



Unveiling the Lives of Working Students: A Proposal for School Support System

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to unveil the live experiences of working students studying at Sto Niño High School for the school year 2023-2024. This study employed purposive sampling since participants qualified on the criteria set by the researchers. Methodically, a student interviewer was trained to conduct the focus group discussions for confirmability purposes. It took 4 sessions to saturate the data. Credibility-wise, the interviewer did member checking to make sure that the ideas and experiences shared by the participants during the sessions were exactly as it is transcribed and interpreted. The data gathering took place at the Barangay Hall of Barangay Sto Niño, Tanjay City since it was preferred by the participants. Moreover, consented audio recording was a big help for the researchers to transcribe the verbatim responses of the participants. Through thematic analysis, the study revealed 4 major themes namely, a) financial constraint, b) lack of resources, c) struggles in the workplace, and d) resiliency and resourcefulness amidst challenges. Thus, the result of the study will be the basis for the proposal of a school support system to aid working students in their education.

Keywords: *Qualitative research; phenomenology; live experiences of working students.*

Introduction

The phenomenon of working students has become increasingly prominent in today's society. As the demand rises, juggling work and studies might be challenging and stressful as they balance the responsibilities of employment and school, which may affect their general well-being and academic performance. Working students must strike a balance that may be both gratifying and taxing, juggling competing schedules and financial difficulties. This phenomenon sheds light on the students' situation and reasons for committing this kind of survival. One of the common causes why students work while studying is due to financial limitations, family support, self-reliance, and future investment (Admin, 2024).

Financial limitations are the main barrier preventing students from receiving a quality education for most households. Their learner's development is hampered by their inability to afford to send them to school. Some students even start working early to support their families and quit school. Poverty-stricken families frequently must decide between meeting their child's educational demands and other essentials. Even in cases where families are exempt from paying tuition, attending school entails additional expenses for supplies, books, uniforms, and examination fees (Rodriguez, 2020). Moreover, students work to support their families. Students who work while they are in school typically do so because their families depend on them for financial support. Children frequently have to step up and assist their parents when they are unable to work due to illness, disability, or other situations. Although many students are prepared to make sacrifices to ensure their families receive the support they require, this obligation can be very taxing on them. According to Balacuit and Lopio (2022), students in a university prefer to work while studying to support their underprivileged families. Besides being supportive of families, students also commit to working while studying to display self-reliance. Working students show their commitment to reaching their academic objectives by taking on part-time jobs or internships. They are prepared to give up things to succeed because they recognize the importance of working hard. In addition to providing them with financial benefits, this self-reliance teaches learners valuable life lessons like independence and self-improvement (Tumin et al., 2020). Moreover, in terms of their ability to modify themselves and their subjective well-being, working students outperform those who are only studying. It is found that working students' resources of subject matter and development aspirations play a major role in their success and well-being. This makes it possible for them to operate well, integrating work and school as two avenues for gaining experience (Lyz et al., 2023).

These sacrifices always have a main reason behind them. Working students hold on to their optimism to have future investments including reaching for their goals. According to the Self-Determination Theory by Edward L. Deci and Richard M. Ryan, people have three fundamental psychological needs: relatedness, competence, and autonomy. Competence is the drive to overcome obstacles and acquire new abilities; relatedness is the urge for deep connections with other people. Autonomy is the need to feel in control of one's actions and decisions. Self-determination theory states that when these needs are satisfied, people are more likely to feel intrinsic motivation, which is a drive that originates internally as opposed to from outside pressures or incentives. Increased well-being, perseverance in completing activities, and general life satisfaction are all correlated with this intrinsic motivation (Ackerman, 2024).



