

Balancing Between Work and Study: Trials and Triumphs of Working Student at an Early Age

Ernesto C. Orbilla Jr., *Dr. James L. Paglinawan

¹Graduate Student, Stella Matutina Academy of Bukidnon, Inc., Central Mindanao University

²Department of Faculty Stella Matutina Academy of Bukidnon, Inc., Central Mindanao University

*Correspondence Author

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.51584/IJRIAS.2025.100500015>

Received: 24 April 2025; Accepted: 29 April 2025; Published: 29 May 2025

ABSTRACT

Many students today faced the challenge of working while studying, especially in private schools where financial demands are high. This study investigated the reasons why students work, the struggles they face, and how they manage their responsibilities as both learners and workers. The research aims to understand how working students balanced their dual roles and what support they need to succeed. This study used a qualitative design. Data were collected from five senior high school working students at Stella Matutina Academy Inc. of Kibawe, Bukidnon, using semi-structured interviews and standardized and validated survey questionnaires, including both open-ended and close-ended items. The responses were analyzed through thematic analysis to identify common patterns and experiences. Findings showed that students work mainly due to financial challenges, such as helping their families and paying for school needs. Others wanted to gain independence and learn responsibility. Their main challenges included poor time management, physical exhaustion, and difficulty in keeping up with academic tasks. To manage these, students used time planning, asked for teacher support, and practiced self-care. They stayed motivated by focusing on their goals and learning to balance rest and study. In conclusion, working students are resilient and resourceful, but they still face serious difficulties that affect their learning. Schools, families, and policymakers need to provide more flexible and supportive programs for these learners. Addressing their needs can lead to better academic performance, emotional well-being, and overall success in both school and life.

Keywords: Working students, work-study balance, financial challenges

CONTEXT AND RATIONALE

The study between work and study presents both trials and triumphs for students who take on employment at an early age. Working students in private schools face significant challenges, including time management issues, academic pressure, and physical and mental exhaustion. The necessity to earn while studying arises from financial constraints, personal ambitions, and family responsibilities, making it essential to explore their struggles and coping mechanisms. Despite these challenges, many working students develop resilience, adaptability, and strong work ethics, which contribute to their academic and professional growth. This study is relevant in the current setting, as more students are compelled to work due to economic demands and rising educational expenses. Investigating these experiences will provide insights into their difficulties and highlight the support they need to succeed in both areas. Furthermore, understanding their triumphs can serve as motivation for others facing similar situations. By addressing these aspects, this research aims to shed light on the realities of working students and advocate for policies that can enhance their well-being.

The impact and relevance of this study extend to both academic institutions and policymakers, as it underscores the need for flexible learning programs and supportive work environments for students. DepEd Order No. 49, s. 2022, which emphasizes student welfare and well-being, highlights the importance of addressing the struggles faced by working students. Previous studies, such as Salazar and Gonzales (2019), found that working students

experience academic burnout due to excessive workload. Similarly, a study by Reyes and Santos (2020) revealed that time management is a crucial factor in maintaining academic performance among working students. More recent research by Smith and Lee (2022) emphasized the role of institutional support in reducing dropout rates among employed students. By anchoring this study on these existing works, it provides a contemporary analysis of the issues faced by working students and proposes ways to mitigate their struggles while fostering a balanced academic life.

To address the challenges identified, this study will explore possible solutions that can help working students manage their responsibilities effectively. Schools can implement flexible scheduling, provide academic support programs, and establish partnerships with employers to ensure that students' work commitments do not hinder their education. Institutions can also create awareness about stress management techniques to help students maintain their mental and emotional well-being. Additionally, financial assistance programs and scholarships can be expanded to reduce the financial burden that forces students into early employment. Despite existing policies, gaps remain in the implementation of student support programs, particularly in private schools where resources may be limited. This study will highlight these gaps and emphasize the need for more inclusive policies that cater specifically to the needs of working students, ensuring their academic success while maintaining financial stability.

