

ADVERSITY TO ACHIEVEMENT: A CASE STUDY OF RESILIENCE IN THE HIGHER EDUCATION JOURNEY OF A STUDENT WITH DISABILITY

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Abstract

This qualitative case study examined the resilience of a student with a disability who successfully completed her bachelor's degree in a higher education institution in Davao Oriental, Philippines. Anchored on Resilience Theory, the study sought to understand the difficulties encountered by the student, the strategies she employed in responding to these challenges, and the insights gained from her experiences in relation to her success in higher education. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with the student, four peers, and four instructors. The gathered data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings revealed three major themes: Adversity, Mediating Processes, and Better-than-Expected Outcomes. Adversity comprised policy-practice gaps, questioned capability, accessibility barriers, and personal challenges. Despite these difficulties, the student demonstrated resilience through self-advocacy, proactive engagement, persistence, and support mobilization. These protective processes contributed to positive outcomes, including academic success, leadership development, social contribution, and shared responsibility. The findings suggest that resilience resulted from the dynamic interaction between adversity and protective processes. The study provides insights into the experiences and success of a student with a disability in higher education

Keywords: Resilience, disability, higher education, Mati City, Philippines

1. Introduction

The choice to pursue higher education is and will always be filled with challenges. However, it is even more challenging for our students with special needs (Zabeli et al., 2021). Despite these challenges, many continue to persevere and show remarkable resilience in pursuing higher education (Caliso et al., 2025). These realities emphasize the importance of understanding the factors that enable some students to persist and succeed despite adversity. Consequently, this study focused on the resilience of a student with a disability who completed higher education, aiming to explore the experiences and processes that contributed to her success.

A study by Subut et al. (2025) in the United Arab Emirates found that students with disabilities experience both the negative and positive aspects of their college environment. Likewise, in Nigeria, a study found that students' experiences in their environment, including interactions with peers and teachers, could contribute to educational challenges during their undergraduate studies (Okoye & Adirika, 2019). However, research findings from India posited the importance of a supportive learning environment in assisting students

throughout their college years (Bindhani & Gopinath, 2024).

In the Philippines, a study found that students with special needs continue to face challenges related to instruction, learning environments, stakeholder support, and institutional preparedness (Reyes, 2023). Similarly, Montales (2026) reported concerns regarding teacher preparedness, limited teaching and learning resources, and weak policy support in addressing the needs of learners with special educational needs. In addition, Caliso et al. (2025) found that these students continue to struggle in their education due to exclusion, social stigma, and inadequate accessibility.

Although existing studies have contributed to understanding the experiences and challenges of learners with disabilities in Philippine higher education, limited research has been conducted within higher education institutions in Davao Oriental. This gap in the literature prompted this study to examine the experiences of a student with a disability and to explore how she persevered through her university journey despite the challenges she encountered. By examining her experiences, this study seeks to uncover not only the barriers she faced but also the coping strategies and resilience processes that contributed to her successful completion of a bachelor's degree.

Significance of the Study

The findings of this study may benefit various stakeholders in higher education. For students with disabilities, the study may provide insights into the experiences, coping strategies, and support systems that contribute to academic success. For instructors and higher education institutions, the findings may contribute to the development of more inclusive teaching practices and supportive learning environments. Policymakers and educational leaders may also use the findings to strengthen programs, services, and policies that promote equitable access and participation for students with disabilities in higher education.

Furthermore, this study contributes to the attainment of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4: Quality Education, which aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all (United Nations, 2015). The study findings may provide insights for the development of more inclusive educational practices and support systems that enable learners with disabilities to access, participate in, and complete higher education. Lastly, the study supports Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 10: Reduced Inequalities by emphasizing the importance of equitable opportunities, accessible learning environments, and institutional support in fostering the academic success and inclusion of students with disabilities (United Nations, 2015).

Research Questions

This study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What difficulties did the student with a disability encounter in higher education?
2. How did the student with a disability respond to and cope with these difficulties?
3. What insights can be drawn from the student's experiences regarding her successful completion of higher education?

Theoretical lens

This study is guided by Resilience Theory, which explains how individuals achieve positive adaptation despite experiencing adversity. Rutter (2012) conceptualized resilience as a dynamic process involving the interaction of risk and protective factors, while Masten (2001) described resilience as positive adaptation in the face of significant challenges. Rather than viewing resilience as a fixed trait, the theory considers resilience a process through which individuals respond to difficulties and utilize available resources

to attain favorable outcomes.

Building on these perspectives, Van Breda (2018) posited that resilience is best understood as a process involving three interconnected components: adversity, mediating processes, and outcomes. According to this view, resilience cannot be understood solely through the presence of adversity or positive outcomes; rather, attention must be given to the mediating processes that enable individuals to respond effectively to challenges. These mediating processes include personal strengths, coping strategies, supportive relationships, and environmental resources that contribute to positive adaptation despite adversity.

Conceptual Paradigm

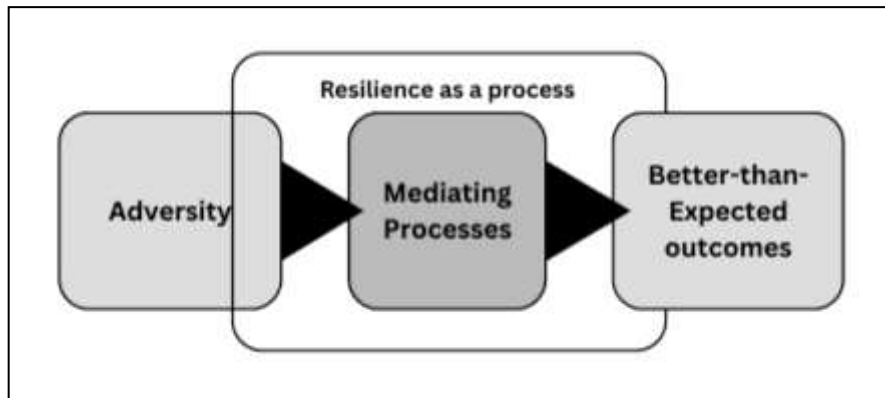


Figure 1. Conceptual Paradigm of Resilience as a Process

Figure 1 illustrates Van Breda's (2018) process-oriented model of resilience. The model shows that resilience emerges through the interaction of adversity, mediating processes, and better-than-expected outcomes. In the present study, this framework serves as the basis for examining the difficulties encountered by the student, the coping strategies employed in response to these challenges, and the positive outcomes associated with success in higher education.

2. Methodology

This chapter presents the methods and processes used to conduct the study, including the research design, research locale, sample and sampling technique, interview guide questions, data-gathering procedure, data analysis, and ethical considerations.

Research Design

For this study, a qualitative single-case study design was employed to allow for an in-depth exploration of participants' experiences, perspectives, and personal histories. This approach is particularly appropriate for providing a comprehensive and detailed understanding of a phenomenon within its real-life context (Gerring, 2004; Yin, 2009). As a qualitative research design, a case study facilitates an intensive examination of the case of a student with a disability in higher education and enables the development of a deeper understanding of complex phenomena within their natural settings (Starman, 2013; Khan, 2019).

Furthermore, a case study aims to capture the characteristics and complexities of a case in depth, making it appropriate for understanding processes, interactions, and the meanings individuals attach to their experiences (Njie & Asimiran, 2014). This aligns with the purpose of my study, which sought to examine the resilience of a student with a disability in higher education despite the adversities she encountered.

To gain a holistic understanding of the case, I gathered perspectives not only from the student herself but also from individuals within her immediate environment, including her peers and instructors. Collecting data from multiple perspectives enabled me to capture different viewpoints and experiences related to the phenomenon under investigation (Paltridge, 2019). Through these multiple perspectives, I explored the difficulties she encountered, the strategies she employed to respond to these challenges, and the insights she gained from her experiences in relation to her successful completion of a bachelor's degree.

Locale of the Study

This study was conducted in Mati City, Davao Oriental, Philippines, the province's capital, located on the southeasternmost side of Mindanao. The participant and key informants were based at a public higher education institution in the city, which served as the study setting. The locale was selected because it provided direct access to the student with a disability who served as the primary participant, as well as to the peers and instructors who had firsthand knowledge of her experiences in higher education. As a real-life educational setting, the locale provided an appropriate context for exploring the difficulties the student encountered, the strategies and support systems that contributed to her resilience, and the outcomes that led to her successful completion of a bachelor's degree.