Concerning this, for some reason, students prefer to work since it would be convenient to study near the school just to continue their studies despite a lack of resources and inconvenience. Some live in rural areas that may lack resources to aid their education which is why studying near a school, with resources, can be the best option. According to the study by Torres, (2024), learners found it hard to deal with education since there was no internet connection, instructional materials, and study center in their places since they live far from the proper of the barangay. The optimism of working students helped them to continue their education. However, working and studying at the same time may pose difficulties on their part too. students also find challenges in terms of time management and their relationship with their family and friends. Time management is one of the main issues that working students deal with. It can be quite difficult to juggle work, school, and extracurricular activities, which can result in stress and burnout. According to the study of Pedroso et al. (2022), students admitted to having limitations in their physical and mental health, which may have been made worse by the strain of juggling employment and school. This is attributed to a significant issue: their friends and family feel they are not spending enough time with them (Maquiling, 2018). In this case, it may lead to stress and burnout when working students do not balance their time and take care of other aspects of life (Admin, 2022). Time management can be hard to practice, and discipline can always be reliable in achieving one's goal. To do this, one must prioritize things and do tasks according to schedule. This can help working students manage their time doing tasks at a time (Logsdon, 2023). Aside from this problem, the mental health of the students may be affected by their situation. It is important to pay attention to and take into consideration the mental health of working students. One's mental health may suffer as a result of juggling the responsibilities of job and school, which can result in elevated stress, anxiety, and even despair. There can be a lot of pressure to perform well in both areas, which leaves little time for leisure and self-care. The students stated that their inability to balance work and study was the cause of their sleep disturbances, which negatively impacted their academic performance as well as their physical and mental health (44% (Verulava & Jorbenadze, 2022). Academic performance can be positively or negatively impacted by working as a student. On the one hand, working can help students learn important time management techniques and get practical experience that can improve their academic performance. Additionally, it can support learners in acquiring critical soft skills like problem-solving, cooperation, and communication. However, working while in school might also make students more stressed out and tired, which can affect their grades. For some students, juggling work obligations with academic obligations and extracurricular activities can be difficult, which can result in feelings of burnout and overload. According to the result of the study by Barber et al. (2022), most students would not choose to complete extracurricular work if given the option. Most students think that doing such work interferes with their ability to do well in class. The phenomenon of working while studying varies in the context of working students. In this sense, the challenges and topics covered in the literature prompt the researchers to look into the phenomenon of the 5 working students studying at Sto Niño High School, school year 2023-2024. These students lived in the far areas of Barangay Sto Niño, Tanjay City, where a lack of resources is the prime reason for working while studying. This led the researchers to employ a phenomenological technique in the investigation of the circumstance. It specifically sought to respond to the following queries.

1. What are the lived experiences of working students studying at Sto Niño High School for the school year 2023-2024?
2. What is the meaning of their experiences?
3. Based on the result of the study, what recommendation/s can be made?

Methodology

This section elucidates the research design, locale, participants, instrument, data-gathering procedures, and ethical considerations of the study.

Research Design

This research employed a phenomenological approach. Phenomenology is a branch of study that seeks to clarify the characteristics of objects based on people's interactions with them. "Study of phenomena," denoting that the investigator is investigating the relevance of these items or phenomena for the research subjects (Editorial Team of Dovetail 149, 2023). Thus, the researchers used this design to look into the lived experiences of working students studying at Sto Niño High School for the school year 2023-2024. Using thematic analysis, codes and themes were generated to shed light on their experiences.

Research Locale

Selecting an appropriate research location is essential for any investigation since it can significantly influence the findings and deductions made from the study. A suitable site for the goals and objectives of the research must be chosen. In this regard, the research locale of the study is at Barangay Hall of Sto Niño, Tanjay City. This site is located near Sto Niño High School where the participants are studying. Moreover, the participants are residing near the school since they chose to study and work at their convenience. Thus, the participants were the ones who chose Barangay Hall since they felt comfortable and undisturbed during the focus group discussions.

Research Participants



Due to their ability to give researchers invaluable information and data, research participants are essential to the field of study. They aid in the collection of data and the formulation of findings in a variety of research projects, experiments, surveys, and interviews. In this study, the researchers employed a purposive sampling technique. Purposive sampling, sometimes referred to as judgmental or expert sampling, is the deliberate selection of participants by the researcher according to their areas of competence. Participants are selected specifically to meet the goals of the study, not at random. This approach enables the researcher to focus on people who have particular characteristics that are pertinent to the study, making it appropriate for small groups with a defined research goal (Bisht, 2024). Anent, participants were carefully selected based on the criteria set by the researchers as follows: a) he/she must be a working student and, b) officially enrolled at Sto Niño High School for the school year 2023-2024.

Research Instrument

A research instrument is a tool that is used to assist in gathering, calculating, and analyzing the data for your study. It is up to the researcher to choose the right instrument that will suit his/her methodology (*LibGuides: Research Instruments: Home*, n.d.). The present study utilized interview guide questions which aided the researchers in following structured questions. Also, a student interviewer was trained by the researchers to do focus group discussions with participants for confirmability purposes. This allows the study to be far from researchers' bias and focuses only on the participants' feelings and experiences (Moran, 2021). Moreover, the researchers were assigned for recording purposes based on the permission granted by the participants. The interviewer was flexible as needed to probe questions for better outcomes. For credibility purposes, the trained student went back to the participants for member checking. This was to make sure that the ideas shared during the focused group discussion were as accurate as the intended meaning by the participants and to check whether participants had something to add that he/she has forgotten during the sharing. This was made by the student interviewer every after-focus group session. Thus, this was necessary to have four sessions to make sure the data had been saturated.

