Priorities and Intentions of Working-Students Working amidst COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract The study explored the priorities and intentions of working students who manage the challenging roles of being a student and a worker. This qualitative study used a descriptive phenomenological design. Five (5) working students from a state university volunteered to be the informants of the study and were selected through the snowball sampling technique. Data collected were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's six-step thematic analysis resulting in five themes. Results showed that

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working while studying was perceived to be challenging yet financially helpful. Students faced time constraints with school tasks, leading to poor grades. Hence, working students tended to have difficulty managing both roles, and the pandemic forced them to work that negatively impacted their academic performance. The study suggested that universities provide more flexibility for working students with options to adjust study loads for working students.

Keywords: *COVID-19 pandemic; lived experience; special needs in education; working students*

Introduction

Working students have many concerns during the COVID-19 outbreak which includes their health, income, and how to balance their education and work (Dias, 2021). Several studies reported that working students continued working amidst the pandemic to affirm their professional identity (Goni-Fueste et al., 2021) and for personal development (Alcarde et al., 2022). However, several studies also reported that working students continue working to earn extra income (Antipolo, 2021) and to support their studies due to tuition hikes (Tsurugano et al., 2021). Several studies have been conducted on the challenges and opportunities faced by working students amidst the pandemic, yet more needs to be conducted that will focus on their priorities and intentions. Hence, this phenomenological study explored the priorities and intentions of working students working amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.

In the global setting, nearly half of working students in Japan have lost employment due to the COVID-19 pandemic, affecting their lives, education, and health (Tsurugano et al., 2021). Working students' health, security, and safety were monitored and expanded during the crisis. Following the education interruption caused by the pandemic, the United

Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2020) has estimated that millions of learners could not return to school in 2020, affecting both regular and working students.

In the Philippines, the COVID-19 pandemic brought educational institutions to adopt the flexible learning modality, which offers students, specifically working students, more flexibility with their time. The Philippines' Commission on Higher Education (CHEd) urged higher education institutions (HEIs) to make the most of technology's potential to aid teaching and learning by grounding program delivery on the connectivity of their students (Commission on Higher Education, 2020). Some schools offer students the option to choose their preferred learning mode according to their respective internet connectivity status and access to technology. To cite, De La Salle University adopted remote learning which blends synchronous and asynchronous activities (Joaquin et al., 2020). Flexible learning demonstrates a digital divide among Filipino students (Santos, 2020). Students who do not have access to cellphones, laptops, or the money to purchase a high-speed internet connection impede the goal of making education accessible to all. Due to the pandemic, students had difficulty accessing online classes. This resulted in frequent student absences due to concerns about poor internet connectivity and the fact that some of them worked part-time (Remoto, 2022).

A student showing up in class indicates interest to learn. It is easy to enforce mandatory attendance in a classroom setting; however, it is challenging in an online course where students can falsify their attendance or refuse to join the class (Archambault et al., 2013). Perfect student attendance during virtual classes is unlikely, and the absences of these working students affected their contribution to the class. Working students took advantage of this flexible learning modality to prioritize their work over attending

classes, and failed to accomplish school tasks and activities. This scenario was caused by the financial constraints which forced them to work.

The Association of Community College Trustees (Beer & Bray, 2019) recognizes that students commonly pursue academics and work simultaneously. Many community college students decided to work while obtaining their degrees, either full-time or part-time. Apparently, students work for different reasons: paying tuition fees and living expenses, supporting their families, avoiding the opportunity cost of leaving the industry, and gaining new career experience (Beer & Bray, 2019). Tettheh and Attiogbe's (2019) study in Ghana, Africa, focused on how working students balance employment and school, and how this condition affects their academic performance. It was shown that juggling employment and school reduces study time and harms working university students' academic achievement. Evidently, finding study time is more difficult due to work responsibilities, and academic institutions provide more help to working students than corporations do. As such, working students need to find a school that understands and supports their needs (SunStar News, 2021).

Plight of Working Students

Many students work while attending school, and these working students realized that handling their twin duties has positive and negative consequences. In fact, Filipino full-time workers who decide to work part-time face various hurdles (Yanbarisova, 2015). Burgos et al. (2020) added that college students experience obstacles in their careers, schools, money, and personal life, putting working students in a situation where they are more likely to drop out. Students who work full-time and study full-time were compared, and found that there is a lesser chance for the former to graduate than the latter (Hovdhaugen, 2013).

Students who worked and went to school had a good mindset including outstanding time management skills, essential job skills, and self-reflection (Childress, 2014). Magno & Magno (2022) added that working students were able to prioritize, gain self-confidence, and be optimistic. It was also observed that students benefited from being both employers and students (Burgos et al., 2020).

