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In the Midst of Pressure and Setbacks: A Phenomenological Study on Academic Resilience of 3rd Year Accountancy Students of BPSU-Balanga Campus

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ABSTRACT

Academic resilience plays a crucial role in helping students cope with demanding coursework, emotional stress, and setbacks. This study explores the lived experiences of 3rd year Accountancy students at Bataan Peninsula State University–Balanga Campus, focusing on how they perceive and practice resilience in the face of academic challenges. Using a qualitative phenomenological approach, data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with selected 3rd year Accountancy students. Participants were chosen through purposive criterion sampling—ensuring they had first-hand experience with academic struggles such as failing marks, difficult subjects, or time pressure. Findings revealed that resilience among the participants is shaped by four major themes: (1) Rising After Failure, (2) Emotional Endurance, (3) Adaptive Study Strategies, and (4) Support Systems. Students described resilience as not merely enduring difficulties, but learning, adjusting, and finding motivation to continue. Family, peers, professors, and faith served as their major sources of strength. This study highlights that academic resilience is not just a personal trait and it is influenced by relationships, environment, and mindset. Insights may guide educators in building supportive learning environments that help Accountancy students persist and succeed.

INTRODUCTION

Accountancy is widely regarded as one of the most challenging undergraduate programs in the Philippines. Nationwide, a significant number of students struggle with demanding coursework, complex subjects, financial pressure, emotional stress, and the fear of failure. For many, setbacks are common—failing quizzes, low examination results, delayed requirements, and academic overload. In this context, resilience becomes a survival skill.

Resilience is the ability to adapt, recover, and continue striving despite obstacles (Masten, 2018; Ungar, 2021). In academic settings, it refers to a learner's capacity to handle pressure, remain motivated, and improve after failure. Previous studies suggest that resilient students are more likely to persist in difficult courses, maintain well-being, and succeed in long-term academic goals (Martin, 2020; Morales, 2023).

However, while research exists on resilience in general, fewer studies examine Accountancy students, who face unique challenges: technical subjects, time-consuming workload, and high expectations from peers and family. In Bataan Peninsula State University-Balanga Campus, 3rd-year students consistently face heavy academic requirements and major examinations, making resilience vital for retention and performance.

This study focuses on how these students understand

resilience, experience setbacks, and find ways to cope. Using a phenomenological approach, it captures their lived experiences and emotional realities not just statistics, but human stories of pressure, frustration, courage, and perseverance.

Keywords: Academic resilience, Accountancy students, phenomenological study, coping strategies, emotional endurance, adaptive learning, higher education, Bataan Peninsula State University, student motivation, academic setbacks.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Design

The study employed a qualitative phenomenological design to explore the lived experiences and perceptions of resilience among 3rd year Accountancy students. Phenomenology is appropriate because it seeks to understand personal meanings behind human experience (Creswell, 2013).

Participants and Sampling

Five (5) participants were selected through purposive criterion sampling. This sampling strategy was used because the study specifically required individuals with direct, relevant experience of the phenomenon under investigation. To be included, participants needed to meet three criteria: (1) they must be currently enrolled

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as 3rd year BS Accountancy students at BPSU-Balanga Campus; (2) they must have encountered academic setbacks such as failing examinations, receiving low grades, or experiencing academic stress; and (3) they must be willing to openly share their experiences during the interview process. Purposive criterion sampling is widely recommended in qualitative research because it ensures that the participants can meaningfully contribute to the depth and richness of the data (Palinkas *et al.*, 2015). Greenwood, Terry, and White (2017) add that purposive sampling allows researchers to intentionally select information-rich cases, resulting in more reliable themes and clearer insights. Since this study focuses on lived academic struggles and personal resilience, selecting participants who have actually experienced academic setbacks is essential to capturing authentic and detailed accounts. The small sample size is also consistent with phenomenological research, which values depth of narratives over the number of respondents (Creswell, 2013). Through these criteria, the study ensured that the voices of students who genuinely faced challenges in the Accountancy program were meaningfully represented.

Data Collection

Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews conducted in person, scheduled at the most convenient time and location for the participants. This face-to-face setup allowed the researchers to establish rapport, observe non-verbal cues, and create a comfortable environment where students could express their thoughts openly and naturally. Each interview lasted approximately 20 to 40 minutes and was audio-recorded with the participants' informed consent to ensure accuracy in transcription and analysis. The interview guide contained open-ended questions designed to explore their personal experiences of academic setbacks, including feelings associated with failure, coping strategies they employed, sources of motivation, and the people or factors that helped them remain resilient. Follow-up probing questions were also asked whenever participants needed to clarify or elaborate on their responses. Conducting the interviews in person strengthened the authenticity and depth of the narratives, allowing the researchers to fully capture the emotions and lived experiences of each participant.

Data Analysis

Interview recordings were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using thematic analysis. After transcription, the researchers repeatedly read the data to gain familiarity with the participants' narratives. Significant statements, ideas, and emotional expressions were identified, coded, and grouped into recurring themes that represented the shared experiences and perceptions of the students. Braun and Clarke (2006) describe thematic analysis as a flexible and rigorous method for identifying patterns within qualitative data, making it appropriate for studies seeking to understand lived experiences. This approach allows researchers to interpret not only what participants

say, but also the underlying meaning behind their responses. Creswell (2013) further supports the use of thematic analysis in phenomenological research because it enables scholars to condense large amounts of narrative data into organized, meaningful themes that capture the essence of the phenomenon. Through this process, the study was able to draw out common experiences related to academic failure, coping mechanisms, motivation, and resilience, providing a deeper understanding of how 3rd year Accountancy students navigate academic setbacks.

