care for children under 7 yo. Therefore, when day-care is available at the campus, it makes a student-parent more focused on their study because they can quickly check on their kids, and I believe the campus's day-care has good quality.

Participant C, a student father, discussed the significant impact of day-care services on both parents and children, praising the professionalism of the university's provision. He reported:

Day-care services are very important, not only for the parents, but essential for kids first of all to get interaction with other children and learn new things for their development. The day-care the UIII provided is very professional both in terms of management and in terms of treating the children. I didn't have any problem.

Participant D, a student father, shared personal experiences acknowledging the complexity of managing child care and academics. He said:

I think I would say it is highly important for parents who pursue higher education. We have experienced this and by having this first-hand experience you cannot contribute well to your academic responsibilities. I think considering this child care we have not experienced any challenges so far but there are some small things we should be mindful of.

Participant E, a student father, reiterated the value of day-care services but acknowledged the challenges of accessing and utilizing them. He articulated:

Day-care services are tremendously important for student parents in pursuing higher education. They provide children a safe and nurturing environment while allowing parents to focus on their studies. Accessing and utilizing day-care services can pose specific challenges for student parents. These challenges may include financial constraints, limited availability of child care slots, and scheduling conflicts with class timetables. Overcoming these obstacles is crucial for student parents to successfully pursue their educational goals.

Interpreted through Maslow's hierarchy, the availability of quality on-campus day-care directly fulfills safety and belonging needs for both student parents and their children. Gender differences again emerge: student mothers (A and B) expressed a more acute sense of personal responsibility for monitoring their children's well-being, reflecting persistent gendered expectations of primary caregiving. Student fathers (C, D and E), while equally valuing day-care, tended to frame its importance in terms of professional and logistical outcomes—

productivity, focus and institutional quality. When these belonging and safety needs are met through reliable day-care provision, all participants demonstrated a greater capacity to direct their energy toward esteem and self-actualization needs, manifested as academic progress and professional development.

The Significance of Child Care for Student Parents

At the level of safety needs in Maslow's hierarchy, child care facilities serve a critical function: they provide the secure, structured environment that student parents require to entrust their children's well-being to others while pursuing academic goals. The quality of that environment—its curriculum, staff and physical conditions—directly determines whether this safety need is genuinely met. This theme explores how student mothers and student fathers perceive and articulate the significance of child care.

Participant A, a student mother, emphasizes the importance of age-appropriate activities and a well-trained staff at child care centers. She asserted:

The curriculum at the day-care should be appropriate for the children's ages. They should offer activities that help kids learn and grow in a variety of ways. These activities might include playing, making art, listening to tales, playing outside, and enjoying unlimited supervised playtime. Make certain that the child-care staff is well-trained, experienced, and knowledgeable about working with small children. They should be capable of recognizing and satisfying the various requirements of children. Most significantly, they should provide a caring, secure and beneficial environment for the children. Having an in-person meeting with parents once a

month to communicate children's improvements, weaknesses and strengths helps parents and day-care to foster greater progress in a kid.

Participant B, a student mother, focuses on the safety and quality of child care, highlighting the importance of a safe environment, credible management, good teachers, an appropriate curriculum, adequate space, cleanliness, diverse activities, and effective communication with parents. She highlighted:

Safe environment (clean, fresh air and water, safety access, etc.); credible day-care management; a good teacher (kind, energetic, intelligent, patient and creative); a good curriculum; appropriate space for moving activities; have a reasonable amount of teachers with the student; clean day-care amenities and school appliances; various activities and materials; communicative teacher.

Participant C, a student father, emphasizes the effectiveness of child care services by integrating programs that allow parents to join events, recognizing the importance of involving parents in their child's experiences. As he described: "In terms of the child it is effective if it can integrate a program that parents with the children would join events as well."

Participant D, a student father, highlighted the significance of better facilities, educational lessons, and sensitivity to a child's needs. He stated: "Better facilities, educational lessons for the child, well protestation, and sensitivity to the child's needs."

Participant E, a student father, emphasizes affordability, flexibility, and quality care for student parents. He summarized:

I believe the key factors that make a day-care service effective in supporting student parents are affordability, flexibility, and quality care. The affordability ensures that day-care services are accessible to student parents from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. Flexibility in terms of operating hours and part-time options accommodates the varying schedules of student parents. Additionally, a day-care service should provide a safe and stimulating environment for children, with well-trained staff who understand the unique needs of student parents and their children.

Through Maslow's lens, the significance of child care for student parents operates primarily at the safety and belonging levels. When day-care quality is high, student parents' safety needs are met, freeing them to pursue esteem and self-actualization through academic achievement. Gender differences are observable: student mothers (A and B) placed greater emphasis on the quality of the physical environment, curriculum, and staff competence—reflecting their deeper investment in the direct caregiving dimension. Student fathers (C, D and E) tended to prioritize systemic and logistical factors such as affordability, flexibility, and parental involvement programs. Both perspectives are complementary and together point toward a comprehensive standard for effective university day-care.