Working students face adverse effects, such as their academic performance being affected by their finances (Coral et al., 2020) and due to high tuition, some parents need help to send their children to schools (Curambao et al., 2015). Many college students took on part-time jobs to finance their studies (Magsumbol, 2021).

Full-time students generally needed more time to study, finish the given tasks, feel stressed, and sleep less than required (Beer & Bray, 2019). Mounsey et al. (2013) noted that working students showed more anxiety and stress levels than unemployed students. Time management and prioritization issues have hindered their academic successes. The plight of the working students was emphasized to incite relevant findings of this study.

Effects of Pandemic on the status of Working students

The COVID-19 pandemic caused educational deficits and issues (Cadosales, 2022). Working students' concerns during the pandemic were their mental and physical limitations, and they experienced less in-person connection and mobilization (Pedroso et al., 2022). Working students struggle to balance employment and study, according to Solmiano et al. (2022). These struggles include scheduling issues and a hostile work environment from other workers and customers. They also face financial challenges and schedule conflicts. Most have unstable internet, which

affects working students' performance. COVID-19 may also spread at work.

As coping methods throughout the pandemic, students adopted new routines, maintained social contacts, and tried new activities (Logel et al., 2021). Antipolo (2021) found minimal literature on student time management. Working students should improve their time management to do better in work and school. Male working students reported more difficult time management than female working students, and none ever claimed to have structured time management, unlike their female peers. Men and women manage time differently. Requinto and Muico (2022) reviewed UM Tagum College working students' grades (UMTC). This study's interview questions were created with pandemic implications on working students in mind.

Many reasons influence students' decision to work a part-time job, such as their parents' unemployment, the necessity to find a method to pay for their education, and their rising stress and worry, which impact their academic performance. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this study examined the priorities and objectives of working students. The findings of this study may be used to suggest solutions for working students studying in a Higher Education Institution.

Purposes of the Research

This study aimed to describe the experiences of working students working amidst the pandemic. Specifically, this study sought to answer the following questions: (a) What are the priorities and intentions of working students? (b) How do students perceive working while studying? (c) What are the positive and negative effects of working while studying? (c) How do students manage their time to comply with their academic activities while working?

Theoretical Framework

This study was anchored on the following three theories: the theory of time allocation by Becker (1965), the economic theory (Alfonsi et al., 2017), and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on students (Burns et al., 2020). The first theory examined how working students divide their time between studying and working. On the other hand, the two remaining theories addressed what skills students acquired from working and why students chose to work during the pandemic.

One of the research questions for this study is how working students manage their time to comply with their academic tasks while working. Hence, Becker's Theory of Allocation of Time (1965), which explored how students arranged and prioritized their time, served as the basis for this study. It talked about how students who choose to work could delegate their time so that they still have study time and do their responsibilities as workers. It requires effort to effectively manage one's time when juggling multiple commitments, such as working and studying. Students who choose to work while still enrolled in school understand the responsibilities and expectations of both jobs and how they must plan their time to meet these commitments and demands.

The supply and demand sides were compared in economic theory (Alfonsi et al., 2017). The former discussed why workers should learn skills that will help them get these jobs. Meanwhile, the latter discussed what prevents firms from hiring these employees. It is pertinent to these working students' circumstances because being employed related to the course will undoubtedly benefit them in the future. On the job, young people learned skills they would not have learned in school, which may have contributed to developing their hard and soft skills. As a result, the students could apply the skills they had learned while working in a classroom setting.

The timeline of this study was during the current COVID-19 pandemic, which impacted our lives. Several people have lost their jobs, which created financial constraints on household expenses. The pandemic forced students to discover other survival methods, such as working while pursuing their education (Burns et al., 2020). While the pandemic negatively affected people's lives in numerous ways, the opportunities it provided cannot be overlooked. Students who decided to work benefited from the flexibility afforded by the internet and remote study.

In this research, anchoring theories were used to evaluate the experiences of working students who seek to maintain a good balance between their job and academic commitments, which influences their academic accomplishment. It highlighted the benefits students use not only in academics but also in professional situations.

Figure 1 shows the different theories and studies that support this research. They were also linked to the following variables as shown below.