Sample and Sampling Technique

The study involved one primary participant and eight key informants. The primary participant was a student with a disability who had completed a bachelor's degree in a higher education institution. She was selected because her experiences were central to the purpose of the study, which sought to examine resilience in the context of higher education.

The key informants consisted of four (4) peers and four (4) instructors who had direct knowledge of the participant's educational experiences. The peers were selected based on their close relationship and regular interaction with the participant throughout her university years. The instructors were chosen based on their experience teaching and working with the participant in academic settings. All key informants were selected through purposive sampling because they possessed relevant knowledge and firsthand experiences that could provide additional perspectives and validate the participant's account.

In qualitative research, sample size is determined by the richness and relevance of the information that participants can provide rather than by statistical representation (Patton, 2015). Furthermore, Guest et al. (2006) noted that meaningful themes and data saturation can often be achieved with a relatively small number of participants who possess direct experience of the phenomenon under investigation.

Purposive sampling was employed because it enabled the deliberate selection of individuals who could provide relevant and information-rich accounts related to the case. As Rai and Thapa (2015) explained, purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling technique in which participants are selected based on their knowledge, relationship, and significance to the case being studied.

Data Gathering Technique

To conduct this study, ethical approval was first secured from the Society for Moral Integrity and Legal Ethics (SMILE). Following approval, an interview guide was developed based on the key concepts of Resilience Theory, focusing on the adversities the student encountered, the coping strategies and protective factors that enabled her to overcome these challenges, and the positive outcomes that emerged from her experiences. Separate sets of semi-structured interview questions were prepared for the student, her instructors, and her peers. Semi-structured interviews, also referred to as focused interviews (Dane, 2010),

allow researchers to explore participants' perspectives in depth while providing the flexibility to ask follow-up questions and probe emerging insights during the interview process (Daymon & Holloway, 2002).

To ensure the validity of the interview guide, it underwent expert validation to assess the clarity, appropriateness, and alignment of the questions with the study's objectives. The interview guide was reviewed by two members of the internal validation team and one external validator holding a master's degree or higher in Special Education. Their comments and recommendations were incorporated into the final version of the interview guide.

After the interview guide was finalized, requests for permission to conduct the study were endorsed by the Program Head, forwarded to the Dean, and subsequently approved by the University President. Once the necessary approvals were secured, informed consent was obtained from all participants before data collection commenced.

Data were collected through one in-depth interview with the student with a disability and two separate focus group discussions involving the identified peers and instructors. In-depth interviews provide rich and detailed accounts of participants' experiences and perspectives (Boyce & Neale, 2006), while focus group discussions facilitate the sharing of experiences and viewpoints through group interaction (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2014). Each interview and focus group discussion lasted approximately 60 to 90 minutes.

All interviews were conducted in a private and comfortable setting to ensure confidentiality and encourage participants to share their experiences openly, consistent with ethical research practices (Osborne & Grant-Smith, 2021). With the participants' consent, the interviews were audio-recorded to facilitate accurate transcription, while field notes were taken to document non-verbal cues and contextual observations.

After data collection, the audio recordings were transcribed verbatim and reviewed for accuracy. The interview transcripts served as the primary source of data for analysis. To enhance the credibility of the findings, the transcripts were returned to the participants for member checking, allowing them to verify and confirm the accuracy of their responses (Widodo, 2014).

Data Analysis Technique

The data gathered from the in-depth interview and focus group discussions were analyzed using thematic analysis within a qualitative case study framework. Consistent with Yin's (2009) approach to case study research, the analysis focused on identifying meaningful patterns and explanations within the case. Following the interviews, all audio recordings were transcribed verbatim and reviewed for accuracy. The transcripts were then read and reread to achieve familiarity with the data and gain a comprehensive understanding of the participants' experiences.

The major themes were predetermined based on the research questions and the conceptual framework grounded in Resilience Theory, namely, Difficulties Encountered, Mediating Processes, and Insights and Outcomes. Within these broad themes, initial codes were generated from significant statements and recurring ideas found in the transcripts. Similar codes were grouped into categories, from which the subthemes emerged inductively from the participants' accounts.

To strengthen the credibility of the findings, data from the student with a disability, peers, and instructors were triangulated to examine converging and complementary perspectives. The resulting themes and subthemes were then interpreted and presented as a case-based description of resilience within the context of higher education.

Trustworthiness of the Study

For qualitative research to be considered trustworthy, researchers must demonstrate that data collection and analysis were conducted carefully, consistently, and rigorously (Nowell et al., 2017). In addition, Lincoln and Guba (1986) described trustworthiness as the rigor and quality of qualitative research, which may be established through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

In this study, trustworthiness was promoted through adherence to ethical and research standards. Ethical approval was secured from the Society for Moral Integrity and Legal Ethics (SMILE) prior to data collection, and informed consent was obtained from all participants. Participants' identities and personal information were protected through the use of participant codes and the secure storage of research materials, consistent with ethical practices in qualitative research (Allen & Wiles, 2016; Creswell & Poth, 2018). These measures helped ensure that the study was conducted ethically and that participants were able to share their experiences voluntarily and openly.

Lastly, careful documentation, accurate transcription of interviews and focus group discussions, and systematic data analysis were employed to enhance the credibility and dependability of the findings. Consistent with Birt et al. (2016), member checking was also conducted, wherein participants reviewed and verified the accuracy of their interview transcripts.

3. Results

This chapter presents, analyzes, and interprets the data gathered from the case of Amy, a student with a disability, in higher education. The findings are organized according to the study's research questions and the themes that emerged from the data analysis. These themes correspond to the adversities experienced by the student, the strategies and support systems that contributed to resilience, and the positive outcomes and lessons derived from the participant's experiences.

Data were obtained from one primary participant, who is referred to as Amy (a pseudonym), and the eight key informants, consisting of four (4) peers as well as four (4) instructors who had direct knowledge of Amy's experiences in higher education.

To maintain confidentiality, these codes (Amy, Peer, & Instructor) are used to identify participants throughout the presentation of findings. Verbatim responses are presented in their original language, followed by their English translations when necessary. Through this structure, the chapter demonstrates how resilience is manifested in the experiences of a student with a disability within the context of higher education.

Modified Paradigm

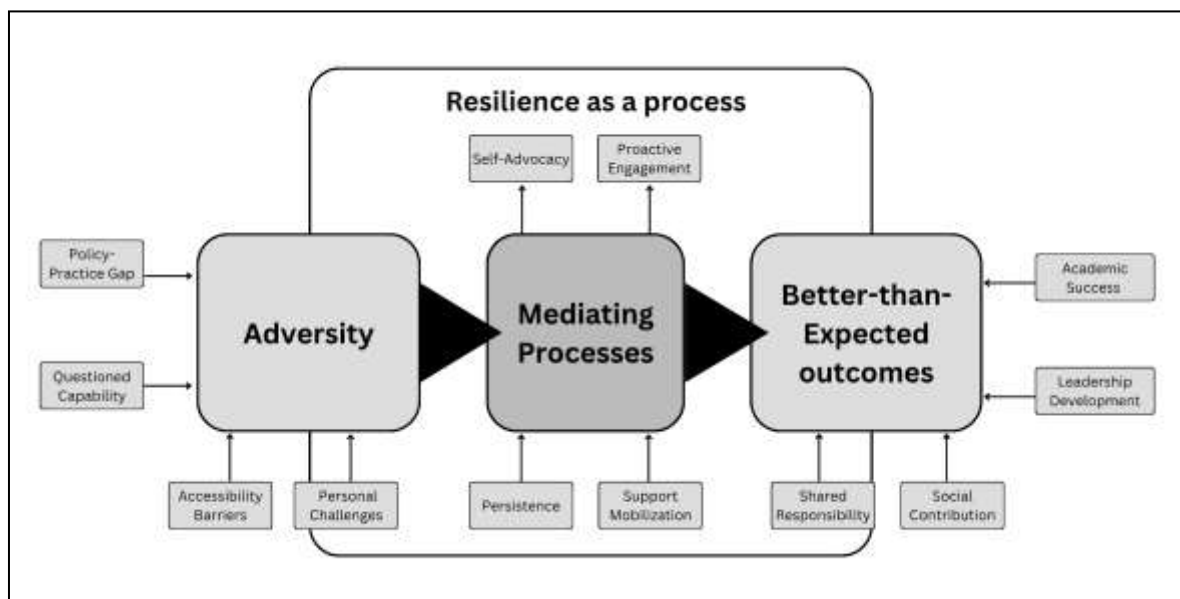


Figure 1. Conceptual Paradigm of Resilience as a Process

Figure 2 illustrates the modified paradigm, which illustrates resilience as a dynamic process experienced by a student with a disability in higher education. It shows that the student encountered various adversities, including policy-practice gaps, questioned capability, accessibility barriers, and personal challenges. These difficulties were addressed through mediating processes such as self-advocacy, proactive engagement, persistence, and support mobilization. Through these processes, the student achieved positive outcomes reflected in academic success, leadership development, social contribution, and an understanding of inclusion as a shared responsibility.