Factors that Determine Effective Day-Care Services

Maslow's esteem needs—the need for recognition, competence and respect—become relevant at this stage. For student parents, effective day-care services contribute to their sense of competence as both parents and students. Institutional support signals that the university recognizes and values their dual role, directly addressing esteem needs. This theme examines how student mothers and student fathers identify the factors that make day-care services effective.

Participant A, a student mother, highlights the importance of granting academic privileges to student parents, recognizing the substantial energy and effort that parenthood demands. She mentioned: “I guess students who are parents should be given a bit of privilege when it comes to academics because parenthood is not easy and it requires a lot of energy and effort.”

Participant B, a student mother, expresses concerns about the shortage of teachers and facilities at the UIII day-care, emphasizing the need for more attention to older students and adequate resources. She explained:

The UIII day-care is experiencing a teacher shortage and facilities. Because of the lack of teachers, the day-care cannot accept any other students. In fact, most of the day-care attendees are babies or toddlers, so the teachers are busy with the needs of the young toddler. While other older students should get more attention. Books and activity materials for the kindy level are minimal. So, the first thing that needs to be solved is adding another teacher as soon as possible.

Participant C, a student father, reinforces the effectiveness of day-care services through parent participation in events, fostering stronger

connections between parents and the institution. Participant D, a student father, emphasizes the need for university policies that support student parents in fulfilling both academic and parenting responsibilities. As he argued:

Sometimes parents get stuck with their academic responsibilities, and by that, I mean online or off-line classes so the university should have policies for them to let them also fulfill their parenthood responsibilities as well. Sometimes the university should also show leniency for parents' students.

Participant E, a student father, suggests various institutional policies and practices to enhance the experience of student parents with day-care services. He proposed:

By establishing partnerships with local day-care centers to provide discounted rates or reserved slots for student parents, offering financial assistance or scholarships specifically designated for child care expenses, creating a centralized system for information and registration for day-care services, implementing flexible course scheduling options that consider the availability of day-care services, and providing on-campus day-care facilities to enhance convenience and proximity for student parents.

Through Maslow's framework, the factors that determine effective day-care services are directly tied to esteem needs. When universities provide adequate staffing, resources, and supportive policies, they signal

institutional recognition of student parents' dual responsibilities. Gender differences are evident: student mothers (A and B) focused on tangible deficiencies—staff shortages, inadequate materials, and the need for academic leniency—reflecting their direct, day-to-day experience of managing caregiving alongside study. Student fathers (C, D and E) tended toward systemic recommendations—policy reform, institutional partnerships, and flexible scheduling—reflecting a broader, structural orientation toward problem solving. Both perspectives are essential for universities seeking to comprehensively address the esteem and self-actualization needs of student parents.

Policies and Practices that Can Better Support Student Parents

At the level of self-actualization in Maslow's hierarchy, student parents aspire to achieve their full academic and professional potential. Institutional policies and practices that actively support student parents—through transportation, health care, flexible scheduling, and community-building—are the mechanisms through which universities can facilitate this highest level of need fulfillment. This theme explores how student mothers and student fathers envision the policies and practices that would most effectively support them.

Participant A, a student mother, emphasizes the importance of transportation and health services for student parents, recognizing their crucial role in managing children's needs while pursuing education. She stated the need for: 'Transportation and health physicians, especially for children.' Participant B, a student mother, highlights the need for more outdoor facilities and sports opportunities, alongside additional teachers, to enhance the day-care experience and ensure proper attention to all age groups. She emphasized: 'Sport and more outdoor facilities. But first, adding teachers will improve the quality of day-care.'

Participant C, a student father, suggests organizing social interaction activities within the university to foster a sense of community among local and foreign student families. Participant D, a student father, emphasizes the significance of having accessible health services, particularly a child doctor, for prompt and specialized care during emergencies. He said: 'I guess health is paramount and having a child doctor in case of emergency, that would be highly appreciated.' Participant E, a student father, proposes a broader range of additional services and resources, including tailored academic support programs, mental health resources, parenting workshops, and networking opportunities, to better support student parents.

Through Maslow's lens, the policies and practices identified by participants operate across multiple levels of the hierarchy—from safety (health care, transportation) to belonging (community activities, networking) to self-actualization (academic support, parenting workshops). Gender differences are again present: student mothers (A and B) prioritized immediate, practical support—transportation, health care, and physical facilities—consistent with their role as primary day-to-day managers of child care logistics. Student fathers (C, D and E) emphasized community building, institutional policy, and supplementary academic resources, reflecting a broader orientation toward long-term support structures. Together, these perspectives suggest that effective institutional policy must address both immediate practical needs and longer-term developmental supports to fully serve the diverse needs of student parents.