Figure 1

Framework of the Study
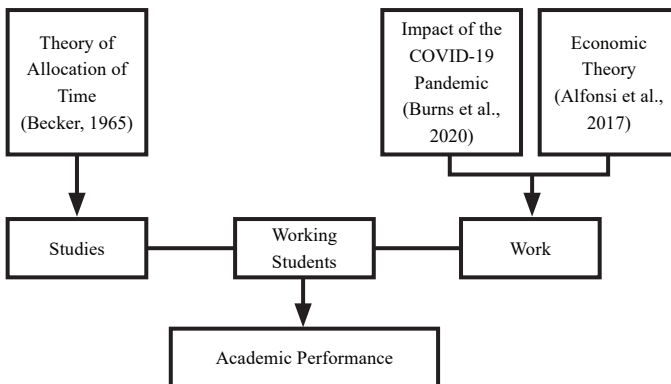
Methodology

Research Design

This qualitative study utilized a phenomenological design wherein the participants revisited their experiences to extract the essence of their ideas and perceptions (Avilla, 2016) on their priorities and intentions as they work amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.

Sampling Procedure and Participants

Five (5) second-year participants (four female and one male) taking up Bachelor of Special Needs Education (BSNED) at a state university were selected through the snowball technique (Cohen et al., 2009) and voluntarily agreed to participate in the study. The age of the participants ranged from 19 to 35 years old. The civil status of the participants, four (4) are single, while one (1) is married. Three participants worked part-time jobs, while two (2) were employed full-time.

Instruments

The researchers served as the study's instrument and media for discovering and interpreting meanings (Barret, 2007). The participants' responses were accumulated through individual interviews where semi-structured interview guide questions were utilized consisting of five (5) questions. The researchers asked the participants using semi-structured interview questions involving asking them open-ended questions and following them up with probe questions to explore further their responses on their priorities and intentions working amidst the pandemic. The researchers used in-depth interviews to conduct detailed interviews with a small number of participants (Ruthledge & Hogg, 2020).

The following questions were asked to the respondents: (1) how do you feel working and studying at the same time?, (2) what were the challenges you have encountered? (3) between working and studying, which one do you prioritize?. Follow up and probing questions were also asked based on the answers of the respondents.

Data Collection

The participants' willingness to engage in the study was requested before the interview. The participants were given instructions and an overview of the interview procedure, which was done via Google Meet. Consent was asked for the recording of the interview.

In the interview process, the participants were individually engaged in an in-depth interview for at least 30 minutes to discuss their priorities and plans for working and attending school during a pandemic. Probing was also done to extract complete data in regard to the phenomenon.

After the interview, the researchers stopped the recording and immediately thanked the participants. The interview was transcribed immediately to understand any nuances that might have been missed during the interview. The transcripts were thoroughly examined and studied and were analyzed using thematic analysis.

Validity and Reliability

Member checking was done to determine the accuracy of the qualitative findings by taking the final report and whether these respondents felt they were accurate (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2017). This was done by conducting a follow-up interview with the respondents and providing an opportunity for them to comment on the findings. Cross-checking codes were also done to determine if the approaches done in interviewing

were reliable. This was done by comparing results that were derived independently by the researchers.

Data Analysis Framework

Thematic analysis was utilized to analyze the transcript of the interviews. This analysis was used to identify, organize, and provide insights into meaning patterns (themes) throughout the data collection (Braun & Clark, 2006). According to Braun and Clark (2006), the first step in analyzing thematic analysis is familiarization; this is where you get to know your idea. The second is coding or highlighting phrases or sentences. Third, the generating of themes followed by reviewing themes, where the researchers made sure the themes are valuable and are accurate presentations of the data. The themes were also if we missed something. Fifth, defining themes or formulating precisely what each theme means and figuring out how it helps in understanding the data before the last process of writing up. Sample codes, sample verbatim responses, categories, and clustering of themes were presented in Table 1.

Ethical Considerations

Informed consent was presented to the informant before the interview to ensure that the conduct of the study was voluntary. Participants' confidentiality was ensured by coding the informants as P for the participant with their participant number, like P1 for participant 1. Moreover, the data obtained were held strictly, securely, and confidentially.

Results

Table 1 presents the codes, sample verbatim responses, categories, and themes that were identified to support the findings of the study.

Table 1

Codes, Sample Verbatim Responses, Categories, and Clustering of themes

Codes and Sample Verbatim Responses	Categories	Themes	Description of the Themes
• Personal needs *"For my personal needs and so that I can help or give to my parents."* (P5) • Financial matters *"I decided to work because I don't want to rely everything to my parents (financially speaking)."* (P1)	Intentions	*Theme 1: Working students' intentions*	This theme explored why students work while learning.
• Earning money *"…the only positive benefit that I got is that, I was paid really good. I did not have to ask money from my parents for load."* (P1) • Personal needs *"For my personal needs and so that I can help or give to my parents."* (P5) • Working experience *"I considered this as a new learning and the greatest reason for me to go on with life….It's more advantageous for working students in this present situation since there is an option to work from home. It really saves time and effort in traveling ang managing household roles at the same time."* (P3) • Family assistance *"…the positive side while doing both is that I can able to put food in the table at the same time reaching my ultimate dream."* (P2) • Developing connections *"I enjoy it sometimes because I can meet and teach Japanese people."* (P5)	Advantages of working	*Theme 2: Positive effects of working while studying*	Working students found it challenging and demanding to balance work and school. This theme concerns studying while working.