Theme 1. Adversity

Adversity refers to the challenges and obstacles encountered by Amy throughout her higher education journey. These difficulties emerged from both personal and environmental factors, including institutional practices, accessibility concerns, perceptions of disability, and family responsibilities. Despite these challenges, Amy continued to pursue her educational goals. The following subthemes describe the specific adversities that shaped her experiences in higher education.

Subtheme 1.1. Policy-Practice Gap all

This subtheme discusses the gap between the university's inclusion policies and the extent to which these policies were consistently implemented. In the collective interview, Amy's experiences suggest that while the university demonstrated a commitment to providing access to higher education for students with disabilities, the implementation of inclusive practices was not always consistent across learning environments. As a result, the accommodations and support available to her varied depending on the individuals involved. Amy stated:

I must say na bisan sa pag-start sa online pa lang, dili jud nimo ma-please tanan instructors na mag-implement ug inclusion. (I must say that even from the start of online classes, you really cannot expect all instructors to implement inclusion.) -Amy

This observation was corroborated by one of her peers, who noted that there were instances when Amy's requests for support were not accommodated. Such experiences suggest that access to accommodations often depended on individual instructors rather than being consistently provided across learning environments. One peer shared:

Naay mga moments na mangayo siya'g tabang. Naay mga instructor na dili mu-accommodate. (There were times when she would ask for help. There were instructors who would not accommodate her.) -Peer 1

In addition, the instructors themselves also acknowledged challenges in implementing inclusive education. One instructor emphasized the need for a more comprehensive approach to inclusion, explaining that the absence of well-established systems often placed students in difficult situations. The instructor said:

There should be a specialized program. Wala man siya nalahi, pero all of the persons involved inside the classroom kay mubuhat jud ug sacrifice, and ang pinaka mabutang sa half-baked situation kay maalanganin ang learning kay mga students jud. I think we should comprehensively define the word "inclusion." (There should be a specialized program. She is not different from other students, but everyone involved in the classroom really has to make sacrifices. In a half-baked situation, it is the students' learning that is most likely to be compromised. I think we should comprehensively define the word 'inclusion.') -Instructor 1

In this statement, the instructor strongly expressed how inclusion extends beyond merely admitting students with disabilities into the university. That there is a need for clear policies, adequate support systems, and shared understanding among stakeholders to ensure that inclusive practices are effectively implemented. Without these structures in place, students may not fully benefit from the opportunities intended by inclusive education.

Similar to this claim, another instructor admitted lacking the necessary preparation to effectively support learners with disabilities and recognized the importance of institutional support through training and resources. The instructor said:

Though I have encountered these types of learners, pero I don't have the necessary trainings that could somehow help me to guide her well along the way. So mao pud na. If ever siguro the school would provide necessary trainings tapos sa materials, ma-reach jud niya iyang potential. Because as what I've observed, she can be more pa than unsa iyang nakab-ot that time in my class. (Though I have encountered these types of learners, I don't have the necessary training that could somehow help me guide her well along the way. So that's also it. Maybe if the school would provide the necessary training and materials, she could reach her potential. Because, as what I've observed, she can do more than what she achieved in my class at that time.) -Instructor 3

It is not enough that an instructor has already handled learners with additional needs, although the instructor was willing to support Amy, the lack of specialized training and appropriate resources limited their capacity to fully address her needs. The instructor's reflection suggests that greater institutional support could have enhanced both the quality of accommodations provided and Amy's opportunities to further develop her abilities.

This concern was echoed by another instructor who pointed out that some faculty members were still learning how to respond to the needs of students with disabilities. The instructor stated:

Dili jud ingon na fully equipped ta, kay naa man juy mga instructors na nag-handle sa iyaha na walay mga trainings. Maglisod pa, mangapa pa. Ang akong maingon kay much better kay naga-accept naman jud ta ug students with special needs, with different needs—dapat ang school jud kay ginatan-aw nila na mag-undergo jud ug training. (We are really not fully equipped because there are instructors who handle her who do not have any training. They still struggle and are still figuring things out. What I can say is that it would be much better since we are already accepting students with special needs, with different needs; the school should really ensure that teachers undergo training.) -Instructor 4

Taken together, these accounts suggest a gap between the institution's commitment to inclusion and its actual implementation in practice. While opportunities for participation were available, inconsistencies in accommodations, limited faculty preparation, and varying levels of understanding regarding inclusion created challenges for Amy throughout her university journey. These findings reflect a policy-practice gap, wherein inclusive principles were recognized at the institutional level but were not always consistently translated into classroom practice.

Subtheme 1.2. Questioned Capability

Another adversity encountered by Amy was having her capabilities questioned because of her disability. Despite being admitted to higher education, there were instances when assumptions were made about her ability to succeed academically. Amy recalled an experience with an instructor who openly doubted her presence in college. She said:

Naay time na nakaingon, 'ngano naa daw na-enroll, maq-unsang mana in the future,' tapos niingon pud siya, 'kung ako magbuot, bagsak jud.' (There was a time when someone said, 'Why was she even enrolled? What will she do in the future?' and also said, 'If it were up to me, she would fail.') -Amy

One of Amy's peers also shared observations that supported Amy's account of being judged based on her disability rather than her actual abilities. The peer shared:

Ana tong instructor na ngano daw nakaabot siyag college na ing-ana iyang condition. Bale gi-kuan siya, gi-discriminate. (An instructor asked why she was able to reach college despite her condition. In a way, she was being discriminated against.) -Peer 2

Rather than allowing these remarks to discourage her, Amy remained focused on her academic goals and chose to let her performance speak for itself. She shared:

Tapos taas kog score. Murag naganahan guro siya na mu-accommodate kay tungod sa result. Pag-abot sa midterm kay nag-hard copy na siya ug test paper. Tapos mas nitaas man akoang score, so mao to ni-announce jud niya sa klase na 'oh, na-outsmart namo.' Sa finals kay nihatang pud siyag hard copy na test. (I got a high score. Perhaps that was why the instructor became more willing to accommodate me because of the results. By midterm, the test was already provided in hard copy. My score became even higher, and the instructor announced to the class, 'Oh, she outsmarted you.' During the finals, a hard-copy test was also provided.) -Amy

However, this personal experience from Amy only showed how she had to constantly prove herself in the classroom before being given accommodations that should have been readily available. Rather than receiving support based on her identified needs, the provision of accommodations appeared to become more consistent only after she demonstrated her academic competence and achieved high scores. She had to do twice as much as her classmates just to prove that she was just as capable as her peers.

In addition, these remarks are not isolated from the instructor, another peer also noted that doubts regarding Amy's capabilities were sometimes evident even in group activities. The peer-participant stated:

Naay time na nakaingon si ate Amy na basi dili daw siya ma-consider sa iyang mga classmates tungod sa iyang situation. Usahay man gud sa mga by-group na activity kay dili na nila ginapangutana si ate kung unsa iyang mga suggestion. Murag tungod sa disability ni ate kay dili na sila nagahunahuna kung naa bay ma-add si ate Amy. (There were times when Amy said that perhaps her classmates did not consider her because of her situation. During group activities, they sometimes did not ask for her suggestions. It seemed that because of her disability, they did not think she had anything to contribute.) -Peer 2

This shows that Amy encountered situations in which her abilities were underestimated because of her disability, a constant reminder of how people viewed her disability first before her as a person, as what

she is capable of. Such experiences manifested through discriminatory remarks, lowered expectations, and the exclusion of her ideas in collaborative activities. Nevertheless, Amy remained steadfast, she challenged these assumptions through her consistent academic performance and active participation, demonstrating that disability did not limit her capacity to succeed and contribute meaningfully in higher education.