Additional Services and Resources

The final theme connects to Maslow's self-actualization level—the pursuit of personal growth, fulfillment, and the realization of one's full potential. Additional services and resources beyond basic child care represent the institutional investment required to enable student parents to thrive, not merely survive, in their dual roles. This theme captures how student mothers and student fathers envision further enhancements to university day-care provision.

Participant A, a student mother, emphasizes the importance of providing playing grounds and organizing trips outside the university to enhance children's day-care experiences. She asserted: "The day-care should provide a playground for children. Besides this, children should be given a small trip outside the university."

Participant B, a student mother, reiterates the importance of sports and outdoor facilities alongside additional teachers to improve day-care quality. Participant C, a student father, suggests social interaction activities to foster community and connection among student parents. Participant D, a student father, emphasizes the importance of high-quality day-care facilities for student parents' peace of mind. He stated: "I guess student parents need more quality time to focus on their studies. High quality day-care facilities let the student parents ensure they are not concerned about their child's well-being during the day."

Participant E, a student father, proposes additional institutional measures. He proposed:

Based on my experiences, I would recommend the following suggestions to universities to improve their day-care services for student parents: (1) Conducting regular surveys and assessments to gather feedback from student parents and identify areas for improvement, (2) Ensuring clear and transparent communication between the day-care service

providers, university administration, and student parents,(3) Continuously investing in staff training and development to enhance the quality of care provided, (4) Regularly reviewing and updating policies to address student parents' evolving needs and concerns, (5) Collaborating with local community organizations or nonprofits to expand the availability of day-care services and resources for student parents.

Through Maslow's framework, the additional services and resources identified by participants reflect aspirations toward self-actualization—for both student parents and their children. Gender differences remain consistent with previous themes: student mothers (A and B) focused on enrichment activities for children and physical environment improvements, reflecting their sustained attention to the quality of their children's daily experiences. Student fathers (C, D and E) gravitated toward systemic improvements—institutional communication, policy updates, and community collaborations—consistent with their broader structural orientation. Addressing both dimensions is essential for universities committed to fostering an inclusive, supportive environment in which all student parents can achieve their full academic and personal potential.

Conclusion of Analysis

From these perspectives, it is evident how complex and demanding it is to strike a healthy balance between academic pursuits and parental responsibilities. Interpreted through Maslow's hierarchy of needs, the data reveal that student parents' ability to achieve academic self-actualization is contingent upon the prior fulfillment of safety, belonging and esteem needs—needs that university day-care programs are uniquely

positioned to address. Gender differences are evident across all six themes: student mothers bear a greater burden of direct caregiving and domestic labor, while student fathers navigate structural and logistical challenges. Despite these differences, both groups consistently identified the on-campus day-care as a critical support mechanism. The suggestions provided by all participants indicate substantial room for improvement in the quality and comprehensiveness of these services, and university's commitment to student-parent success must attend to both the practical and systemic dimensions of day-care provision.

Findings

Interpreted through Maslow's hierarchy of needs, this research presents five key findings that illuminate the experiences of student parents—both mothers and fathers—who utilize the UIII university day-care facility while pursuing graduate and postgraduate studies.

1. Student parents face complex, multilayered challenges in balancing academic studies with child care responsibilities, rooted primarily in Maslow's safety and belonging needs. Effective time management and a reliable support system are essential prerequisites for academic success. Notably, gender differences are evident: student mothers (Participants A and B) carried a compounded burden of academic demands alongside domestic labor and primary caregiving responsibilities, while student fathers (Participants C, D and E) experienced challenges predominantly related to time management, logistical coordination, and identity tension around their provider role. Both groups, however, identified the absence of a secure child care arrangement as the primary obstacle to academic engagement.
2. The quality of day-care services received by student parents has a significant impact on their ability to fulfill both academic and

parental responsibilities. When safety and belonging needs are met through high-quality, professional day-care provision—as evidenced by the UIII facility—student parents, regardless of gender, demonstrated a greater capacity to redirect their attention toward academic achievement. Student mothers placed particular emphasis on the emotional reassurance derived from knowing their children were in a safe, well-managed environment, while student fathers emphasized institutional professionalism and operational reliability.

3. Child-care services provided by the university offer a safe and educational environment for children while enabling student parents to focus on their studies. This finding aligns with Maslow's safety needs: the existence of a structured, nurturing day-care environment fulfills the foundational requirement that children are protected, which in turn frees student parents to pursue higher-order needs such as esteem and self-actualization through academic progress. Both student mothers and student fathers affirmed this function of day-care provision, though mothers additionally emphasized the developmental quality of the curriculum and staff competence, while fathers highlighted systemic factors such as affordability and flexibility.
4. Student parents emphasized that the university can better support them by ensuring the quality of care, providing necessary resources, and implementing supportive institutional policies. These recommendations operate at the esteem level of Maslow's hierarchy—the need for institutional recognition of student parents' dual roles. Gender differences persist here: student mothers advocated for tangible improvements such as additional teachers, better materials, academic leniency, transportation, and accessible health care services. Student fathers proposed broader systemic reforms including institutional partnerships, financial assistance schemes, centralized information systems, flexible

course scheduling, and on-campus day-care expansion. Both sets of recommendations are complementary and collectively point toward a more inclusive institutional framework.