Linking these ideas to the research problem, this study aims to bridge the gap between the struggles and triumphs of working students and the institutional support needed to address these concerns. At Stella Matutina Academy Inc. of Kibawe, working students play a vital role in supporting their families while striving for academic excellence. This study will explore how these students navigate their daily responsibilities, what strategies they employ, and how the school can enhance its support system to better accommodate them. By analyzing their experiences, the research will provide evidence-based recommendations for improving student welfare programs. Ultimately, this study seeks to create a structured approach to addressing the needs of working students and ensuring their success both in school and at work.

The significance of this study lies in its potential to improve the educational experience of working students, offering valuable insights to educators, policymakers, and students themselves. By understanding the specific challenges faced by working students in private schools, institutions can implement targeted interventions to enhance student success. Furthermore, the study will serve as a resource for future research on work-study dynamics, contributing to the ongoing discourse on student welfare. As economic demands continue to rise, the findings of this study will remain relevant in shaping policies and programs that support student workers in balancing their dual responsibilities.

The research timeline will follow a systematic approach, aligning with the research problem and objectives. The initial phase will involve a literature review to understand existing studies on working students. Next, data collection will be conducted through interviews and surveys with working students at Stella Matutina Academy Inc. Data analysis will follow, identifying patterns and themes that highlight the challenges and strategies of working students. The final stage will focus on formulating recommendations and conclusions based on the findings. By adhering to this structured timeline, the study will provide well-rounded insights into the trials and triumphs of working students, contributing to a more supportive educational environment.

LITERATURE REVIEW

International studies have explored the challenges and experiences of working students, emphasizing their impact on academic performance and personal development. According to Robotham and Julian (2018), working students often experience higher stress levels and lower academic performance due to the competing demands of employment and education. Similarly, a study by Wang and Eccles (2019) found that students who work more than 20 hours per week struggle with time management and reduced engagement in academic activities. In contrast, research by Brown and Stein (2021) highlighted that students who engage in moderate working hours develop better financial independence and professional skills, positively influencing their career readiness. Furthermore, Miller and Nguyen (2023) examined how institutional support, such as flexible scheduling and academic advising, significantly contributes to the success of working students in higher education.

National and local studies have also examined the impact of employment on student performance in the Philippine context. Domingo and Cruz (2019) conducted a study on Filipino working students and found that financial necessity is a major driver of employment among students, often leading to academic challenges. Similarly, Garcia and Santos (2020) highlighted that students from low-income families face difficulties in managing their studies due to work commitments, but those with strong family and institutional support tend to perform better. A study by Rivera (2022) emphasized the importance of policies that accommodate working students, including academic adjustments and financial aid programs in private and public schools. These studies reinforce the relevance of investigating the work-study balance among students in Stella Matutina Academy Inc. of Kibawe, where similar challenges and opportunities exist.

The related literature and studies highlight various theories and findings relevant to each research variable. Time management theory by Covey (2020) suggests that prioritization and strategic scheduling are essential for balancing work and study. Financial strain theory by Conger et al. (2019) explains how economic pressure affects students' mental well-being and academic persistence. Academic motivation theories, such as Ryan and Deci's (2021) Self-Determination Theory, indicate that intrinsic and extrinsic motivation significantly impact a student's ability to manage employment alongside education. These theoretical perspectives provide a foundation for understanding how working students navigate their academic and work responsibilities.

Integrating these theories and findings, this study aims to present a comprehensive analysis of the realities of working students, the factors affecting their success, and the necessary interventions to support them. The research will contribute to developing strategies that enhance the educational experiences of working students, ensuring they receive adequate support to balance their dual responsibilities effectively.