Subtheme 1.3. Accessibility Barriers

In this subtheme, barriers in accessibility emerged as another significant challenge in Amy's higher education experience. Although she actively participated in class, limitations related to visual access to learning materials occasionally affected her ability to fully engage in classroom tasks. One experience she recalled involved an examination administered through a PowerPoint presentation. She recalled saying:

Ma'am, maski muduol pa jud ko, di jud nako mabasa. Kay pag muduol ko tapos mugamit ko sa akoang glasses, samot ko na murag dali ko malibat. Tapos magkurog akong mata. (Ma'am, even if I move closer, I still cannot read it. When I move closer and use my glasses, I start feeling dizzy and my eyes begin to strain.) -Amy

Amy's experience was supported by her peers, who also saw how most of the instructors' visual materials frequently posed challenges for her, noting that there is a need for someone to assist her. One peer explained:

Sa academics, maglisud kay gagmay ang font. Masugdan niya pero dili niya mahuman. Naa jud dapat mubasa para niya. Magsulti na siya sa amoa, mag-rant na siya ngano ing-ani ang font—gamay. (Academically, she experienced difficulties because of the small font size. She could begin a task but was often unable to complete it. Someone usually had to read the materials for her. She would tell us and express her frustration about why the font was so small.) -Peer 2

Similarly, another peer shared that activities requiring the use of laptops and digital presentations often became difficult because of her limited vision. She specifically said:

Kanang sa presentation sa laptop... naay teacher magpahimo ug activities na gamit ang laptop, mag-struggle jud siya. Although ma-overcome niya, pero naa jud mga lapses—ang mga letters, ang arrangement. (With presentations on the laptop, when a teacher would give activities that required using a laptop, she would really struggle. Although she was able to overcome it, there were still lapses—the letters and the arrangement.) -Peer 4

The challenges were further intensified when accommodations were not consistently provided. The same peer shared another of Amy's experience in the classroom, saying:

Ang isa ka teacher namo wala jud niya gi-accommodate si ate... Muingon mi, 'Ma'am, dili mana siya makaklaro, need jud na printed ma'am.' ... Pero ipaduol ra siya sa may laptop. (One of our teachers did not really accommodate her... 'We would tell the teacher, 'Ma'am, she cannot see it clearly, she needs a printed copy.' However, she was simply asked to move closer to the laptop.) -Peer 4

Aside from these, accessibility barriers also extended beyond classroom instruction. According to one instructor, Amy encountered limitations during her practicum because certain teaching environments required close monitoring and management of learners with behavioral challenges, in which the instructor noted that Amy will have a hard time due to her disability. The instructor specifically shared:

There was a time na nalimit jud siya sa pag-showcase sa iyang abilities. It was during her practicum... especially since there are classrooms that dili man sa dili para niya, pero maglisud jud siya didtoa kay naay mga students na naa juy behavioral problems and challenges. Maglisud jud siya kay limited iyang eyesight, basi maglisod siya sa pag-manage and handle sa kids, so gi-assign jud siya sa visually impaired students. (There was a time when she was really limited in showcasing her abilities. It was during her practicum, especially since there were classrooms—not that they were not for her—but she really had difficulty there because there were students who had behavioral problems and challenges. She would really struggle because her eyesight was limited, and she might have difficulty managing and handling the kids, so she was assigned to students with visual impairments.) -Instructor 2

This experience shows how Amy's disability sometimes affected the opportunities available to her during her practicum. Although she was capable of performing teaching tasks, concerns about the demands of managing students with behavioral challenges influenced her placement. Consequently, she was not always given the same opportunities to demonstrate her abilities in different teaching contexts.

Together, these accounts indicate that accessibility barriers were present across various aspects of Amy's educational experience, including examinations, instructional materials, technology-based activities, and practicum placements. While Amy continuously adapted to these challenges, the findings suggest that the accessibility of learning environments and the availability of appropriate accommodations played a crucial role in shaping her participation and learning experiences in higher education.

Subtheme 1.4. Personal Challenges

Beyond the challenges associated with her disability and the learning environment, Amy also encountered personal challenges that affected her educational journey. As a student, mother, and family member, she had to balance multiple responsibilities while pursuing her studies. Reflecting on this experience, Amy shared:

Challenge jud to na time. The fact that I have my son, and if makahuman ko, oi, then maka-work, kay maka-support ko sa akong anak and makahuman akong mga igsoon. (That was really a challenging time. The fact that I have my son, and if I could finish my studies and eventually work, I would be able to support my child and help my siblings finish their education) -Amy

In addition to family responsibilities, Amy was also driven by a desire to prove herself despite limited support from her father. She wants her father to see her graduate even without his help. She explained:

Then gusto sab nako i-prove sa amuang papa nga maka graduate ko without his help, kay di man jud tu siya mag-invest ug money para sa studies nako, ma'am, kay mao ra daw gihapon, wala koy mapaingnan if mu-graduate ko, even high school lang po. So naningkamot ko, ma'am. (I also wanted to prove to my father that I could graduate without his help because he did not want to invest money in my education. He believed that even if I graduated, I would still have nowhere to go. So, I worked hard.) -Amy

Amy's experiences were likewise observed by her peers. One peer recalled how she openly shared the difficulties she encountered in balancing her academic responsibilities with her family obligations. This peer said:

Naga-share siya sa amoa kung unsay mga kaagi niya—sa iyang anak, family, kung unsaon niya pag-accomplish. During tung time nga nagklase mi, naglibog siya ato kay ang iyang anak dili kaayo niya mabantayan. Pero bisan ing-ana iyang situation, dili siya maulaw na mag-share sa amoa sa iyang personal na problem—in terms sa iyang family, sa iyang acads, kung makaya ba niya ni, makaya ba niya na. (She shares with us her experiences regarding her child and family and how she managed to accomplish her responsibilities. During that time, she was worried because she could not closely monitor her child. However, despite her situation, she was not hesitant to share her personal struggles with us, including concerns about her family, academics, and whether she could handle everything.) -Peer 3

An instructor similarly observed that personal and family concerns occasionally affected Amy's academic routine, especially since Amy consistently shows good academic performance. The instructor shared:

Consistent jud siya. Naa lang jud time na murag naa guro siyay problem ato na murag nawala siya sa iyang pacing. Na ang dating Amelia na nagapaningkamot, kato kay usahay late... Murag ang nadungog nako kay nagkaproblema siya sa family. (She was generally consistent. There was just a time when it seemed that she was experiencing problems and lost her usual pace. The Amy who was normally hardworking became occasionally late. From what I heard; she was experiencing family problems.) -Instructor 4

These accounts indicate that Amy's journey through higher education was shaped not only by disability-related and institutional challenges but also by personal and family responsibilities. Balancing motherhood, financial concerns, family expectations, and academic demands created additional pressures throughout her studies. Nevertheless, these challenges became significant experiences that she had to navigate while pursuing her goal of completing higher education.

In summary, this theme of Adversity reflects Amy's encounters with multiple adversities throughout her higher education journey. These challenges included gaps between inclusive policies and actual practices, experiences of having her abilities questioned, accessibility barriers in learning environments, and personal responsibilities related to family and finances. While these difficulties created obstacles to her participation and learning, they also formed the context within which her resilience developed. Collectively, these adversities reflect the complex realities faced by a student with a disability in higher education.

Theme 2. Mediating Processes

Mediating processes refer to the strategies, behaviors, and sources of support that enabled Amy to navigate and overcome the adversities she encountered. These processes served as protective factors that helped her adapt to challenges and remain committed to her educational goals. Through self-advocacy, active participation, persistence, and support from others, Amy was able to respond positively to difficult circumstances. The following subthemes illustrate the mechanisms that contributed to her resilience throughout her university journey.