	Challenges	Theme 3: Negative effects of working while studying	This theme illustrated working students' disadvantages. The researchers chose this issue because some comments demonstrated the downsides of multitasking.

- Rushed assignments

  "When I make assignments, I had to make them in a rush because I had to duty at 11 PM to 8 AM. My scores are not that high (or perfect) because I did not allow much time for my assignments and quizzes. I was also not that focused during online classes because of lack of sleep." (P1)

- Sleep insufficiency

  I choose studying since I am a working student I usually stay up late or sometimes I sacrifice my time to sleep just to submit all my lacking activity" (P2)

- School absences

  "Sometimes I have to risk my study (absent) just to do my work because it's in my motto that whatever happens, family first." (P2)

- Time conflict

  "Time management is very challenging. There are a lot of instances where I missed activities because of the time conflict and because of tiredness. A lot of stress and mental breakdowns exist. I sometimes get to the point of procrastinating things which really had affected my studies. It takes my time." (P4)

- Time constraints

  "Time management and there are a lot of activities that I need to do. Especially in this time of pandemic I believe only a few students have learned something but, in my case, I haven't learned anything in this setting." (P5)

- Health concerns

  "It is very difficult to do both, sometimes I have to sacrifice my health just to do my task." (P2)

	Choosing education	*Theme 4: Prioritizing education over work*	This theme showed how working students value education.
• Putting education first *"For now, I'd say studying because education is more important than working. My parents are both working and they can sustain for our family needs. My parents also discouraged me to continue working. I managed my time by setting priorities. I also made an assignment tracker online, so that I will be able to know what assignment should I do first. Also, I sought help from my family to always remind me about the things that are important." (P1)* • Choosing education *"I prioritize studying. The main reason why I work is to help sustain my educational needs so I will choose studying even if time comes when both gets complicated. (P4)* • Educational expenses *"I prioritize studying. The main reason why I work is to help sustain my educational needs so I will choose studying even if time comes when both gets complicated. (P4)*			
• Work benefits *"I will prioritize my work becaause I can get money from it but I also give time for my school works and studying because I will really pass my works on time and sometimes catch up with the lessons." (P5)* • Working for a living *"With my case, as a woman with family, I always prioritize my work since I finished my study or not, I always aim to work for a living. Studying in my own pace is considered as a bonus for me during this pandemic. I have to think of what to do first and balance the result. I always prefer to do the lesser effect of consequence than the grave effect." (P3)*	To earn money	*Theme 5: Prioritizing work over studies*	This theme highlighted how working students put employment before school.

Fifty-six (56) significant statements were extracted from the interview transcripts of the five informants. There were 18 codes, which also generated 18 formulated meanings. The 18 codes were grouped into five categories, which emerged as five themes. According to the participants' responses, working while studying is tough, but it also helps them throughout the pandemic. This made them more motivated to study. Working students faced much hostility due to their availability and academic schedules. Proper time management is also considered, particularly for breadwinners, since it simplifies their jobs.

Discussions

Theme 1: Working Students' Intentions

Working students have various reasons and intentions for working despite studying and even working amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. Based on the results, the most prevalent reason students work is for money. These working students learned to be financially independent, have spending money, and assist with home expenditures. They become responsible for their expenses to meet their basic needs and they do not frequently ask their parents for money (Caldwell, 2022). Yanbarisova (2015) found that many students study while working. Students opted to work while studying for financial support or to occupy their free time. Students who need more savings, wealth, or access to other financial resources have few options for paying costs that are not covered by grants, leading them to get a job (Perna & Odle, 2020). Furthermore, Remenick and Bergman (2021) suggested approaches for colleges to help working students.

Theme 2: Positive Effects of Working while Studying

Studying while working had helped the participants financial concerns, notably during the pandemic when they could work from home and study remotely. Working while studying motivates them to continue their education since it gives them fresh insights into the world, and the chance to meet new people. Working has helped them gain skills. Student employment has several benefits, says Childress (2014). Time management and job abilities are improved. Employment experience may boost a resume and lead to future letters of support and recommendation. Additionally, students seek financial independence by getting valuable experience in a genuine working setting (Chantrea et al., 2017). Working while pursuing educational goals allows one to gather experience, which opens up several doors to potential networking associations. The connections made via the network might be helpful for future professions. Working students might benefit from this because it teaches them how to budget and manage their time well (College Life, 2022).

