

The Influence of Filipino Family Values on Students' Decisions to Pursue Graduate Studies

Rochelle C. Bagain 

Author Information:

University of La Salette, Inc.
Santiago City, Isabela, Philippines.

Correspondence:

chelbagain@gmail.com

Article History:

Date Received: August 15, 2026

Date Revised: August 20, 2026

Date Accepted: August 25, 2026

Date Published: September 18, 2026

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.67903/ijroms0422>

Document ID: 2026IJROMS0422

Recommended Citation:

Bagain, R. C. (2026). The influence of Filipino family values on students' decisions to pursue graduate studies. *International Journal of Research on Multidisciplinary Studies*, 1(8), 281-291. <https://doi.org/10.67903/ijroms0422>

Abstract. This qualitative phenomenological study examined how family values, expectations, support, sacrifices, and responsibilities influenced students' decisions to continue their education at the graduate level. Filipino students who were contemplating or had already opted for graduate studies were purposively selected because they had family influence in their decision to continue their studies in a graduate program. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect the data and thematic analysis was used in the analysis to discover patterns, meanings and common experiences that emerge in the narratives of participants. The results confirmed that it was a combination of personal aspirations and family oriented values that influenced the choice for pursuing graduate studies. Students were encouraged to learn and motivated by parents' emotional support; values of respect, responsibility, perseverance and gratitude contributed to students' determination to pursue further studies. Family sacrifices and the desire to help families were also important factors in their decisions about education. This result shows that graduate education choices for Filipinos are not only personal but are also a function of the interconnected dynamics between family expectations, obligations, and aspirations and personal goals. The study will help to illustrate the role of family values in further educational endeavors of the Filipino, and understand the influence of these values on education in general. The results could be used to help students ponder their learning motivation, to inform parents of their impact on their students' educational decisions, and to support teachers and higher education institutions in creating more culturally responsive student support and graduate education programs.

Keywords: Educational Decision-Making; Family Expectations; Filipino Family Values; Graduate Studies; Student Aspirations

Introduction

In the Filipino cultural context, family plays a significant role in shaping educational aspirations and decisions. Education is considered to be one of the primary routes of personal development, career advancement and social mobility. Although a bachelor's degree might be the minimum requirement for a career, graduate degrees can be used to help students further specialize their studies, develop additional skills, and continue their academic pursuit. But not only personal aspirations, family norms, financial prospects, culture, and perceptions of opportunities help to drive the decision to pursue a master's or doctoral degree. Children's education is important to Filipino families and students might not just see this as a personal achievement but also as a responsibility to the family and a contribution to family welfare (Alampay & Garcia, 2019). In this context, decisions about education may be related not only to personal preferences but also with broader family aspirations, responsibilities and sacrifices.

The studies conducted in the Philippines had shown that the family has a pivotal role in the educational and career decision making of students. Parents and family members have been found to be significant factors that contribute to students' choices of studying in the Academic track, interest in college courses, and career options (Nazareno et al., 2021; Onoshakpokaiye, 2022). For instance, Catindig et al. (2013) found that parental influence was one of the career decision-making self-efficacy and the career aspiration which was important for the undergraduate students of the Philippines. Recent studies also continue to prove family-related factors as factors that affect students' educational decisions. According to Faculin et al. (2025), family influence is manifested in various ways, such as financial support, encouragement, expectations, and other influencing factors affecting students in their career decision-making. In the same way, Llenares et al. (2021) cited financial assistance, encouragement, peer and family discussion, and role modeling as having the greatest impact on students' educational and career choices. These results suggest that learning trajectories of Filipino learners are not always the result of a choice that

they make but may emerge from the continuing interaction with family members and family expectations and resources.

The influences can be understood by taking into account the Filipino family values. The relationship patterns with close family members, respect, responsibility, sacrifice and caring for the well-being of the family can influence the meaning that students can give to achievement and future success. Alampay and Garcia (2019) pointed out that Filipino children's educational success might be related to the obligation of the child to his or her parents and the family welfare, and financial constraints could also have an impact on whether they continue their education or not and necessitate significant sacrifices by the parents. For students, therefore, higher education can be interpreted as a way of life-long personal and professional development, of contributing to enhance the family's socio-economic status and, in the long term, to support family welfare, which is the result of the parents' sacrifice.

However, family influence can't be interpreted as parental control alone. Family members can influence educational decisions via encouragement, financial support, expectations, advice, conversation around future opportunities, and by modeling (Faculin et al., 2025; Llenares et al., 2021). Parents can recommend specific educational/career pathways and students are expected to be autonomous at the same time (to pursue their own interests and take responsibility for the outcomes of their choices for their families). Faculin et al. (2025) have shown that the role of the family can exist alongside the students' growing independence in career decision making. This implies a dichotomy between family involvement and student autonomy is not always a contradiction. Students, however, can negotiate personal aspirations in relation to respect for the parents and family expectations, and the perceived responsibilities to the family. Similarly, in their study of motivational sources, Almodovar et al. (2026) reported that family expectations and cultural values can be sources of motivation and guidance, but at the same time, they can induce emotional pressure and affect the entire set of the choices students can imagine. In a collectivist setting, Chaturvedi (2025) also shows how family expectations can be both encouragement and restriction for educational and career choices.