Subtheme 2.1. Self-Advocacy

Self-advocacy emerged as an important process through which Amy worked through the challenges she encountered in higher education. Rather than relying solely on others, this subtheme shows how she actively communicated her needs, made decisions regarding her learning, and asserted her preferences in various situations. Reflecting on her experiences, Amy emphasized her sense of agency and control over her educational journey, saying:

I felt that I am the one who is in control of everything, especially when it comes to my studies and choices. -Amy

Amy further shared how she intentionally chose not to wait for others to approach or assist her, believing that active participation was necessary to move forward. She expressed how she differs from those with the same circumstances as her. She said:

Sa visually impaired kay magwait ra jud na sila kung kanus-a sila i-tap, especially pag totally blind. Even sa with low vision, naa jud silay hesitation. Ako, di jud ko maghulat na i-tap. Kung maghulat kag i-tap ka, maabtan kag siyam-siyam. (Many visually impaired individuals wait until they are approached, especially those who are totally blind. Even those with low vision tend to hesitate. As for me, I do not wait to be approached. If you wait to be approached, it will take a very long time.) -Amy

This assertive trait of Amy was also recognized by her instructors. One instructor described how she openly communicated her needs and took initiative in arranging accommodations that would support her participation. The instructor described:

The best part is how she's honest enough of her situation. Siya mismo muingon na, 'Ma'am, akong condition ing-ani... pwede ba na diri ko mulingkod?' Gina-explain niya. On my part as an instructor, dili sa burden, pero less job sa akoo na part to arrange things for her because she already took initiative on how things should be arranged for her. (The best part is how she is honest about her situation. She herself would say, 'Ma'am, this is my condition... may I sit here?' She explains it. From my perspective as an instructor, it made things easier because she had already taken the initiative to communicate how arrangements could be made for her.)

Similarly, a peer observed that Amy exercised independence and made decisions regarding the type of assistance she wanted to receive. Rather than relying completely on others, she communicated her needs and determined when and how support would be provided. This reflects her ability to maintain control over her learning and daily activities while accepting appropriate assistance when necessary. The peer stated:

Actually, Ma'am, tanan man ginabuhay niya. Pag kabalo siya na ang iyahang mga gibuhay kay tama, so buhaton niya. For example, naay times na pag dili niya gusto'g guide, dili gyud niya gusto. (Actually, Ma'am, she does everything herself. If she knows that what she is doing is correct, she will do it. For example, there are times when she does not want a guide, and when she does not want one, she really does not want one.) -Peer 1

The accounts from both peers and instructors reflect how Amy actively asserted control over her educational experiences. She communicates her needs, making independent decisions, and taking initiative in situations that affected her participation. Rather than passively waiting for support, she exercised agency in managing her learning environment and navigating the challenges associated with her disability. Such actions illustrate self-advocacy as a key process that enabled her to participate more fully in higher education.

Subtheme 2.2. Proactive Engagement

Another important process that contributed to Amy's success was her proactive engagement in her academic, organizational, and social activities. She is known to be an active student by her peers and instructors. She shared that rather than remaining passive, she consistently sought opportunities to participate, contribute, and involve herself in various aspects of university life. Amy described how she actively exercised her choices and participated in activities beyond classroom requirements, saying:

I think it's always that I have my choice with regards to my studies and to my activities. Whenever the school or the BSNEC faculty itself conducts seminars... I always participate... I was one of the officers in the organization... I was able to share my ideas, my knowledge to my fellow BSNEC students, even sa mga seniors. (I think I always had a choice regarding my studies and activities. Whenever the school or the BSNEC faculty conducted seminars, I always participated. I was one of the officers of the organization, and I was able to share my ideas and knowledge with fellow BSNEC students, even to the seniors.) -Amy

Amy's proactive engagement was also observed by her peers. One peer recalled how she consistently volunteered during presentations and actively participated in program activities, saying:

Sa mag-presentation kay siya muuna, 'Sige, ako na,' mungon siya. Sa mga activity sa program, siya pa ang mas naa permi kesa sa amoa na mga regular. (Whenever there was a presentation, she would be the first to say, 'Okay, I'll do it.' In program activities, she was often more present than us who did not have disabilities.) -Peer 4

In addition, Amy also reflected on the importance of stepping beyond her comfort zone and embracing challenges as opportunities for growth. Rather than avoiding unfamiliar situations, she viewed them as valuable learning experiences that contributed to her personal and academic development. She expressed:

Kung wala jud ko ning-step out sa akong comfort zone, wala jud pud ko naka-feel na ing-ato na challenge. (If I had not stepped out of my comfort zone, I would not have experienced that kind of challenge.) -Amy

Furthermore, she explained that she preferred taking the initiative rather than waiting for others to approach her. She stated:

Ako, di jud ko maghulat na i-tap. Kung maghulat kag i-tap ka, maabtan kag siyam-siyam. (As for me, I do not wait to be approached. If you wait to be approached, it will take a very long time.) -Amy

Amy's experiences challenged the common perception that they should remain passive and wait for assistance. Instead, she consistently demonstrated initiative by actively participating, communicating her needs, and engaging with those around her. Her presence was defined not by her disability but by her confidence, leadership, and active involvement within the university community. She shared:

Mao guro ang nakalamang sa akoo na uban nga parehas sa akoo. Ang uban maulaw jud. Hangtod dili nimo kuhiton, magpuyo ra jud. Kung asa sila gibutang, dira sila magstay. Hulaton ra kung i-tap or tawagon, i-approach. Ako kay lahi ko. Kung naa koy katapad, kay makig-istorya jud ko, kay malaayan man ko. (Perhaps that is what gave me an advantage over others like me. Some are really shy. Unless someone approaches them, they simply stay where they are. They wait to be called or approached. I am different. If someone is beside me, I talk to them because I get bored.) -Amy

This attitude was also evident in Amy's interactions with other people. Her initiative extended beyond academic tasks, as she consistently engaged with classmates and actively participated in classroom discussions. An instructor also observed Amy's willingness to communicate and confidently express her ideas. The instructor shared:

Kabalo jud pud siya mu-communicate jud... Naa pud siyay initiative na muistorya jud. Siguro kay vocal man gud siya... Kung gusto siya mu-answer, mu-answer jud siya. (She really knows how to communicate. She takes the initiative to speak. Maybe because she is very vocal, and whenever she wants to answer, she does.) -Instructor 2

These accounts demonstrate that Amy consistently engaged with opportunities for participation rather than waiting for opportunities to come to her. Through active involvement in organizations, classroom discussions, presentations, and social interactions, she positioned herself as an active participant in university life. Such behaviors reflect proactive engagement, enabling her to expand her experiences, build relationships, and abled her to go through the challenges in her higher education journey.

Subtheme 2.3. Persistence

Persistence emerged as another important process that enabled Amy to continue pursuing her degree despite encountering setbacks, discrimination, and personal challenges. Rather than allowing negative experiences to discourage her, she maintained a mindset focused on perseverance and continuous growth. Reflecting on how she responded to discriminatory experiences, Amy shared:

Discrimination? Hala, larga... Naa ra na sa imoha kung unsa imong pagdawit sa discrimination – negative ba anq imong pag-react? Pasagdan lang ba nimo sila? Kay anyway, dili man sila ang nagpakaon sa imoha. Dili man sila ang nagaprovide sa imoha. Mindset. (Discrimination? Let it pass. It depends on how you respond to discrimination—whether you react negatively or simply ignore it. After all, they are not the ones feeding you or providing for you. It is all about mindset.) -Amy

Amy's determination was likewise recognized by her peers. One peer observed her commitment to completing her studies despite the discrimination associated with her disability. In this account, her peer shared how Amy showed excitement in learning, saying:

Makita pud nako na maningkamot jud siya para mahuman jud niya iyahang pag-eskwela... kanang excited jud siya na mu-eskwela siya maski naa siyay disability. Maningkamot jud siya. (I could really see how hard she worked to finish her studies. She was always excited to go to school despite her disability. She truly persevered.) -Peer 3

In addition, Amy also recalled a time when she experienced an academic setback after receiving a failing grade. Rather than allowing this experience to discourage her, she viewed it as a temporary obstacle and remained committed to achieving her goals. She shared:

Kato na time, medyo na-down ko kay siyempre wala diay nako napasas. Ang huna-huna nako, dili jud ko mag-stop. Dili nako huna-hunaon ang failure. (At that time, I felt disappointed because I did not pass. However, I told myself that I

would not stop. I would not dwell on the failure.) -Amy

Amy emphasized the importance of maintaining a positive outlook when faced with difficulties and failures. She explained:

Ma-overcome ra jud over time... More motivated to do better, to strive harder... sa problema, di man jud nako dibdibon. Tapos di pud ko magpanic... If naa pud tay failure sa usa ka butang... wala kay mabuhay, samot na dili ka makakita ug ideas na mas makatabang pa sa imo na mu-grow. (Challenges can be overcome over time. They motivate me to do better, to strive harder. I do not take problems to heart. Also, I will never panic. If we fail on one thing...there is nothing we can do and you will miss opportunities to find ideas that can help you grow.) -Amy

In this subtheme, Amy responded to challenges, setbacks, and discrimination with determination and a growth-oriented mindset, she continued with an excited persona to learn. Rather than allowing difficulties to hinder her progress, she viewed them as experiences that could be overcome through effort and persistence. This sustained commitment enabled her to continue pursuing her educational goals despite the obstacles she encountered throughout her university journey.