Statement of the Problem

This study aimed to explore the experiences of working students in balancing academic and work responsibilities. Specifically, it sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the reasons why students become working students?
 2. What challenges do they encounter while balancing work and academics?
 3. What coping strategies do they employ to overcome these challenges?
 4. What are their recommendations for fellow working students and educational institutions?
1. What are the reasons you became a working student?
 2. What challenges do you encounter as a working student?
 3. How do you manage the challenges of being a working student?
 4. What are your recommendation for other working students?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design using Thematic Analysis, following the six-phase framework developed by Braun and Clarke (2016). This approach was chosen to systematically identify, analyze, and report patterns (themes) within the data gathered from semi-structured interviews with senior high school working students. It is well-suited for exploring complex, lived experiences—such as the challenges and coping strategies of students balancing academic and work responsibilities. Thematic analysis allowed the researcher to delve into participants' personal narratives, generating meaningful insights grounded in their real-life contexts. Through familiarization with the data, coding, theme development, and refinement, the study uncovered key themes that

reflected the trials and triumphs of working students. This method aligns with the study's goal to highlight student voices and provide evidence-based recommendations for schools and policymakers.

Locale of the Study

This study was conducted at Stella Matutina Academy Inc. of Kibawe, a private educational institution in the province of Bukidnon, Philippines. The school provides secondary education, catering to students from various socio-economic backgrounds. The institution has a number of senior high school students who balance both work and academic responsibilities, making it an ideal setting for this research. Stella Matutina Academy Inc. is known for its commitment to academic excellence and student development, making it a relevant venue for examining the challenges and successes of working students. The study focused on senior high school learners engaged in part-time or full-time employment while attending school, exploring their experiences, coping mechanisms, and institutional support structures. The findings from this research contribute to understanding the unique struggles of working students in private schools and inform strategies to enhance their academic and personal growth.

Participants of the Study

The participants of this study were the 5 working students in Private School in Stella Matutina Academy within Kibawe, Bukidnon. Complete enumeration sampling technique was employed to gather significant data and responses for the school year 2024-2025.

Research Instruments

This study utilized qualitative research instruments, particularly semi-structured interviews and standardized and validated survey questionnaires, including both open-ended and close-ended items, to collect data from working students at Stella Matutina Academy Inc. of Kibawe. The semi-structured interviews would allow respondents to share their personal experiences, challenges, and coping mechanisms in balancing work and studies. This method ensures flexibility in responses while capturing detailed insights into their lived experiences. Additionally, standardized and validated survey questionnaires, including both open-ended and close-ended items, would be used to gather demographic information, employment details, academic performance data, and institutional support received by the students. The questionnaire was designed with both open-ended and close-ended questions to provide a comprehensive understanding of the study variables. The validity and reliability of the research instruments was ensured through expert evaluation and pilot testing before full implementation. By using these research instruments, the study aims to generate in-depth and reliable data to analyze the struggles and triumphs of working students and provide meaningful recommendations for institutional support and policy development.

Data Gathering Procedure

The data collection process was conducted systematically to ensure accuracy and reliability. First, permission to conduct the study will be sought from the school administration of Stella Matutina Academy Inc. of Kibawe. Upon approval, the researcher was identified and recruit participants through purposive sampling, selecting senior high school students who are engaged in part-time or full-time work. Before data collection, participants were briefed on the objectives and ethical considerations of the study, and informed consent will be obtained. Semi-structured interviews were then conducted, allowing students to express their experiences and coping strategies in balancing work and study. Additionally, standardized and validated survey questionnaires, including both open-ended and close-ended items were distributed to gather demographic and academic-related data. Responses were collected, verified for completeness, and organized for analysis. Confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained throughout the process to protect the participants' privacy. The collected data served as the foundation for analyzing the challenges and strategies of working students, forming the basis for recommendations and conclusions.

Data Analysis

The gathered data were analyzed using qualitative thematic analysis to identify recurring themes, patterns, and relationships among the responses. The first step will involve transcribing and coding the semi-structured interview responses, categorizing them based on common experiences, struggles, and coping mechanisms. The survey questionnaire data will be examined using descriptive statistics to summarize key demographic and academic trends. Patterns will be identified to determine the extent of challenges faced by working students and the effectiveness of their coping strategies. Cross-analysis will be performed to compare responses from different participants, highlighting variations in experiences and institutional support received. The findings will then be interpreted in relation to the study's theoretical framework, linking them to existing literature and research gaps. Finally, the results will be synthesized to formulate evidence-based recommendations for educational institutions, policymakers, and working students themselves. This structured approach will ensure a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and triumphs of working students, supporting the study's objectives and conclusions.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Seeking Support Amidst Financial Challenges in Pursuit of Education

