

## Balancing Academic Pursuits and Employment: An In-Depth Examination of College Student Experiences



Jesusa E. Pineda, PhD<sup>1</sup>, Amelia A. Calfoforo, EdD<sup>2</sup>, Rufus M. Javier, Jr.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1,2,3</sup>Carlos Hilado Memorial State University

**ABSTRACT:** The intricate dynamics of students managing work and study responsibilities may be determined through their lived experiences. This phenomenological study aims to gain insight into the diverse experiences of college students who balance their academic pursuits with employment. The participants were chosen according to the following criteria: (a) fourth-year Bachelor of Arts in English Language students enrolled in the Academic Year 2023-2024 at a state university and (b) had been working students since the first year. Clarke and Braun's (2006) Thematic Analysis method was employed to uncover and analyze prevalent themes within the participants' responses. The research uncovers significant themes that illuminate the lived experiences of ten college students who worked while studying from their first year to fourth year at a state university. Two overarching themes were gleaned from the participants' responses: Financial Well-being and Student Empowerment and Struggle for Balance and Resilience in Dual Responsibilities. In conclusion, the students successfully overcame academic challenges while working throughout their entire college journey.

**KEYWORDS:** Phenomenology, Philippines, State University, Thematic Analysis, Working Students

### I. INTRODUCTION (SIZE 10 & BOLD)

Studies have found that university students working while studying have varied motivations. According to Chantrea, Chansophy, and Chantytta (2017), university students' primary goal for working while studying was often financial independence. Balacuit and Lopio (2022) revealed that students typically worked to support their underprivileged families and sustain their academic expenses in pursuit of a better future. Also, some students' post-graduation career experience was a driving factor, as Gaytos, Lavilla, and Doblon-Merilles (2020) revealed.

This research explores the diverse experiences of college students who simultaneously pursue their academic goals and work responsibilities. Balancing higher education with employment presents a unique set of dynamics, and our study aims to illuminate how these students navigate their academic and professional lives. Through in-depth analysis and first-hand narratives, we delve into the distinct experiences of these students in their dual roles.

In recent years, the dual responsibilities of academic pursuits and employment among college students have garnered increasing attention worldwide. Various studies have explored the experiences of working students in different countries, such as Malaysia, the United States, the United Kingdom, Nigeria, and the Philippines. However, despite the growing body of literature on this topic, there remains a notable research gap concerning the specific experiences of Filipino college students balancing academic commitments with employment responsibilities.

Several studies have delved into the experiences of working students in diverse cultural and educational contexts. For instance, Tumin, Faizuddin, Mansir, Purnomo, and Aisyah (2020) investigated the experiences of working students at the International Islamic University Malaysia, shedding light on the challenges and coping mechanisms within the Malaysian context. Similarly, Johnson (2022) explored the lived experiences of single-parent students attending community colleges in America, providing valuable insights into the unique struggles faced by this demographic. Moreover, Asirit, Mapalo, Benliro, Patricio, Alima, and Villacruz (2023) conducted a thesis study in Davao, Philippines, focusing on working students' coping strategies and survival experiences. Yet, there remains a gap in nationwide broader, in-depth examinations of college student experiences. While a few studies such as those by Ebarido and Wibowo (2021), Pedroso, Crudo, Magno, and Mellizo (2022), Mutya, Geverola, Cano, and Friolo (2022), and Reyes (2020) have touched upon related topics in the Philippines, there is still a lack of comprehensive research explicitly addressing the interplay between academic pursuits and employment among Filipino college students.

## **Balancing Academic Pursuits and Employment: An In-Depth Examination of College Student Experiences**

Furthermore, existing studies from other countries, such as the study by Mordi, Adisa, Adekoya, Sani, Mordi, and Akhtar (2023), provide valuable insights into working students' work-life balance and experiences. However, the cultural and socio-economic context of the Philippines presents unique dynamics that justify a localized investigation.

This study looks closely at how Filipino college students manage their studies and jobs. By understanding their specific challenges, we can help create better support and policies to help them succeed. This research will help policymakers and educators and ensure students are happier and more successful in their college journey in the Philippines.

### **II. GENERAL OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY**

This study aimed to gain insight into the diverse experiences of college students who balance their academic pursuits with employment.

### **III. METHODOLOGY**

This study utilized a phenomenological research approach, employing thematic analysis to examine the multifaceted experiences of college students who worked while studying. Phenomenology captures the essence and meaning of these experiences, while thematic analysis offers a systematic and in-depth exploration of themes, providing a comprehensive understanding of working students' challenges, motivations, and strategies. This combined approach aims to provide a nuanced portrayal of the interplay between work and education in the lives of college students.

Data were collected through an unstructured interview guide and participants' narratives.

Upon receiving approval from the dean, the researchers conducted an orientation for the participants, explaining the study's overarching objectives and the questions to be asked. After securing the participants' consent, in-person interviews were conducted, each lasting one hour. The interview questions were in English, allowing participants to respond in English or Hiligaynon. Participants were explicitly informed that the interviews would be recorded, and their identities and responses would be treated with the utmost confidentiality. The data collected from these interviews underwent thorough analysis to elucidate the experiences of Bachelor of Arts in English Language students who worked while studying. The participants were encouraged to provide in-depth insights into their experiences of balancing work and academics. Interviews with consenting participants were recorded, transcribed, and translated into English (for Hiligaynon responses), and their answers were subsequently compiled and analyzed.