Subtheme 2.4. Support Mobilization

This subtheme focuses on another important process that contributed to Amy's success. Although Amy demonstrated a high degree of independence, she acknowledged the value of seeking support when necessary. Throughout her university journey, she drew on academic and non-academic support from peers, classmates, and instructors. Rather than being a one-sided process, this support was reciprocal, as Amy also provided guidance and shared her knowledge with those around her. She described the close relationships she developed with her support network, saying:

Ang support man gud nila kay both academic and non-academic. Pag walay kwarta ang isa, naa ang isa. Way sud-an ang isa, naa ang isa. Ing-ana mi ka-close. (Their support was both academic and non-academic. If one of us had no money, someone would help. If one of us had no food, someone would provide. That is how close we were.) -Amy

One of Amy's peers further explained how support was provided in a way that complemented Amy's abilities rather than replacing them. Although assistance was given for tasks such as typing, Amy remained responsible for generating the content and making academic decisions. She shared:

Magpatabang siya, mag-dictate siya. Malimit siya sa pag-type, pero ang content, iyaha na. Strong independent woman jud siya. (She would ask for help and dictate what needed to be written. She was limited in typing, but the content was entirely hers. She is truly a strong and independent woman.) -Peer 1

An instructor also noted that Amy's classmates were willing to support her because they recognized her abilities and valued her contributions. One instructor stated:

Isa pud kay bright jud siya, so iyang mga classmates pud kay maka gain pud sa iyaha. (She is very intelligent, and her classmates also benefit from what she contributes.) -Instructor 2

The subtheme Support Mobilization suggest that Amy's support network extended beyond receiving assistance to include reciprocal relationships characterized by trust, cooperation, and mutual support. While she relied on classmates and friends for certain forms of assistance, particularly in tasks affected by her disability, she also contributed knowledge and support in return. Such relationships enabled her to access the resources necessary to navigate challenges and continue pursuing her educational goals, demonstrating the importance of support mobilization in her resilience journey.

Overall, this theme reflects that despite the adversities she encountered, Amy demonstrated several mediating processes that enabled her to navigate challenges effectively. Through self-advocacy, proactive engagement, persistence, and support mobilization, she actively responded to difficulties rather than allowing them to hinder her progress. These processes served as protective factors that strengthened her capacity to adapt and persevere. Together, they illustrate how resilience was developed and sustained throughout her educational journey.

Theme 3. Better-than-Expected Outcomes

Better-than-expected outcomes refer to the positive results that emerged despite the adversities Amy experienced. Rather than merely overcoming challenges, her experiences contributed to achievements that extended beyond academic completion. These outcomes were reflected in her academic success, leadership development, contributions to others, and experiences of inclusion within a supportive community. The following subthemes highlight the positive outcomes associated with her resilience in higher education.

Subtheme 3.1. Academic Success

Amy's experiences demonstrate that resilience can lead to meaningful academic achievements despite the challenges encountered throughout higher education. Her success was reflected not only in her academic performance but also in her ability to attain not just a high school diploma but also her degree in higher education that only she had attained in her family. Reflecting on this accomplishment, Amy shared:

Pride sa family, ma'am, kay ako ra man naka-graduate ug high school sa amuang manag-igsuon po, and ako ra sad nakalahos sa college. (I am the pride of my family because I am the only one among my siblings who graduated from high school, and I am also the only one who was able to finish college.) -Amy

Amy's successful completion of her degree was also recognized by one of her instructors, who attributed part of her success to her independence and ability to keep pace with classroom demands. The instructor shared:

Si Amy, base sa akong experience with her and based on my observation, wala jud ko naglisod sa iyaha when it comes to kanang teaching sa classroom kay she's very independent naman gyud, and kabalo pud siya makisabay sa iyang mga classmates. (Based on my experience and observations, I never had difficulty teaching Amy because she was already very independent and knew how to keep up with her classmates.) -Instructor 4

A peer similarly acknowledged Amy's competence and viewed her graduation as a significant accomplishment. For the participant, Amy's success demonstrated that her disability did not hinder her ability to achieve her educational goals. The peer shared:

Capable jud siya. Maka-proud jud si ate. Makaya niya despite sa iyang disability—ning-graduate siya. (She is truly capable. We are proud of her. Despite her disability, she was able to graduate.) -Peer 1

Another instructor further emphasized Amy's strong academic performance and commitment to her studies. The instructor noted that Amy consistently demonstrated diligence and excellence in her individual work despite the challenges she encountered. The instructor said:

Pero all-in-all, kung i-base sa individual performance, mu-excel jud si Ms. Amelia... Maningkamot jud siya iyaha. (Overall, if we base it on individual performance, Ms. Amelia really excels. She truly works hard.) -Instructor 4

These accounts indicate that Amy's resilience ultimately translated into academic success. Her ability to remain committed to her studies, perform well in academic tasks, and complete her college education despite various personal, institutional, and disability-related challenges demonstrates a positive educational outcome. More importantly, her graduation represented not only personal achievement but also a significant

milestone for her family and a testament to her determination and perseverance.

Subtheme 3.2. Leadership Development

Beyond achieving academic success, Amy's experiences also reflected the development of leadership qualities that emerged through her interactions with peers and participation in university activities. As she progressed through her studies, she became a source of guidance, encouragement, and support for others. Amy recognized that her classmates frequently sought her assistance and valued her knowledge. She said:

Magpila na sila sa gawas magpatabang... Na-confident ko kay naa jud silay trust sa akoang knowledge. Mao nang rapud ko naghisitate na magpadayon. (They would line up outside asking for help. It made me confident because they trusted my knowledge. That was also one of the reasons why I continued.) -Amy

Additionally, Amy shared that her peers regularly consulted her for ideas and advice. She specifically stated:

I was grateful because, as always, they send me private messages to get some ideas about things that they don't know, and they felt that I know. (I was grateful because they would send me private messages asking for ideas about things they did not know, believing that I could help them.) -Amy

The influence Amy had on others was evident in several accounts of her peers. One peer recalled how she constantly encouraged them to stay focused on their academic responsibilities, saying:

Naay mga moments na tamad kaayo ko mutrabaho, muingon na siya na magtrabaho namo sa academics kay aron dili ma-late. Ginakasab-an ko niya sa akong mga grado kung naunsa na—mga pangaral niya. Hangtod ron, monitor niya among school life. (There were times when I felt too lazy to work, but she would remind us to focus on our academics so we would not fall behind. She would even scold me about my grades and give advice. Until now, she still monitors our school life.) -Peer 1

Another peer described how Amy extended encouragement and support during difficult situations. Beyond offering academic assistance, Amy was also willing to provide emotional and practical support whenever her classmates faced personal challenges. She stated:

Naa toy time na nag-rant ko niya, wala na'y kwarta, dili na makaya kay daghan bayrunon. Niingon siya na sige lang, ingnon ra siya pag dili na makaya kay mutabang siya. (There was a time when I complained to her because I had no money and could no longer manage my expenses. She told me to let her know if things became too difficult because she was willing to help.) -Peer 2

Amy's initiative and ability to motivate others were likewise recognized by her classmates. Her leadership was evident not only through formal roles but also through the initiative she took in encouraging and reminding her peers to fulfill their academic responsibilities. One peer recalled:

Kato na time dili jud nako malimtan kay sige na siyag chat sa GC tapos papasahon na jud mi. Mas naa pa siyay initiative sa amoa, mao among napansin. Leader-leader na siya. (I will never forget that time because she kept reminding us through the group chat to submit our requirements. We noticed that she had more initiative than the rest of us. She was really acting like a leader.) -Peer 4

This leadership was also evident within the classroom. Amy's active participation and confidence allowed her to influence classroom discussions and engage meaningfully with both her classmates and instructors. One instructor noted:

And even during classes, very participative jud siya and always present. Sa naa jud always iyang presence. At the same time, confident siya, makig-engage siyag conversation. Mao jud akong mapansin sa iyaha. (During classes, she was very

participative and consistently present. Her presence was always noticeable. At the same time, she was confident and actively engaged in conversations. That was what I consistently observed about her.) -Instructor 1

Amy's experiences in higher education contributed to the development of leadership qualities characterized by initiative, confidence, influence, and a willingness to guide others. Her classmates viewed her as someone they could rely on for advice and encouragement, while instructors recognized her active participation and confidence. Through these experiences, Amy emerged not only as a successful student but also as a leader who positively influenced those around her.