The dynamics are especially striking when students are thinking about going to graduate school. Some of the main distinctions between undergraduate and graduate study include the financial and time expenses, commitment, and long-term goals of graduate study. Students might have to consider the tuition costs and other academic costs, job prospects, future prospects, family obligations, advanced education time etc. If you have a family or are already working, further studies might necessitate changes to your family and work life. So, a person's choice to pursue a master's degree or a doctoral degree may not just be academic, but also financial, financial return, family support and family responsibility.

These are all factors that have been shown to be important by existing research on graduate study. In the study on Filipino undergraduate students' intention to work towards their post-bachelor's, outcome expectations and social support significantly predicted intention to study further; while self-efficacy failed to do so. The results indicate that postsecondary choices are based on factors beyond students' self-efficacy in learning. In fact, the same outcomes factors – outcome expectations, intrinsic and utility value, psychological cost, subjective norms and financial well-being – have been identified as relevant in predicting students' intentions to go back to school for graduate studies in international contexts (Bergann et al., 2025; Nguyen et al., 2025; Zhou et al., 2024). These results further highlight the need to look at graduate education as a high-stakes educational transition in terms of both personal aspirations, expected outcomes, social relations and cost.

But social support and parental influence as seen through traditional lenses may not reflect the traditional connotations of these influences as manifested in Filipino students' decisions. Family values may be internalized and manifested in a collectivist culture as expectations of respect, responsibility, reciprocity, compliance, and family advancement. Studies on filial piety have revealed that parents' expectations, perceived obligations and family relationships may also affect students' educational decisions, apart from parents' direct guidance (Askarova et al., 2025; Guan et al., 2025; Qiao et al., 2024). Qualitative research in Asian countries also suggests that respect for the elders, expectations of stable careers, and the perception of having financial responsibilities may also drive students to negotiate or sometimes favor family interests over personal ones (Santos, 2020; Chaturvedi, 2025). These results offer a cultural foundation for further discussion of Filipino family values as another context of influence beyond just external, but rather as values that students might internalize and apply when making decisions on their educational choices.

A similar study in the Philippines has also found that family influence is significant at various stages in the educational decision-making process. A few studies have looked at how seniors select their track, how college students select their courses, and how career choices are made (Nazareno et al., 2021; Faculin et al., 2025; Onoshakpokaiye, 2022). In addition, there has been some research that has focused on intentions to continue post-secondary education (Bayon et al., 2024). However, there is a limited body of literature that merges the issue of Filipino family values, lived experiences, and decisions made for graduate education. The current research about factors associated with intending to enter graduate studies focuses on quantifiable

factors like social support, outcome expectations, subjective norms, financial status, and perceived costs (Bayon et al., 2024; Bergann et al., 2025; Nguyen et al., 2025; Zhou et al., 2024). These methods are useful in examining the attributes that predict students' intentions, but they offer limited insight into the ways in which students experience and interpret family values like sacrifice, reciprocity, respect, responsibility, and family advance while considering their decisions for graduate studies.

A second gap is in methodology. The current literature in the Philippines on educational and career decision-making uses quantitative, survey and correlational studies (Nazareno et al., 2021; Faculin et al., 2025). While they can detect relationships and predictors these methods can fail to fully embody the meaning assigned by students to family relationships or how students negotiate between personal and familial aspirations. Limited qualitative research in other related fields of educational and career development shows that effects of family can be felt in a variety of ways, such as encouragement, support, obligation, and pressure (Almodovar et al., 2026; Chaturvedi, 2025). Thus, a phenomenological analysis of how students perceive the influences and how they construct meaning of family values in their choices to attend graduate school seems appropriate to explore.

The present study seeks to close these gaps by looking at the Filipino students' perception and or interpretation of family values in their decision to pursue graduate studies. These notions of family influence are not quantified but examined for how participants give meaning to definitions of family expectations, emotional and financial support, sacrifices made by families, respect, responsibilities, perseverance, reciprocity, and aspirations for family upliftment. The philosophy is that decisions about furthering a search for a graduate program might be a process of negotiation between one's expectations and one's family's expectations. The study thus aims to explore the influences of relationships and cultures on the decisions of Filipino graduates in their pursuit of graduate education.

Therefore, this study, "The Influence of Filipino Family Values on Students' Decision for Graduate Studies" was conducted to find out how the Filipino family values affect the decision of students to take up graduate studies. The study is confined to Filipino students who are intending to undertake a further education program or have already made the decision to go for a graduate program and the study is centered on the students' actual experiences and perceptions of the influence of family. It is not intended to quantify the power of the family influence using statistics, make causal inferences or compare the performance of Filipino students with students from other cultural groups. Instead, it aims to discover the significance participants give to their experiences of education decision making in relation to family values. The study adds to the literature on educational decision making by examining graduate education from the perspective of Filipino family values. The results may encourage students to think about the family and cultural components of their educational objectives, help families understand how their expectations and support are felt by students, and help educators, academic advisers, and higher education institutions "to learn about how to best be culturally responsive in offering graduate education success coaching and counseling."