Ethical Considerations

This study complied with the ethical standards set forth by the Data Privacy Act of 2012 (Republic Act No. 10173) and the Code of Ethics for Researchers. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was secured from all respondents. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained through the use of pseudonyms and secure data handling. All data were utilized solely for academic purposes and treated with integrity, transparency, and respect for participants' rights and privacy.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Rising After Failure

Participants shared how academic setbacks became turning points for personal growth. They viewed failure not as an endpoint but as a challenge that strengthened their determination. One participant expressed, "Bumagsak ako noon, pero hindi ako sumuko—ginawa ko iyong inspirasyon para bumawi." This reflects the concept of resilience described by Martin and Marsh (2006), emphasizing persistence despite adversity. The theme highlights students' ability to transform failure into motivation for improvement.

Emotional Endurance

Emotional strength emerged as a key factor in coping with academic and personal pressures. Participants described experiences of stress and discouragement but emphasized their efforts to maintain composure and positivity. As one noted, "Mahirap, pero kailangan kong magpakatatag—walang ibang lalaban para sa pangarap ko kundi ako." This aligns with the notion of emotional resilience in literature, where adaptive coping mechanisms help students maintain well-being during challenges (Connor & Davidson, 2003).

Adaptive Study Strategies

Students developed personalized strategies to enhance academic performance, such as time management, peer collaboration, and self-reflection. One participant stated, "Dati basta basa lang ako, pero natutunan kong magplano at mag-focus sa mahihirap na topics." This demonstrates metacognitive awareness and self-regulated learning, which Zimmerman (2002) identifies as essential components of academic success.

Support Systems

Family, friends, and mentors served as crucial sources of

encouragement and stability. Participants emphasized that social support helped them persevere through academic and emotional difficulties. As one shared, “Kung wala ang pamilya ko at mga kaibigan, baka sumuko na ako.” This theme reflects the role of interpersonal relationships

in fostering resilience, consistent with Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory (1979), which highlights the influence of social contexts on individual development. The heart-shaped conceptual illustration encapsulates the core essence of academic resilience among third-

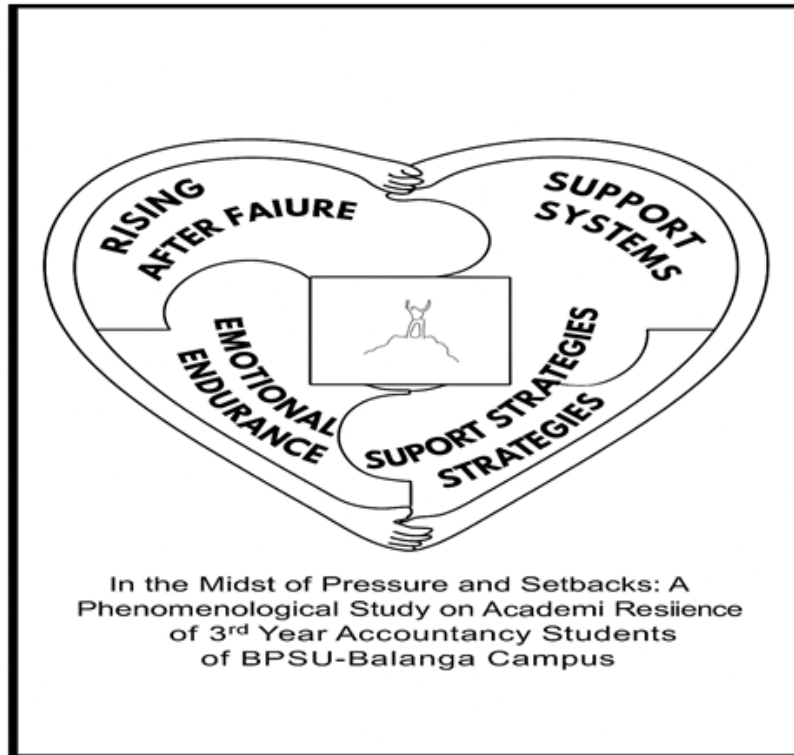


Figure 1: Interconnected Dimensions of Academic Resilience in Third-Year Accountancy Students

year Accountancy students, reflecting the interconnected themes that sustain their perseverance amidst academic and emotional challenges. Each segment of the heart represents an emergent theme derived from participants lived experiences, signifying that resilience is not a singular trait but a dynamic and holistic process shaped by personal, emotional, cognitive, and social factors. At the heart of the diagram is a symbolic image of an individual standing victoriously atop a peak—representing the culmination of resilience. It reflects the students’ journey from struggle to achievement, embodying the transformative process of overcoming setbacks through courage, adaptation, and support. The heart shape symbolizes that resilience is both emotional and relational, driven by self-belief and strengthened by human connection.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that academic resilience among 3rd year Accountancy students is an active process of learning, adjusting, and seeking strength from others. Their resilience is not just personal, but social—fueled by relationships, faith, and hope for their future career. Academic resilience is deeply intertwined with faith, optimism, and relational strength. Students often rely on spiritual beliefs as a source of inner peace and

persistence, while their bonds with others reinforce their motivation to continue. As such, resilience becomes an interplay between the mind, heart, and environment—a multidimensional construct that evolves through experience and reflection.

In essence, the resilience of Accountancy students is both personal and communal, characterized by perseverance, adaptability, and interdependence. It allows them not only to survive academic hardships but also to grow from them, embodying the human capacity to thrive despite adversity. The insights drawn from this research may serve as a foundation for educators, guidance counselors, and administrators in developing supportive learning environments and resilience-building programs that nurture both academic competence and emotional well-being. By understanding how students navigate setbacks, institutions can foster a culture of empathy, encouragement, and holistic growth—ensuring that learners are not only competent accountants but also resilient individuals prepared for the challenges of professional life.

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