5. Student parents identified the following as essential factors for an effective university day-care facility: a safe physical environment, credible administration, excellent and adequately staffed instructors, an age-appropriate curriculum, sufficient space for physical activity, high standards of sanitation, a variety of enrichment activities, and effective communication with parents. These factors collectively address Maslow's safety and belonging needs, and their fulfillment is a precondition for student parents—both mothers and fathers—to successfully pursue self-actualization through higher education. While both genders converged on these quality standards, student mothers tended to foreground the caregiving and environmental dimensions, while student fathers emphasized administrative efficiency and programmatic flexibility.

Taken together, these findings demonstrate that university day-care programs are not merely a logistical convenience but a structural necessity for student parent success. Their effectiveness is contingent on addressing the full spectrum of needs identified in Maslow's hierarchy—from physical safety to institutional recognition—and on recognizing that student mothers and student fathers, while sharing common challenges, bring distinct gendered experiences and priorities that universities must attend to in designing and improving day-care services.

Limitations and Suggestions

This study explains the way university day-care services assist student parents, but it has limitations. These limitations suggest directions for further research. In addition, this section provides

suggestions for improving student parent support in future research. The following limitation points are identified.

- 1. Methodological Scope:** This qualitative study incorporated in-depth interviews, which are well-suited to exploring the lived experiences and perspectives of student parents. However, the depth of qualitative inquiry necessarily limits the breadth of the findings. A fuller understanding of the experiences and outcomes of student parents—including measurable academic progress, employment outcomes, and long-term well-being—could be achieved by complementing qualitative findings with quantitative methods such as surveys or longitudinal studies.
- 2. Researcher Positionality and Bias:** The positionality of the research team requires transparent reflection. Two of the three researchers in this study are student parents themselves, which may have introduced interpretive bias in data collection and analysis. To mitigate this, the research team employed several reflexivity strategies. First, reflexive journaling was maintained throughout the research process, in which the two researcher-parents documented their personal assumptions, experiences and emotional responses to the data to consciously separate their own perspectives from participants' accounts. Second, bracketing was practiced prior to analysis, whereby the researcher-parents explicitly identified and set aside their preconceptions before engaging with the data. Third, peer debriefing was conducted with the third researcher—who is not a student parent—serving as an external checker to review and interrogate interpretations and identify potential bias in the analytical process. Fourth, member checking was employed by returning key findings to participants to verify the accuracy and credibility of the researchers' interpretations. These combined strategies strengthen the trustworthiness of the findings while acknowledging the inherent positionality of the research team.

3. Temporal Scope: This study examined the immediate perceptions and experiences of student parents at a single point in time. Academic progress, employment opportunities, and long-term well-being should be evaluated for a more comprehensive assessment of the impact of university day-care services. Future research employing longitudinal designs would be better positioned to capture the sustained effects of day-care provision on student parent outcomes over time.

Based on these limitations, the following proposals can guide future research and enhance university day-care programs:

- 1. Comparative Studies:** Comparing university day-care programs across different universities and cultural contexts will help identify their relative effectiveness and facilitate the sharing of best practices across institutions.
- 2. Longitudinal Research:** Longitudinal research can reveal the long-term advantages and disadvantages of university day-care programs by tracking the experiences and outcomes of student parents over time. This can help improve programs and determine the sustained academic support requirements of student parents.
- 3. Mixed Methodologies:** Combining qualitative and quantitative research methodologies can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the experiences, outcomes and impacts of university day-care programs. This approach can validate qualitative findings, investigate statistical associations, and expand analytical perspectives.
- 4. Participation of Stakeholders:** Student parents, university administrators, academics and day-care workers should be included in the research process so that their diverse perspectives are considered. Collaborative research designs can generate more

contextually grounded insights and enhance the practical applicability of findings for improving university day-care facilities.

5. Continuous Improvement: University day-care programs should be systematically evaluated and continuously enhanced. This includes soliciting regular input from student parents, routinely assessing care quality, addressing emerging challenges, and adapting policies and practices to meet the evolving needs of student parent communities. By addressing these limitations and implementing the suggested approaches, future research and university day-care programs can better comprehend the challenges and benefits experienced by student parents, generating knowledge that can enhance policies, methods and resources designed to assist student parents in balancing their academic and family responsibilities.

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