Research Question

This study aims to explore the influence of Filipino family values on students' decisions to pursue graduate studies. Specifically, it seeks to answer the following questions:

1. How do students describe the Filipino family values that influence their decision to pursue graduate studies?
2. How do students describe their family's expectations regarding their pursuit of graduate studies?
3. How do students describe the ways their family values and expectations shape their decision-making regarding graduate studies?
4. How do students reconcile their personal aspirations with their family values and expectations when deciding to pursue graduate studies?

Scope and Delimitation of the Study

This study is a qualitative type that aims to explore how the Filipino family values affects students' choice of further studies - graduate studies. It will engage selected college students, either planning or interested, in graduate study. Semi-structured interviews will be conducted to collect data, and analyzed based on thematic analysis. The study will explore participants' thoughts about family values, expectations, support and responsibilities in the context of their decisions. It will not explore other areas like academic performance, financial status, institutional factors or employment opportunity as primary areas of inquiry. The results will not be extrapolating to other and all Filipino students.

Literature Review

Filipino Family Values and Educational Decision-Making

Family is an important context for Filipino students' educational decision-making. Education achievement is not only one's own achievement, but it can also be viewed within the family context of filial obligation, family welfare, and sacrifice (Alampay & Garcia, 2019). Studies conducted in the Philippines have consistently found correlation between family influence on the academic-track, college-course, and career choices of students and the following family factors: expectations, finances, encouragement, advice, and role modeling (Nazareno et al., 2021; Onoshakpokaiye, 2022; Faculin et al., 2025; Llenares et al., 2021). Similarly, Catindig et al. (2013) set the basis for the influence of parent on the career decision-making self-efficacy and aspirations of Filipino students. The results of this study show the influence of family relations in making decisions about education among Filipino students rather than single individuals' choices of school.

Family influence, however, is of multiple dimensions. It can offer resources and support and set expectations for educational and career directions. Financial support and encouragement were important aspects of family influence, and students also felt more independence in their choice of career, according to Faculin et al. (2025). In the same vein, Almodovar et al. (2026) argued that cultural values and family norms can act as motivational and as emotional restraints. Therefore, Filipino students have the opportunity to compromise family views and keep their own goals for education. The relationship between the influence of the family and the student's agency is significant for an understanding of further education choices.

Parental Expectations, Support, and Responsibility

Parental attitudes can impact students' goals for school by linking higher education to economic stability, success in the world of work, and better family well-being. Some studies also recognized a differentiation in what kind of parental involvement Filipino students have in career decision-making as identified by Lao et al. (2019) who cited guidance, emphasis, encouragement and pressure; and Vasquez et al. (2025) who cited varying levels of parental involvement. Based on the results of this study, it is inferred that parental expectation is not an automatic facilitator and/or negative inhibitor but rather depends on how students perceive and react to it.

Family support is especially important if students are thinking about further studies. Emotional, financial, informational or practical support. In their study of 578 Filipino final year undergraduate students, Bayon et al. (2024) showed that social support and outcome expectations were significant in determining intentions to pursue advanced degrees. The same factors (social support, expected outcomes, utility value, subjective norms, psychological costs, financial well-being) have been found in international studies to be linked to graduate-education intentions (Bergann et al., 2025; Nguyen et al., 2025; Zhou et al., 2024). In general, however, these studies tend to view support and family influence as quantifiable factors, and do not directly focus on what students make of family support in their culture.

Educational decision-making is further complicated due to family responsibility. Educational progress can be seen by Filipino students as a way of enhancing future possibilities for contributing to family welfare. Alampay and Garcia (2019) linked education attainment to "filial obligation" and "family welfare" and Fabella (2025) spoke of "parental authority" and "family expectations/collaborative decisions" in the Philippines context. Therefore, graduate studies may be seen as more than just a way for one to move ahead in the workplace, but also as a means to pay back parents, to make a better life for themselves and their families, and to make up for the perceived obligations to the members of their family.

Personal Aspirations, Autonomy and Family influence

Student autonomy by no means reduces the impact of family influence. Students actively respond to, interpret, negotiate, accept or challenge family expectations. Faculin et al. (2025) noted that the support and encouragement provided by the family were parallel to student independence in career choices, and Almodovar et al. (2026) demonstrated that families expectations can be facilitative and at the same time restrictive. Respect for parents, filial expectations, and family responsibility might affect educational decisions in the post-graduate stage, as students continue to engage in negotiations about their personal interests, with similar findings in collectivist contexts (Askarova et al., 2025; Guan et al., 2025; Qiao et al., 2024; Chaturvedi, 2025).

This negotiation will be more important in thinking about graduate school. The student may go for advanced studies due to their own interests and goals, but also take into account family expectations, finances, sacrifice, and responsibilities. On the other hand, family encouragement can be a spark to start a student's choice of becoming a teacher, but may eventually become their own aspiration. An awareness of students' experience and interpretation of the influence of family is needed to understand this process, not just to establish the presence or absence of family influence.