Subtheme 3.3. Social Contribution

Another important outcome of Amy's university experience was her ability to contribute positively to the lives of others. Beyond pursuing her own academic goals, she shared her knowledge, experiences, and skills with peers and fellow learners, allowing her to give back to the community that supported her. Amy described how she used her expertise in Braille and orientation and mobility to assist others. She said:

As I shared before this interview, my knowledge in Braille and orientation and mobility... I taught her how to use the cane using the four basic cane techniques. -Amy

Amy's willingness to help others was also recognized by her peers. Her readiness to share what she knew made her someone her classmates could easily approach whenever they needed academic assistance. One peer described her as someone who was approachable and always willing to share her knowledge, saying:

Very approachable siya, labi na paq-abot sa academic. Paq duulon nimo si ate, muhataq jud siya. (She is very approachable, especially when it comes to academics. Whenever you approach her, she is always willing to help.) -Peer 1

Another peer shared how Amy's knowledge and guidance became a valuable resource in completing academic tasks. According to the participant, Amy not only provided answers but also helped classmates better understand concepts and activities. The peer said:

So, sa akoo jud, dako jud tabang siya sa akoo when it comes sa mga activities na dili nako masabtan. Sa iya ko naga-pangayo tabang. Gina-discuss sa akoo. Kung unsa akoang pangutana, iya jud gina-tubag. (She has been a great help to me whenever there are activities that I do not understand. I ask her for help, and she explains things to me. Whatever questions I have, she answers them.) -Peer 2

Amy's influence also extended beyond direct assistance. According to one peer, her accomplishments served as a source of inspiration for others. The peer said specifically:

Usahay makaingon ang uban na ngano makaya man ni ate Amelia, then kami na regular kay dili namo makaya. (Sometimes others would say, if Ate Amelia can do it, why can't we, even though we do not have disabilities?) -Peer 3

These accounts suggest that Amy's contributions extended beyond her own educational success. Through sharing knowledge, assisting classmates, teaching practical skills, and inspiring others through her achievements, she positively influenced those around her. Her experiences demonstrate that resilience not only benefited her personal development but also enabled her to contribute meaningfully to her peers and the broader educational community.

Subtheme 3.4. Shared Responsibility

The findings in this subtheme revealed that Amy's success was not solely the result of her individual

efforts but was also supported by the collective actions of people within her environment. Throughout her university journey, various individuals contributed to creating an inclusive and supportive atmosphere that enabled her to participate meaningfully in academic and social activities.

Reflecting on her experiences, Amy recognized the role of the university community in fostering a welcoming environment. She emphasized that the guards, as the first people students encounter upon entering the campus, played an important role in creating a sense of inclusion. She noted:

Mailhan man gud nimo ang environment na welcoming kay magsugod man gud sa guard, kay sila man gud ang pinaka front desk. Magsugod jud sa guard. So maong na-feel jud nako na willing jud sila mag-study, magtuon unsaon pag handle sa naay visual impairment. (You can tell that an environment is welcoming because it starts with the guards, since they are the first people you meet. It starts with them. That is why I felt that they were willing to learn and understand how to handle a person with visual impairment.) -Amy

Amy added how she acknowledged the support she consistently received from her classmates and friends, which contributed to her sense of belonging within the university. She shared:

I was lucky because I have my classmates/friends who were always there to guide me... I did not even feel like I don't belong. (I was lucky because I had classmates and friends who were always there to guide me. I never felt that I did not belong.) -Amy

The role of peers in promoting inclusion was further emphasized by one instructor, who observed how Amy's classmates actively adjusted and supported her participation in classroom activities. According to the instructor, these everyday acts of consideration and cooperation created an environment where Amy was able to participate fully and feel accepted as a member of the class. The instructor said:

Friendly ang iyang mga classmates, and they really consider her. Ma-feel gyud nimo na included siya among the group, wala siya gina leave behind. Usahay sila pa ang mu-adjust. One time, I've observed someone nga nag-give way sa front na seat for her. Didto siya. And also, ma-observe pud nimo how they simply clear the way for her. And then usahay pud, their classmates will be the one to remind na i-explain jud ang situation niya. They have this camaraderie inside their class. (Her classmates were friendly and genuinely considerate of her. You could see that she was included in the group and was never left behind. Sometimes they were the ones who adjusted for her. I observed classmates giving up front seats for her and helping clear her path. There were also times when classmates reminded others to explain situations to her. They had a strong sense of camaraderie within the class.) -Instructor 1

Similarly, another instructor highlighted how Amy's classmates ensured that she remained included and supported during classroom activities. The instructor's observations suggest that inclusion was sustained through the consistent efforts of classmates who actively involved and assisted Amy whenever needed. The instructor said:

Wala jud ko kabantay na na-exclude siya kay iyang mga classmates... gina-apil man jud si Ms. Amy... gina-guide-an siya sa iyang classmates. (I never observed her being excluded by her classmates. They always included Ms. Amy and guided her whenever necessary.) -Instructor 4

These accounts tell a story of how Amy's success was supported by the collective effort of individuals who shared responsibility for creating an inclusive learning environment. The willingness of classmates, university personnel, and instructors to provide guidance, make adjustments, and foster a sense of belonging contributed significantly to her positive experiences in higher education. In this subtheme, inclusion is not solely dependent on the efforts of the individual with a disability but is also strengthened through the collective commitment of the community to support participation and success.

This theme showed that Amy's resilience resulted in several positive outcomes that extended beyond simply completing her studies. Her experiences were characterized by academic success, leadership

development, social contribution, and a shared sense of responsibility within her support network. These outcomes demonstrate that resilience can lead not only to positive adaptation but also to personal growth and meaningful contributions to others. Collectively, the findings revealed how Amy transformed adversity into opportunities for achievement, influence, and inclusion.

Summary of the Findings

The accounts showed that Amy encountered various challenges throughout her higher education journey. These difficulties included policy-practice gaps in the implementation of inclusive education, experiences of having her capabilities questioned because of her disability, accessibility barriers related to learning materials and classroom activities, and personal challenges involving family responsibilities and financial concerns. These adversities created obstacles that affected her academic participation and experiences. Despite these challenges, Amy continued to pursue her educational goals and remained committed to completing her studies.

Furthermore, Amy responded to these challenges through self-advocacy, proactive engagement, persistence, and support mobilization. She actively communicated her needs, exercised independence in decision-making, and sought opportunities to participate in academic and extracurricular activities. Amy also demonstrated resilience by maintaining a positive mindset, learning from failures, and refusing to be discouraged by discrimination or setbacks. In addition, she relied on supportive relationships with classmates, friends, and instructors who provided both academic and personal assistance throughout her university journey.

Lastly, Amy's successful completion of higher education was characterized by academic success, leadership development, social contribution, and shared responsibility. Through perseverance and active engagement, she achieved academic milestones and successfully completed her degree despite numerous challenges. Her experiences also enabled her to become a source of guidance, inspiration, and support for others, demonstrating leadership and meaningful contributions to her community. Her success testifies that inclusion is a shared responsibility, requiring the collective support of peers, instructors, and the broader educational environment to foster positive outcomes for students with disabilities.

4. Discussions

This chapter discusses the findings of the study in relation to existing literature and Resilience Theory. The themes that emerged from the data are examined to determine how they support, extend, or differ from previous research and theoretical perspectives. Through this discussion, the study provides a deeper understanding of the difficulties encountered by the student, the coping strategies employed in response to these challenges, and the outcomes associated with resilience in higher education.

Adversity

The findings of this study suggest that Amy's experiences of adversity are consistent with previous research on the educational experiences of students with disabilities, particularly those with visual impairments. Binlang and Donguiz (2024) identified that visually impaired students commonly encounter multifaceted barriers in inclusive educational settings, including inaccessible learning environments, inadequate instructional support, and social challenges that affect their academic participation. Similarly, Caguete and San Jose (2026) found that students with visual impairments continue to experience limited access to learning materials, insufficient institutional support, and social barriers despite efforts to promote inclusive education. These findings are reflected in Amy's experiences, where challenges extended beyond her visual impairment to include inconsistencies in the implementation of inclusive practices, assumptions about

her capabilities, accessibility concerns, and personal responsibilities.