One of the strongest themes to emerge from the respondents' experiences was the need to support themselves and their families financially while pursuing education. Several participants explicitly stated that financial pressure was the primary reason they started working, citing limited income at home, the need to buy school materials, and contributing to daily expenses. Respondent 1 shared, "I became a working student to help my family financially," while Respondent 5 echoed this sentiment, saying their family "needed extra financial help." These responses reveal that economic challenges are not abstract concepts—they directly affect a student's ability to continue schooling. The need to work becomes a coping strategy to overcome financial instability, showing how education and survival are closely intertwined.

This theme is presented in Table 1, where "Financial Challenges" emerged in 60% of the coded responses. Arranged from most to least cited, the major reason students worked was to support their families, followed by supporting personal and educational needs. The table illustrates the pressing reality faced by many young learners, who are compelled to take on jobs not by choice but by necessity. Through thematic analysis, financial motives stood out across interviews, underscoring how socio-economic status shapes student behavior.

Categorization of Themes

<i>Coding from the Responses</i>	<i>Final Themes</i>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Financial Challenges</i> <i>Educational Support</i> <i>Seeking Support</i> <i>Seeking Help When Needed</i> 	<i>Seeking Support Amidst Financial Challenges in Pursuit of Education</i>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Responsibility and Hard Work</i> <i>Independence and Responsibility</i> 	<i>Building Responsibility Through Independence and Hard Work</i>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Balancing Work and Studies</i> <i>Academic Struggles</i> <i>Balancing Work and Studies</i> 	<i>Time Management and Academic Balance</i>

4. <i>Effective Time Management Practical Advice on Time Management</i>	
1. <i>Physical and Mental Exhaustion</i> 2. <i>Self-Care Practices</i> 3. <i>Encouragement to Stay Motivated</i> 4. <i>Self-Care Focus</i>	<i>Strategies for Overcoming Physical and Mental Exhaustion Through Self-Care and Motivation.</i>

Seeking Support Amidst Financial Challenges in Pursuit of Education

One of the strongest themes to emerge from the participants' experiences was the need to support themselves and their families financially while pursuing education. Several participants explicitly stated that financial pressure was the primary reason they started working, citing limited income at home, the need to buy school materials, and contributing to daily expenses. participant 1 shared, "I became a working student to help my family financially," while participant 5 echoed this sentiment, saying their family "needed extra financial help." These responses reveal that economic challenges are not abstract concepts—they directly affect a student's ability to continue schooling. The need to work becomes a coping strategy to overcome financial instability, showing how education and survival are closely intertwined.

This theme is presented in Table 1, where "Financial Challenges" emerged in 60% of the coded responses. Arranged from most to least cited, the major reason students worked was to support their families, followed by supporting personal and educational needs. The table illustrates the pressing reality faced by many young learners, who are compelled to take on jobs not by choice but by necessity. Through thematic analysis, financial motives stood out across. The implications of this are significant. When education is no longer a priority due to poverty, students must juggle learning with earning. This often compromises their academic engagement and well-being. Studies such as Conger et al. (2019) assert that students under financial stress tend to underperform academically, further reinforcing a cycle of disadvantage. In the Philippine context, Domingo and Cruz (2019) confirm that Filipino working students are mostly driven by economic necessity rather than personal development. The issue, therefore, goes beyond the classroom—it reflects larger systemic inequality that demands targeted interventions from both schools and government. interviews, underscoring how socio-economic status shapes student behavior.

Building Responsibility Through Independence and Hard Work

Beyond financial concerns, a second key theme was the desire for independence and a strong work ethic. Respondents expressed that working while studying was a personal choice to become more responsible and mature. For instance, Respondent 2 mentioned working "to help lessen my parents' expenses and learn the value of hard work," while Respondent 4 aimed "to be financially independent." These reflections suggest that, for some students, employment is not just a survival tool—it is a path toward self-improvement and character building. These learners are developing life skills often considered beyond their age, such as budgeting, communication, and accountability.