Graduate Education as a Distinct Educational Decision

Graduate education is a different kind of educational decision than previous ones, as it tends to have more time, financial and professional obligations. When students begin thinking about getting their Masters or PhD, they should take into account tuition, career prospects and advancement, specialization, expected return on investment, and family life. Bayon et al. (2024) reported a relationship between outcome expectations and social support with regard to Filipino undergraduate students' intention to pursue advanced degrees. International research also confirms that expected success, utility and intrinsic value, psychological-cost, subjective norms and financial-well-being are key factors to consider (Bergann et al., 2025; Nguyen et al., 2025; Zhou et al., 2024). Family background can also impact opportunities for education, with disparities in parents' education, culture, and economic resources potentially impacting educational experiences (Glueck, 2024).

Despite these contributions, one question in the current research is yet to be explored well enough. Studies on family influence on senior high school track selection, college-course choice, and career decisions have been conducted in the Philippines, with a focus mainly on measurable factors like social support, outcome expectations, and subjective norms in the studies on graduate-intention (Nazareno et al., 2021; Faculin et al., 2025; Bayon et al., 2024). Much less attention has been paid to how Filipino students' sense of, and interpretation for, a specific family value (e.g., respect, sacrifice, responsibility, reciprocity, perseverance, family advancement) will be manifested when making the decision of whether or not to pursue graduate education. Furthermore, most of the literature produced in the Philippines are quantitative and correlational-oriented, providing only superficial knowledge of the meaning in the lived context of these decisions.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological research design to explore the lived experiences and perceptions of Filipino students regarding the influence of family values on their decisions to pursue graduate studies. A phenomenological method was used since the study was designed to gain insight into the participants' experience, interpretation and meanings of family expectations, family support, family sacrifice, family responsibility and personal aspirations in relation to graduate education. Semi-structured interviews were conducted for detailed accounts of experiences and thematic analysis for patterns and themes in the interview data.

Sampling Design

The study employed purposive sampling to select participants who had direct experience with the phenomenon under investigation. Participants were selected based on their relevance to the research questions and their ability to provide rich accounts of how Filipino family values influenced their educational decisions. The sampling process included students who were considering, planning, applying for, or had recently decided to pursue graduate studies. Participant recruitment continued until the data provided sufficient depth and no substantial new themes emerged from subsequent interviews.

Research Locale

This study conducted at University of La Salette, Inc. Santiago City, Isabela. The school has a diverse group of students from different academic disciplines and backgrounds to make presentations to a setting that allows the students to explore their choices for graduate studies.

Research Participants

The participants consisted of ten (10) Filipino college students who were considering, planning, applying for, or had decided to pursue graduate studies. Participants were selected purposively based on the following criteria: (1) Filipino citizenship or cultural identification; (2) current enrollment in or recent completion of undergraduate education in the Philippines; (3) consideration, planning, application, or recent decision to pursue graduate studies; (4) willingness to discuss personal experiences involving family values and educational decision-making; and (5) willingness to participate in an in-depth semi-structured interview. Efforts were made to include participants with varied family and socioeconomic backgrounds to capture diverse experiences of family influence.

Research Instrument

A semi-structured interview guide developed by the researcher based on the research questions and literature was the main piece of research instrument. The interview questions were open-ended questions on

the participants' perceptions and experiences on Filipino family values, parental expectations, family support, sacrifice, responsibility, personal aspirations, autonomy and decisions on their graduate education. The interview guide was pre-tested by qualified stakeholders for relevance, clarity and the questions in relation to the research objectives. Revisions that were deemed appropriate were made prior to interviews.

Data Gathering Procedure

Permission to conduct the study was granted from the appropriate authorities of the University of La Salette, Inc. prior to data collection and ethical requirements and informed-consent procedures were followed throughout the research process. Persons with inclusion criteria were selected by purposive sampling and informed about the purpose, procedures, possible risks, confidentiality issues, and voluntary participation of participants. The researcher asked a consent on the approval of the participants engaging this study. The semi-structured interviews took place at times and places agreed upon by the participants to ensure privacy and comfort. The interviews were recorded with the participants' consent and were carried out with notes taken for relevant observations and contextual information. Recordings were transcribed accurately, and each participant was assigned a pseudonym or a participant code to ensure the anonymity of the participants. The transcripts were then created for systematic analysis.

Results and Discussions

The phenomenological analysis revealed that the participants' decision to pursue graduate studies were constituted through personal aspirations and familial relationships. Six interrelated themes emerged from the participants' narratives: (1) graduate education as personal and professional becoming, (2) parental sacrifice as a source of filial responsibility, (3) family values as internalized moral orientations, (4) family support and expectations as relational resources, (5) negotiation between familial expectations and personal autonomy, and (6) graduate education as an expression of reciprocity and family advancement. A theme was provided to synthesis the results, From Family Impacts to Relational Educational Agency. Rather than presenting family influence as a unidirectional force exerted by parents upon students, the findings indicate that participants experienced family influence as relational, internalized, and negotiated. Family values became part of the interpretive framework through which participants understood what graduate education meant, why it mattered, and for whom its benefits were ultimately intended.