More specifically, the policy-practice gap identified in this study aligns with Caguete and San Jose's (2026) observation that inclusive policies do not always translate into consistent support within higher education institutions. This finding is likewise consistent with Galleto and Burerros (2017), who reported that teacher education institutions in the Philippines remain vulnerable in implementing inclusive education due to challenges in policy, curriculum, instructional materials, and teaching methodologies, emphasizing the need for continuous professional development among educators.

Similarly, Montales (2026) found that the implementation of inclusive education continues to be constrained by weak policy implementation, inadequate instructional resources, and limited teacher preparedness, highlighting the importance of strengthening institutional capacity to support learners with special educational needs. Likewise, Amy's experiences of having her capabilities questioned and encountering accessibility barriers support Binlang and Donguiz's (2024) conclusion that students with visual impairments often face both physical and attitudinal barriers that limit their educational participation. These findings demonstrate that the challenges experienced by students with visual impairments are shaped not only by disability itself but also by the educational environment in which learning occurs.

From the perspective of Van Breda's (2018) Resilience Theory, these adversities represent the risk conditions that precede resilience. Rather than viewing disability as the primary source of difficulty, the findings indicate that Amy's challenges emerged from the interaction between her individual circumstances and environmental factors, including institutional practices, accessibility, and social perceptions. This supports the view that resilience develops in response to adversity situated within one's social and educational context rather than through individual characteristics alone.

Mediating Process

The findings of this study suggest that a combination of personal initiative and supportive relationships shaped Amy's ability to navigate adversity. Her use of self-advocacy, proactive engagement, persistence, and support mobilization reflects the mediating processes described in Van Breda's (2018) Resilience Theory, which emphasizes that resilience develops through the interaction between individual agency and environmental resources. Rather than allowing adversity to hinder her educational journey, Amy actively utilized personal strengths and available support systems to adapt to the demands of higher education.

Furthermore, this is consistent with Caliso et al. (2025), who found that students with disabilities developed coping strategies rooted in self-acceptance, determination, and social support, enabling them to overcome barriers and pursue their academic goals. Likewise, Ju et al. (2017) reported that self-advocacy, self-awareness, problem-solving, goal setting, and the effective use of support systems are essential contributors to the academic success of students with disabilities in postsecondary education. Amy similarly demonstrated these characteristics by communicating her needs, taking initiative in academic and social activities, persevering through challenges, and seeking support from peers and instructors while also extending support to others.

The findings are further supported by Ang et al. (2022), whose meta-analysis demonstrated that resilience interventions among higher education students effectively strengthen resilience, reduce stress, and promote social competency. Their review suggests that resilience is fostered not only through individual coping skills but also through meaningful social interaction and supportive relationships. This was evident in Amy's experiences, where resilience was sustained through both her personal efforts and the reciprocal support she shared with and received from her university community. These findings reinforce Van Breda's (2018) assertion that resilience is a dynamic process emerging from the interaction of personal strengths and

environmental supports, rather than being solely an individual characteristic.

Better-than-Expected Outcomes

The findings of this study indicate that Amy's resilience extended beyond overcoming adversity, resulting in positive academic, personal, and social outcomes. These outcomes were evident through her academic success, leadership development, social contribution, and the shared responsibility demonstrated within her university community. From the perspective of Van Breda's (2018) Resilience Theory, resilience is reflected not only in adapting to adversity but also in achieving positive outcomes despite significant challenges. This is consistent with Ju et al. (2017), who emphasized that self-determination is strongly associated with the academic success of students with disabilities in higher education. Similarly, Antcil et al. (2008) found that persistence, competence, self-advocacy, and self-realization contribute to the development of a strong academic identity among successful college students with disabilities. Amy's successful completion of higher education and consistent academic performance reflect these characteristics, demonstrating that resilience fostered both competence and achievement.

Beyond her personal accomplishments, Amy's experiences illustrate how resilience enabled her to become a source of support and leadership for others. Rather than being solely a recipient of assistance, she actively contributed to her peers by sharing knowledge, providing academic guidance, and encouraging classmates during challenging situations. These findings are consistent with Francis et al. (2019), who reported that college students with disabilities described not only barriers but also empowering experiences that strengthened their confidence, sense of agency, and capacity to contribute meaningfully within their educational communities. Amy's leadership and willingness to support others demonstrate that resilience can extend beyond individual adaptation to positively influence the learning experiences of others.

Additionally, Amy's positive outcomes were achieved through the collective efforts of the university community. The support provided by classmates, instructors, and other members of the institution fostered a sense of belonging and encouraged her active participation in academic and social activities. Likewise, Fichten et al. (2006) emphasized that appropriate accommodations, institutional support, and positive interpersonal relationships serve as important facilitators of success among college students with disabilities. Similarly, Adams and Proctor (2010) found that successful adaptation to college is influenced by both individual factors, such as self-advocacy, and environmental factors that promote social adjustment and institutional attachment. Together, these findings reinforce Van Breda's (2018) proposition that resilience is a dynamic process in which positive outcomes emerge through the continuous interaction between individual strengths and supportive environments.

Implications of the Study

The findings of this study demonstrate that resilience of a student with a disability extends beyond overcoming adversity and involves positive adaptation that results in meaningful academic, personal, and social outcomes. The study also highlights that resilience is shaped not only by the student's personal efforts but also by the support and opportunities provided within the educational environment. These findings have implications for both theory and practice.

Implications for Theory

The findings support the application of Resilience Theory by illustrating resilience as a dynamic process rather than a fixed personal characteristic. Amy's experiences demonstrate that resilience developed through the interaction between adversity, mediating processes, and better-than-expected outcomes. The identified adversities, including policy-practice gaps, questioned capability, accessibility barriers, and personal challenges, served as the conditions that required adaptation. In response, Amy drew upon self-

advocacy, proactive engagement, persistence, and support mobilization, which enabled her to achieve positive outcomes reflected in her academic success, leadership development, social contribution, and shared responsibility. These findings reinforce the view that resilience is fostered through the combined influence of personal agency and environmental support. They also demonstrate the usefulness of Resilience Theory in understanding how students with disabilities navigate higher education and achieve success despite significant challenges.

Implications for Practice

The findings suggest that promoting the success of students with disabilities requires both individual empowerment and institutional commitment. Higher education institutions may strengthen inclusive education by ensuring the consistent implementation of accommodations, improving the accessibility of learning materials and physical environments, and providing continuous professional development for instructors on inclusive practices. The findings also emphasize the importance of fostering a supportive university community in which classmates, faculty members, and non-teaching personnel actively contribute to creating an inclusive environment. Furthermore, encouraging students with disabilities to develop self-advocacy skills, participate in leadership opportunities, and build collaborative support networks may enhance their resilience and increase their opportunities for academic and personal success.

Future Direction

The findings of this study provide several opportunities for future research on the experiences of students with disabilities in higher education. Since this study focused on a single graduate with a disability, future researchers may explore the experiences of a larger and more diverse group of students with disabilities across different higher education institutions. Comparative case studies involving students with various disability types may provide a broader understanding of how resilience is developed within different educational contexts.

Future studies may also examine the perspectives of other stakeholders involved in inclusive higher education. While this study incorporated the views of the focal participant, peers, and instructors, subsequent research may include university administrators, disability support personnel, guidance counselors, and family members to gain a more comprehensive understanding of how institutional and social support contribute to students' resilience and educational success.

Another area for future research is the implementation of inclusive education practices in higher education institutions. The findings highlighted variations in accommodations, accessibility, and instructor preparedness, suggesting the need for studies that examine institutional policies alongside their actual implementation. Such investigations may identify effective practices and areas for improvement in promoting inclusive learning environments for students with disabilities.

Finally, future researchers may explore the long-term outcomes of resilience beyond graduation. Studies focusing on employment experiences, career development, professional identity, and community participation among graduates with disabilities may provide valuable insights into how resilience developed during higher education continues to influence success in adulthood. Such research would further contribute to the growing body of knowledge on disability, inclusion, and resilience across the lifespan.

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