### **IV. DATA EXPLICATION**

To uncover the nuanced experiences of college students balancing their academic responsibilities with employment, the researchers employed Braun and Clarke's (2006) Thematic Analysis method. This qualitative analytical approach was chosen for its systematic yet flexible framework, which allows for identifying, analyzing, and interpreting recurring patterns or themes within rich textual data.

### **V. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Before conducting this study on college students working while studying, the informed consent process was carried out to familiarize the participants with the key elements of the study and what their participation would involve. Their voluntary participation in the study was sought, emphasizing respect for their vulnerability. Those who did not fully consent to participate were excluded. Participants were assured that their anonymity would be maintained, their provided data would be kept with the utmost confidentiality, and they might experience psychological discomfort while answering interview questions. However, they were informed that their voluntary participation could contribute to understanding their experiences and those of their co-students balancing work and academics. It would also support ongoing efforts to enhance research on student experiences. The findings of this study will be disseminated through research colloquia or in-house research presentations. Copies of this study will also be provided to the academic institution's Graduate School office and library. The researchers ensured the fair distribution of the benefits and burdens of this study, which delved into the experiences of college students working while studying. The data collected from the participants were deleted from the electronic device, where they were stored as soon as the findings were disseminated.

### **VI. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

Two overarching themes were derived from the responses of the ten participants regarding their experiences of working while studying from their first year to fourth year in college. These themes are: (a) financial well-being and student empowerment and (b) struggle for balance and resilience in dual responsibilities.

Moreover, each overarching theme has several subthemes. Below are the subthemes and the participants' responses that support these subthemes.

## Balancing Academic Pursuits and Employment: An In-Depth Examination of College Student Experiences

### (a) Financial well-being and student empowerment

The participants' experiences while balancing work and study responsibilities reveal several key themes. Firstly, a significant number of participants, including Ana, Bea, Dina, Filna, Gina, Ivan, and Jaylan, emphasized their self-supporting roles, showcasing financial independence and, in some instances, acting as the primary breadwinner for their families. Additionally, participants like Bea and Ella highlighted the importance of flexibility in managing their work-study balance, with participant Ella underscoring the value of stability despite facing challenges. Moreover, struggles and challenges were acknowledged by participants Ella, Gina, and Hayna, with participant Hayna specifically noting financial difficulties. Lastly, engagement in sidelines to support their studies was evident among participants Ana, Ella, and Filna, while participant Jaylan incorporated investments as part of their strategy for balancing work and study commitments. These themes collectively shed light on the diverse financial aspects and strategies employed by students navigating the complexities of combining work and academic pursuits.

Participants Ana, Bea, Dina, Filna, Gina, Ivan, and Jaylan highlighted their role as self-supporting individuals, being financially independent, and in some cases, serving as the breadwinner in their families.

### (b) Struggle for balance and resilience in dual responsibilities

The participants' experiences while navigating the complexities of working while studying reveal a range of key themes. Challenges and struggles were prevalent among participants Ana, Ella, Gina, and Jaylan, who highlighted enduring difficulties in managing their work and study responsibilities, underscoring the demanding nature of balancing these commitments. In contrast, participants Bea, Dina, Hayna, and Jaylan demonstrated adept skills in time management, multitasking, and effectively balancing various responsibilities, showcasing their ability to juggle work and study commitments efficiently. Health issues and well-being emerged as significant concerns for participants Carla, Ivan, and Jaylan, who mentioned lapses, health issues, and mental health concerns, emphasizing the impact of their dual roles on their overall well-being and the importance of managing these challenges. Flexibility and determination were evident in participants Bea, Filna, Hayna, and Jaylan, highlighting their resilience and commitment to successfully navigating the challenges of working while pursuing their studies. Ana, Bea, Ella, and Jaylan highlighted how crucial effective time management is in meeting school and job demands. Similarly, Carla, Ella, Gina, and Jaylan shared their struggles with maintaining focus and managing distractions, which often hinder their ability to fulfill both roles effectively. Ana and Dina further noted difficulties such as the late submission of modules and tasks, issues with time management, and maintaining academic initiative amidst competing priorities.

These themes collectively shed light on the diverse experiences and strategies employed by students in managing the intricate balance between work, study, and personal well-being.

## VI. CONCLUSIONS

This study provides a comprehensive examination of the multifaceted experiences of students navigating the delicate balance between work and study responsibilities. Through uncovering a variety of themes, it elucidates the challenges encountered and the strategies employed in managing dual roles. The exploration of financial well-being and student empowerment unveils a spectrum of financial aspects and coping mechanisms, ranging from self-support to engagement in sidelines and investments. Moreover, the struggle for balance and resilience underscores the demanding nature of simultaneously juggling work and study commitments, showcasing participants' adept skills in time management, multitasking, and addressing health and well-being concerns. Ultimately, the themes of flexibility, determination, and effective time management underscore the participants' resilience and adaptability, shedding light on the intricate interplay between academic pursuits, employment, and personal well-being in students' lives.

## VII. ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The heading of the Acknowledgment section and the References section must not be numbered.

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## Balancing Academic Pursuits and Employment: An In-Depth Examination of College Student Experiences

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