Graduate Education as Personal and Professional Becoming

The first level of formulation was that of personal development, future job success, specialization, and further education. Participants 1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10 linked graduate education to a deeper understanding and stronger professional skills, as well as new opportunities for moves in the career path. At this stage, engaging in graduate studies seemed to be an individual effort based on the hope to be more capable and established in the workplace. Participants' stories, however, indicated that the significance of educational progress was more complex than just the attainment of credentials. Graduate education was an act of becoming, of gaining knowledge, of becoming more professionally able, of becoming ready for future tasks. The choice was not just for another academic qualification, but it was one about creating a specific picture of the participant that he or she wanted to be. This discovery makes a completely individualistic understanding of educational aspiration more complicated. Participants' motivations for engaging in graduate studies were expressed in personal terms but were embedded in relational contexts that endowed these meanings to the aspirations. For example, their ideas of 'career advancement' often included the notion of achieving some kind of stability and becoming a family contributor. Therefore, it could be concluded that the participants' aspirations are relationally constituted aspirations. The self seeking educational progress is not estranged from the family, but is the self created in the familial relationships and responsibilities. This is consistent with the results from Philippine literature regarding the family's influence on educational and career choices as it can be seen that decisions for school and career choices are heavily affected by family expectations, resources, and encouragement (Nazareno et al., 2021; Faculin et al., 2025). The present findings extend this literature, in suggesting that the influence of the family is not only external (in the way of advice or expectations), but also internal (as students' expectations for success in education).

Parental Sacrifice as a Source of Filial Responsibility

The other major aspect of what the participants experienced was that of their parents' sacrifices. Parents' hardship, financial struggle, and diligent attempts to provide educational opportunities were themes that were recalled by participants 1, 4, 6, and 9. Such recollections were not just relegated to the background of the circumstances. They were a kind of moral event to the participants and impacted on

their conceptions of education. Parental sacrifice seemed to feel appreciated and to foster feelings of responsibility and purposefulness in learning opportunities. Graduate education was therefore linked to a moral story: Parents invested in the child's education and the child would invest in parent's investment by achieving and contributing to society. This is congruent with Alampay and Garcia (2019) who positioned the educational goals of Filipinos in the context of the obligation to the family and family welfare. However, the current research results give a more experiential aspect to this relationship. The participants did not just state that they were performing a culturally mandated or required action. Instead, they shared the ways in which the sacrifice of their parents became part of their own education and what that meant to them. This is a very theoretical point. The pressure of filial responsibility was not the only way in which it was felt, but also as an inner moral obligation. Sacrifices of the family were integrated into the participant's motivation. Thus, moving into graduate school might be a process of self-development as well as an effort to assign meaning to the sacrifice required to achieve earlier educations. The significance of this finding is phenomenological, that is, sacrifice being transformed into meaning. Economic or personal sacrifice experienced by parents was later rethought by the participants as a motivation to persevere, achieve and furthergo in education. Family sacrifice thus acted as a moral guide, rather than just a material condition.

Family Values as Internalized Moral Orientations

Responsibility, respect, perseverance, hard work, sacrifice, family solidarity and love of family were explicitly cited as values influencing participants' choice of education by participants 2, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9 and 10. These values offer an interpretive framework on the findings as it shows that it is not just about parental teaching that shapes the values of children. Participants did not simply say that their parents told them to go to graduate school. Rather, they used to report on values they learned and lived in their families, which then guided their decision making on topics such as education, employment, responsibility and achievement. Family values thus seemed to be internalized orientations to consider alternative future courses of action. Respect, for instance, was an incentive to listen to family opinions, and a moral equivalent of perseverance and hard work, a moral excuse to persist despite problems. The concept of individual achievement extended to family achievement, as the education of an individual was seen to be happening within the context of the family as a relational unit. Judging from this finding, one can distinguish between two types of family influence: social control and moral formation. In the first case, the parents assume an influence over the child by leading them or limiting their freedom in making decisions. The latter offers the idea that dispositions are developed in the family context, and then used to interpret one's choices. The second interpretation is more supported by the partakers narratives. In this respect, Filipino family values was a cultural-moral inheritance. Students were not only given expectations of what they are to do, they also acquired an understanding of the nature of responsibility, success, thanks and a worthwhile life. This may account for the fact that family influence might continue to be a major factor even if parents were not directly involved in the immediate decision to attend graduate school.

Family Support and Expectations as Relational Resources

Family support was also identified by the participants as an important factor supporting educational aspirations. Participants 2, 5, 6, 8 and 10 mentioned emotional encouragement, reassurance, trust and confidence in family during times of uncertainty and difficulty. Not only was financial support not excluded, though. Confidence in them or how available they were emotionally were often equally as important. This result is in line with the study conducted by Bayon et al. (2024), which showed that social support is a significant factor that influences Filipino students' goal of further studies. The accounts of the phenomenological experiences in this study, however, show something that may not necessarily be represented in a generic term like "social support" namely that social support is an experience of relationship. A positive message from a parent, such as one of encouragement, may carry more weight that what is written, as the message might reflect the parent's confidence that the student is able to perform well. Likewise, funding could be seen as a sign that the family values and supports the student's educational goals—in addition to being a source of economic support. This support was supported by family expectations. Participants 1, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10 shared their hopes and dreams for educational attainment, career security, self-sufficiency and future accomplishments. However, these expectations were not usually manifested as restrictions on career choices to follow a certain profession. This is important because it deviates from the view that family influences are either positive or negative (excluding revolutionary). The experiences of the participants indicate that expectations can serve as an orientation to relations. Parents express a vision of the future that the students read, interpret, negotiate, and, sometimes, adapt to their visions.