Theme 3: Negative effects of Working while Studying

Trying to balance being a student and doing a job can lead to stress. Time conflicts will always be, and not getting enough rest can be tiring. Working students put off doing important schoolwork because they need more time. Balderrama et al. (2021) mentioned that some working students find it hard to study and work simultaneously. To work and attend school, students must know how to manage their time and to set their priorities. The pandemic made it harder for students who were also working. Sleep deprivation makes it hard to study and work. Distractions at school and work add to stress. Their condition requires patience. When they finish their degrees, working students can get better jobs.

According to Balacuit and Lopio (2022), the working students' biggest academic hurdle is school-related fees. They are also mentally challenged by external discouragement and family morale. Working students hurt their health, which makes them feel stressed and anxious. This condition includes changes in energy, not getting enough sleep, and not wanting to eat. Students have had health problems because of these, which has hurt their ability to learn (Verulava & Jorbenadze, 2022). Students who want to work and attend school must be good time managers. They need to set priorities that require them to complete their duties. This might include finishing projects or assignments across many weeks or months (Unitar International, 2022).

Theme 4: Prioritizing Education over Work

Two participants prioritize school above the job. Some students work even if their families are financially stable. Their parents discouraged them from working so they could concentrate on school and health. It is ultimately up to the student to decide whether he wants to pursue getting a job, given that he can manage himself. Working students often work to attend college due to many circumstances, and working students must balance school and their job. Self-management is a crucial competency for employees and students, according to Santoso et al. (2020).

Abenoja et al. (2019) studied how students optimized work and study time. Students work and learn with a positive attitude, effective time management, and self-reflection. Working and learning necessitate dedication and discipline. Education and experiences are two of the most crucial components in seeking a job. Working students gain these experiences simultaneously, where they must prioritize their education (Yadav, 2022).

Theme 5: Prioritizing work over Studies

Three out of five participants put a job before school, hence their responsibilities and priorities vary. Due to budgetary considerations, individuals favored jobs above school. The pandemic has slowed their pace. These working students have considered their priorities. According to Lischer et al. (2021), many college students struggle to combine career, family, and school. The findings show that while students faced stress owing to the shift's increased workload, it was frequently well-managed yet caused tension and strain. Students who work must find a way to balance work and school. Prioritizing what needs to be done first is essential, and working students will do well if they ask for help and stay positive (Cardenas, 2021).

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study aimed to describe the experiences (priorities and intentions) of working students working amidst the COVID-19 pandemic which affects their academic performance. Working students used the pandemic as an advantage and an opportunity to work and study simultaneously. The participants perceived that both roles were challenging to deal with at the same time. However, because of the pandemic, they were forced to work to earn money to sustain their personal needs and extend help to their families.

Working students had difficulty managing both roles, and the pandemic forced them to work, negatively impacting their academic performance. Due to inevitable time constraints and insufficient sleep, working students are forced to make rushed assignments or even late submissions of tasks. However, it was revealed that the pandemic and remote learning events had positive effects, enabling them

to have flexibility and meet the demands of both roles, like earning money and pursuing their studies.

The anchored theories supported the findings of the study. Working students could possess practical time management skills to divide their time well to meet their responsibilities in both studies and work. This study has also confirmed that working students could develop their hard and soft skills further. Every working student has their downsides and weaknesses. The need to earn forces them to work and find ways to earn money to meet their own needs and those of their family. Their obligation as students makes it difficult for them to focus on what needs more time and effort. Since the study's scope is limited to the responses of BSNED students, in the future, the researchers suggest conducting a broader range of participants that would show individual differences and additional insights.

The researchers also recommend that the universities allow working students to adjust their study loads that are flexible and accessible to the students. It is also recommended that increasing awareness of mental and physical health issues be addressed by Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Furthermore, working students should be encouraged to implement effective time management and self-management.

This study focused on the different effects that could affect working students during the pandemic. The data was collected from the five (5) respondents studying in a state university for the school year 2021-2022. This study does not cover anything unrelated to the effects of studying while working on the students amidst the pandemic. The students who were not a part of the population were not within the scope of this study. Since the scope of the research study is restricted to the responses of BSNED students, future researchers can conduct a broader range of participants that

would reveal the perspectives of other students in different courses to provide more information.

Acknowledgement

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