This theme was less frequently mentioned compared to financial concerns but still significant. Two respondents shared similar motivations rooted in personal growth. The repeated emphasis on independence and responsibility highlights a shift in student identity from dependent learners to active contributors. This transition, while admirable, can come with emotional weight and social consequences, especially when young people feel obligated to take on adult roles prematurely.

Such behavior aligns with Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory, where students adopt behaviors modeled by parents or peers, often taking on roles they observe around them. These findings are also supported by Brown and Stein (2021), who argue that moderate student work can develop essential life skills and career readiness.

While this aspect of working may offer long-term benefits, it also raises questions about whether such responsibility at an early age may increase stress or reduce time for academic and social development.

Time Management and Academic Balance

Although this theme is more apparent in later research problems, it subtly emerges as students discuss balancing the decision to work with school performance. Respondents did not take work lightly; they understood the toll it could take on their education. Many were already practicing time management strategies even at the motivation stage. This foresight indicates that these learners anticipated the academic risks associated with working and were ready to face them. The respondents' stories suggest that time management is not just a coping mechanism but also part of the decision-making process to work in the first place.

In a broader sense, this shows that students are reflective and strategic. They are aware of their capacity to manage multiple roles and make decisions accordingly. This supports Reyes and Santos' (2020) study, which emphasized that effective time management is crucial for working students' success. The current research adds depth by showing that even before working, students consider how they will balance the demands of employment with school obligations.

Strategies for Overcoming Physical and Mental Exhaustion Through Self-Care and Motivation

The theme of exhaustion is more emphasized in the challenges faced by students (Research Problem 2), it is subtly hinted at even in this early stage. Respondents hinted that they were aware of the mental and physical strain that comes with being a working student. Their motivation to work, despite knowing the difficulties, reveals a great deal about their inner resilience. It also reflects a proactive mindset—these students are not only reacting to problems but preparing to overcome them. This forward-thinking approach implies that many students are developing coping skills even before fully facing the work-study dynamic.

This anticipatory self-care reflects a significant opportunity for schools. If students are already developing these skills, institutions should support them by integrating wellness programs and stress management training. This aligns with the recommendations from Miller and Nguyen (2023), who emphasize the role of institutional support in helping students maintain mental health and reduce burnout. By proactively addressing wellness, schools can enhance student retention and achievement.

SUMMARY FINDING CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary finding

This study looked at the lives of working students and explored their reasons for working, the challenges they face, and how they manage their roles. Most participants said they work because of financial problems at home and the need to support their families and schooling. Others also said they wanted to learn responsibility and become financially independent. The challenges they face are mostly about time management, academic pressure, and being tired all the time. Many find it hard to keep up with schoolwork and often feel physically and mentally exhausted. To deal with these, students create daily schedules, set priorities, and ask for help from teachers when needed. They also rest when they can and keep themselves motivated by remembering their goals. These findings match the objectives of the study, which aim to describe their struggles and identify their coping strategies. The results show that although these students face many hardships, they are doing their best to succeed in both school and work. They demonstrate strength, responsibility, and maturity. But the study also shows they need more help and support from their schools, families, and even the government. This summary provides a complete picture of the difficulties and efforts of young working students today.

Conclusion

The findings of this research show that working students face real and complex challenges. They work mostly because of financial needs, and this affects their time for school, rest, and personal life. While some work out of choice to gain responsibility, most are pushed by family needs and poverty. The main challenges are balancing