Negotiating Familial Expectations and Personal Autonomy

One of the most theoretically noteworthy findings was the family influence and personal autonomy. The participants (1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10) indicated they valued their families' views but also felt responsible for their own education. Participant 10's description of the family as "major but not controlling" sums up this tension. This statement should help with the interpretation of the whole data set. The participants did not think of autonomy as being independent of their family. In contrast, autonomy was expressed in relationship. That's an important difference. With an individualistic notion of autonomy, the nature of freedom can be defined as freedom from outside others. The narratives of the participants suggest something else: that they might be independent and listen to parents, think about family's well-being, express what they plan to do, and take family expectation seriously. As such, the notion of family influence and autonomy should not be set against each other. The experiences of the participants suggest a relational process of negotiation through which educational choices are made by engaging in conversation with others and values of the social world. This discovery has corroborated other existing studies in the Philippines which show that family encouragement and support can indeed coexist with growing independence in educational and career decision-making among students (Faculin et al., 2025). It also aligns with the study by Almodovar et al. (2026) that family expectations can be both a motivator and a constraint of Filipino students. However, the present results offer a more detailed picture: the family's influence over a student's autonomy is not necessarily depleting, and it is possible for the family to shape expectations and have them become internalized in the form of commitments that the student endorses. Reflective appropriation of family values may, therefore, be the means for autonomy, rather than the rejection of them.

Graduate Education as Reciprocity and Family Advancement

The last theme is related to participants' perceptions of graduate studies as a way to support their families. Participants 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 9 & 10 related high education to future financial stability and being able to provide for parents and other family members. Graduate education had a decidedly relational character here. Not only was it seen as an investment in the person. It was also known as an investment in the family's future. Advancement opportunities, income, and stability might bring opportunities which the participants hoped would also benefit their families. This discovery puts the idea of reciprocity at the core of the educational choice. Participants seemed to grasp that learning was a relationship-based process, with the parents supplying them with opportunities, sacrifices, guidance and care, and the students wanting to return that gifts to themselves in the form of success and later to their families. While this notion of indebtedness, or indebtedness as an obligation, is certainly important for this reading, it ought not to be interpreted simplistically as indebtedness. In the participants' accounts, reciprocity is not so much defined as the idea of repaying a reckonable debt, as it is seen as a way of looking at family well-being in an ongoing relationship. The motivation to give back demonstrates insight into the relationships that have enabled them to achieve something. Graduate education is then at once a personal project, a family project. The student wants to improve in some way, and if he or she can improve in some way it becomes more important because he or she might be able to help the people who helped him or her improve.

From Family Impacts to Relational Educational Agency

The results suggest a central phenomenon which can be called relational educational agency when combined. Participants were given choice over the nature and motivations for continuing with graduate study and such choice was not necessarily independent of family relationships. They decided on what they would do based on their recollections of sacrifice by their parents, their internalized understanding of the values of respect and responsibility, their experience of family support, their expectations of success, and their desire to positively contribute to family welfare. The results thus cast doubt on the belief that the decision-making process in education is a linear continuum of individual autonomy on one end, and family control on the other. The experiences of the participants is described in more nuanced terms. They were not wholly autonomous decision makers, and at the same time was not merely an object of parental desires. Instead, they had agency by means of a constant process of interpretation, negotiation, and of embedding family values within their personal visions. This process can be conceptually illustrated as: Family relationships form the basis for internalization of values, which in turn influences interpretations of sacrifice and responsibility, which lead to personal and professional aspirations that then affect the negotiation of family expectations, educational decision, and anticipated reciprocity and family advancement. This process will make important contribution to the literature. In the Philippines, past research has confirmed that family plays a role in the educational pathways, career decisions, and the likelihood of pursuing a higher degree (Nazareno et al., 2021; Faculin et al., 2025; Bayon et al., 2024). The present results build on this knowledge by uncovering the nature of such influence in everyday experience and how it is understood in this lived context. The findings aren't strictly speaking about whether or not

family support is linked to intention to attend graduate school; rather, they uncover why family support is important. The findings do not focus on parental expectations as an independent variable, but rather on how students see the expectations as signs of care, responsibility, sacrifice, or even stress, in extreme cases. The most important implication of the findings is that autonomy does not necessarily mean a lack of family influences; students' feeling of autonomy seems to occur when familial relationships and values are negotiated reflectively. Therefore, the main idea that surface in participants' narrative is that the choice of further education in the post-secondary sector is negotiated aspiration, where the individual self and the family are not perceived as separate spheres. The real value of graduate education occurs when the learner is able to advance in personal and professional growth while still being engaged in responsibilities, relationships, and aspirations related to the family. This has brought the research gap noted in the literature to a solid empirical basis. Several studies have demonstrated the role of family, social support, parental expectations, and outcome expectations in educational decision making (Alampay & Garcia, 2019; Bayon et al., 2024; Faculin et al., 2025). There has been, however, a relatively limited focus on how values like sacrifice, respect, responsibility, reciprocity, and family advancement can be lived out by Filipino students in their choices of graduate programs. The present study aims to fill this gap by showing that these values are not just external factors that impact educational choices but that they are also part of the meanings through which students think about their educational futures.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles were observed throughout the study. Ethical approval was obtained from the Research Office of the University of La Salette prior to data collection. Participants provided informed consent and were informed that participation was voluntary, that they could decline to answer any question, and that they could withdraw without penalty. Potential emotional discomfort arising from discussions of family experiences was minimized by allowing participants to pause, skip questions, or terminate the interview when necessary. Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured through the use of participant codes or pseudonyms, while recordings, transcripts, and other research materials were securely stored and accessible only to the researcher. Participants were debriefed after the interviews and given an opportunity to raise concerns or clarify questions. Cultural sensitivity was observed throughout the research by respecting diverse interpretations of Filipino family values and avoiding assumptions or stereotypes in the analysis and presentation of participants' experiences.

Conclusion

This study identified the interplay of individual aspirations and family bonds that influences a Filipino student's choice for graduate studies. Six themes of the lived experience emerged from what the participants said: graduate education as personal/performing becoming, parental sacrifice as a basis for filial responsibilities, family values as internalized moral orientations, family support/expectations as relational resources, negotiation of familial expectations and personal autonomy, and graduate education as an expression of reciprocity and advancement of the family. The results indicate that graduate education is seen not only as further academic degrees, but as a way of personal and professional development and preparation for future prospects. The goals of working to progress and secure a stable career were very tied to the desire to contribute to their families. Some sacrifices by the parents also emerged as tools of motivation as participants were encouraged to persevere and see educational success as a way to honor their parents' sacrifices. Responsibility, respect, perseverance, hard work, sacrifice, solidarity, and love of family were internalized and became important values and guides in educational decision making. Simultaneously, the family support in the form of encouragement, reassurance, trust and confidence enabled the participants to remain steadfast and persist in spite of the difficulties encountered in graduate studies. The aspirations of family members also influenced their expectations around leaving school, job security and future success as well. Important, however, is that family influence was not invariably at the expense of personal autonomy. Participants honoured the views of their family members and were responsible for themselves in making educational decisions. They managed to accommodate their own ambitions with their family's aspirations through communication, explanation, negotiation and understanding. So autonomy was not perceived as the disembarkment from family, but as a relational process formed within the family. The results suggest that the relational educational agency is key to the understanding of participants' experiences. Students had opportunities to give their own interpretations of parents' sacrifice, internalize family value, respond to parents' expectations, strive for their personal and professional objectives, and expect reciprocity and family success in the future. The implications extend to the student, family, teacher, academic adviser and educational institutions. Reflective decision making is appreciated, whereby students are aware of their aspirations and family responsibility. Students are able to be encouraged in a way that maintains their autonomy. The relationships in graduate education can be explored through education support systems,

services for graduate students, advising, counseling, and mentoring, which can be enhanced by educators and educational institutions. The study only includes the experiences of the participants and not of all Filipino graduate students. Future studies could investigate these experiences in various areas and across varying social, economic, academic and institutional backgrounds. Overall, Filipino students view graduate education as a negotiated aspiration, where personal development and family advancement are inextricably connected.

Recommendations

Based on the results, students are asked to introspect on their own aspirations and future goals in life and to reflect on the impact of Filipino families' values, sacrifices, expectations, and responsibilities in their choices of education. Parents and families are expected to offer guidance, emotional support, encouragement, and constructive communication with the students, and have their students make their own decisions about graduate programs and career decisions. Higher education institutions, faculty, and academic advisers are urged to provide family-oriented and culturally responsive advising, counseling and career planning workshops and supporting peer helping groups for students to encourage them to balance with family expectations, academic obligations and personal objectives. Family and cultural factors should also be included in the institutional policies and practices of students' services that ensure that family involvement does not take away the students' personal agency. Finally, future studies should consider these questions with larger and more varied samples in various disciplines, socioeconomic status, regions and institutions, such as comparative and mixed methods to evaluate family-inclusive counseling and support programs. Supporting Filipino graduate students in general requires an awareness of the relational nature of educational decision making and the facilitation of family participation as a support mechanism in educational decisions when appropriate, as long as there is also open communication and respect and students' autonomy.