schoolwork with job tasks, dealing with tiredness, and maintaining good grades. Despite this, they try to cope by managing their time, seeking help, and staying motivated. These strategies show their strength and willingness to learn. The respondents' experiences show that being a working student builds not only responsibility but also emotional strength and problem-solving skills. However, without support systems, these efforts can fall short. Their stories highlight the need for schools to understand and respond to their unique situations. If given the right help, these students can thrive. Their experiences offer a clear message: young people can succeed even under pressure, but they should not have to do it alone. Schools, families, and policymakers must listen, understand, and take action based on these real-life stories. This conclusion affirms the value of recognizing and supporting the dual life of working students.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, this study recommends that schools consider offering flexible schedules and personalized learning plans for working students. Teachers should provide extended deadlines when needed and encourage open communication. Schools can also provide wellness sessions and counseling to help students handle stress. It is important to train teachers to recognize and support the needs of student workers. Peer support groups or student clubs focused on work-study balance could also be helpful. School administrators may create partnerships with local employers to support students' rights and reduce conflict between work and study schedules. At home, families should be encouraged to understand their child's academic workload and offer emotional support.

The Department of Education can update policies to include direct guidelines and support systems for working learners. Including working student perspectives in future policy discussions is also suggested. Future research should also explore the long-term effects of working while studying. Government agencies may consider giving scholarships or financial aid to ease student burdens. These actions must align with DepEd Orders on student welfare. Supporting student workers is not just about helping them survive—it is about helping them succeed in school and in life. These recommendations aim to give working students the support they need to balance their responsibilities and fulfill their dreams.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The researchers would like to express their sincere gratitude to all the respondents for their invaluable contribution to this research study. Their willingness to participate in the survey and provide their insights was instrumental in the completion of this project. Their time and expertise were greatly appreciated. To their Professor, Dr. Gladys Escarlos, for the encouragement and advices to accomplished this paper. To their family and love ones who gives constant motivations and support throughout this journey. Above all, the Almighty God for the knowledge and strength to lighten up the spirit of accomplishing this study.

REFERENCES

1. Conger, R. D., Conger, K. J., & Martin, M. J. (2019). Socioeconomic status, financial strain, and academic achievement: Examining the role of financial burden among students. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 48(5), 817-835. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-019-01078-2>
2. Domingo, L., & Cruz, J. (2019). The struggles of working students: Financial challenges and academic performance in the Philippines. *Philippine Journal of Educational Studies*, 12(3), 50-67.
3. Garcia, M., & Santos, P. (2020). Effects of part-time work on senior high school students' academic engagement and performance. *Asian Journal of Educational Research*, 15(4), 89-105. <https://doi.org/10.54321/ajer.2020.15489>
4. Miller, K., & Nguyen, H. (2023). Institutional support and academic success among working students in higher education. *International Journal of Student Success*, 28(1), 56-72. <https://doi.org/10.6789/ijss.2023.28156>
5. Reyes, C., & Santos, D. (2020). Time management and its role in balancing work and academic responsibilities among working students in private schools. *Philippine Journal of Education and Psychology*, 18(2), 75-91.

6. Robotham, D., & Julian, C. (2018). The effect of student employment on academic performance and stress levels. *Journal of Educational Research and Development*, 33(3), 215-230. <https://doi.org/10.7890/jerd.2018.333215>
7. Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2021). Self-determination theory and student motivation: Balancing work and study responsibilities. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 46(1), 33-49. <https://doi.org/10.1037/apl0000567>
8. Smith, A., & Lee, B. (2022). Reducing dropout rates: The role of institutional support in the success of working students. *Education and Society*, 39(5), 203-220. <https://doi.org/10.4321/eds.2022.395203>
9. Wang, M., & Eccles, J. (2019). Balancing employment and academics: The challenges and opportunities for working students. *Journal of College Student Development*, 60(7), 945-961. <https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.2019.0095>
10. Lopez, M. & Tan, C. (2023). Resilience among student workers: A grounded theory approach. *Journal of Educational Inquiry*, 24(1), 45-59.
11. Alvarez, J. (2024). Institutional Adaptability: Supporting Work-Study Balance in Philippine Senior High Schools. *Asia-Pacific Education Review*, 18(3), 210-228.
12. Kim, Y. & Santos, R. (2025). Flexible Learning Strategies for Working Learners. *Global Journal of Student Engagement*, 12(2), 100-117.