References

- Alampay, L. P., & Garcia, A. S. (2019). Education and parenting in the Philippines. In E. Sorbring & J. E. Lansford (Eds.), *School systems, parent behavior, and academic achievement* (Vol. 3). Springer.
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-28277-6_7
- Almodovar, A. A., Butad, J. I., Danao, L. M., Delacruz, P. K., Escorial, M. F., Eusebio, A., Javier, J. M., Diola, D., & Arahan, D. A. (2026). Lived experiences of Filipino college students in academic course selection: A phenomenological study. *Psychology and Education: A Multidisciplinary Journal*, 58(8), 1108–1117. <https://doi.org/10.70838/pemj.580806>
- Askarova, N., Shalamova, O., & Voronova, L. (2025). The family's role in high school graduates' higher education decision-making. *Global Journal of Guidance and Counseling in Schools: Current Perspectives*, 15(1), 73–84. <https://doi.org/10.18844/gjgc.v15i1.9647>
- Bayon, C., Abejo III, M., Guinocor, M., Garciano, M. J., Literatus, J., Reveche, S. J., Nudalo, A., Gonzaga, M. C., Caminos, I., Caminos, R., Borres, V., & Cortes, S. (2024). Do social cognitive factors influence final-year undergraduate students' intentions to pursue advanced degrees? An examination of the moderating effect of sex. *Frontiers in Education*, 9, Article 1329911. <https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2024.1329911>
- Bergann, S., Blüthmann, I., Neugebauer, M., & Watermann, R. (2025). Intrinsic and extrinsic motives of undergraduate students for pursuing a master's degree: Applying the Eccles et al. expectancy-value model. *PLOS ONE*, 20(3), Article e0317204. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0317204>
- Catindig, M. D., Espina, K. J., & Placido, A. C. (2013). *Career-life preparedness: The power of parental influences on the career decision self-efficacy and career aspirations of Filipino undergraduate students* [Bachelor's thesis, De La Salle University]. Animo Repository. https://animorepository.dlsu.edu.ph/etd_bachelors/11242
- Chaturvedi, N. (2025). Impact of family on career decision-making among high school students in Lucknow's various educational boards. *International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research*, 7(6). <https://doi.org/10.36948/ijfmr.2025.v07i06.63123>
- Fabella, M., Seki, M., & Kakinaka, M. (2025). General perceptions of career decision-making autonomy among youth in rural Philippines: An experimental study examining cultural and gender dynamics. *The Developing Economies*, 64(3), 243–263. <https://doi.org/10.1111/deve.12453>
- Faculin, C. H., Villares, O. N., Jortil, M., & Delantar, A. F. A. (2025). Linking demographic profile to family influence and career decision preferences. *Journal of Humanities, Social Sciences and Business*, 5(1), 25–38. <https://doi.org/10.55047/jhssb.v5i1.1972>

- Glueck, M. B. (2025). Beyond a bachelor's: Stratification in graduate school enrollment. *Research in Social Stratification and Mobility*, 96, Article 101019. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rssm.2025.101019>
- Guan, S., Meng, F., & Wu, C. (2025). Authoritative filial piety rather than reciprocal filial piety mediated the relationship between parental support, career decision self-efficacy, and discrepancies between individual-set and parent-set career goals. *Behavioral Sciences*, 15(8), Article 1135. <https://doi.org/10.3390/bs15081135>
- Lao, L. S., Pecson, J. B., Tejada, C. R., & Todino, K. K. (2019). *Ayon kay nanay at tatay Perceived parental involvement on career decision-making of Filipino senior high school students* [Bachelor's thesis, De La Salle University]. Animo Repository. https://animorepository.dlsu.edu.ph/etd_bachelors/5736
- Llenares, I. I., Deocarís, C., & Deocarís, C. (2021). Work values of Filipino college students. *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling*, 49, 513–523. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03069885.2021.1939267>
- Nazareno, A. L., Lopez-Relente, M. J. F., Gestíada, G. A., Martínez, M. P., De Lara, M. L. D., & Roxas-Villanueva, R. M. (2021). Factors associated with career track choice of senior high school students. *Philippine Journal of Science*, 150(5), 1043–1060. <https://doi.org/10.56899/150.05.15>
- Nguyen, Q. T., Hoang, P. D., Vu, H. T., & Nguyen, D. L. (2025). Understanding postgraduate study intentions in Vietnam: A qualitative exploration of contextual and motivational drivers. *Journal of Finance & Accounting Research*, 25(4). <https://doi.org/10.71374/jfar.v25.i4.08>
- Onoshakpokaiye, O. E. (2022). The influence of parents on students' choice of career in these present occupational challenges. *IJIET (International Journal of Indonesian Education and Teaching)*, 7(1), 1–7. <https://doi.org/10.24071/ijiet.v7i1.4968>
- Qiao, G., Chen, H., Li, G., Liu, H., & Wang, X. (2024). The role of filial piety in filial tourism: An intergenerational analysis of decision-making. *Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research*, 29, 1017–1031. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10941665.2024.2362199>
- Santos, L. D. M. (2020). I am a nursing student but hate nursing: The East Asian perspectives between social expectation and social context. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 17, Article 2608. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17072608>
- Vasquez, J., Arpon, A. M., Arellano, V. P., Tariga, J., Rom, G., & Umpad, T. K. (2025). Exploring students' experiences of parental influence in career decision-making. *International Journal of Modern Developments in Engineering and Science*, 4(4), 14–21. <https://journal.ijmdes.com/ijmdes/article/view/252>
- Zhou, Y., Liu, Y., Xue, W., Li, X., Yang, Z., & Xu, Z. (2024). Factors that influence the intent to pursue a master's degree: Evidence from Shandong Province, China. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 15, Article 1284277. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2024.1284277>