Data Gathering Procedures

There were three steps involved in the data-gathering process in this study: pre-, during, and post-gathering. The pre-data collection phase involved the researchers determining the eligibility requirements for the participants. To prevent the researchers' personal bias, a student was trained to do interviews with participants in the concentrated group discussions for confirmability purposes. After that, an invitation letter noted by the adviser and the school head was given to the participants for orientation purposes. The researchers requested participants' consent to record data during the session. The researchers recorded the individuals' comments verbatim. The trained student followed up with the subjects after the initial transcription to ensure accuracy and resonance with their experiences. This was done to confirm if the answers accurately reflected the participants' intended meanings. The FGD was held every Thursday, at 3 p.m. due to participants' availability. The methods used in the initial sessions were methodically repeated until data saturation was achieved, which occurred in the fourth session at the same location. This gave the researchers the chance to demonstrate the validity and dependability of the information. Following the data collection, the researchers got to know the transcripts and found key phrases that served as the foundation for developing codes and themes. Crucially, the investigators made certain that the information acquired would be utilized exclusively for teaching, research, and innovation purposes.

Ethical Considerations

Throughout conducting this study, the researchers observed ethical procedures. Initially, the researcher acquired informed consent from the subjects and explained. The consent explained the nature and goals of the study and emphasized that participants might withdraw from the study at any time and that participation was completely voluntary. Second, the researchers gave the participants an explanation of how their anonymity was highly valued and how their identity was treated with confidentiality. The participants were represented by code as their identities. Lastly, it was made clear that the participant master list was only accessible to the researchers.

Results and Discussions

The study's primary conclusions are outlined in this section. The live experiences of working students who are studying at Sto Niño High School, Tanjay City Division, for the school year 2023-2024 were brought to light by applying thematic analysis to create codes and themes. The researchers were able to gain a comprehensive understanding of the unique experiences that each of these students experienced during their course of life.

Table 1. Thematic map of the working students' live experiences for the school year 2023-2024.

Codes	Themes
No one can spend for their education Struggling to make a living Lack of income No internet	Financial constraints Lack of resources



Weak signal	
No library or study center	
Living far from the school	
It is hard to study and work at the same time	Struggles in the workplace
Cannot spend time with family and friends	
Prioritizing urgency	Resiliency and resourcefulness amidst challenges
Maximizing time management	
Staying positive and determined	
Developing a sense of responsibility	

Financial Constraints

In today's world, financial difficulties are a common problem for working students. Many students struggle to strike a balance between their need to work to support themselves financially and their academic obligations. The impact of financial restraints on working students' capacity to pay for needs like food, housing, and transportation is one of the main consequences. This may lead to students going without food, no allowance or not being able to get to class because they do not have access to transportation. Thus, this is one of the major reasons why students work while studying. This is supported by the statements of the participants.

Participant 1 said,

"I decided to work while working because my parents cannot support my education financially."

Moreover, participant 4 added,

"One of the reasons I hold for tackling this situation is that my parents cannot afford the expenses for my education. Their income is not sufficient for the consumption and basic needs of the entire family which is why I needed to work while studying."

Participant 2 answered,

"Same in my situation. My father is a farmer, and my mom takes care of the task at home. Only my father works for us, and we have 4 siblings in the family. This led me to choose this path so I can continue my studies."

Participant 5 added,

"I have the same situation as them. My father is just the one who works for us. His income on the farm is not enough for all of us. My parents preferred to buy the basic things needed in our family than to buy materials for my education. This is the reason why I chose to be a working student."

Lastly, participant 3 emphasized,

"I need to work while I am studying because my parents have no resources to spend on my education. I needed to finish my studies and I believe in education that is why I entered being a working student."

This theme highlights the responses of the participants in terms of their take as working students. Participants emphasized that these students did not have a choice but to enter life being working students. Family income is the main reason leading these students to work. Based on their statements, their parents preferred to spend for their basic needs rather than to buy instructional materials for their education. This is a direct result of the family's income and priority for daily sustenance. Families in poverty usually have to choose between providing for their children's educational needs and other necessities. Even in situations where families are not required to pay tuition, there are still other costs associated with attending school, such as uniforms, supplies, books, and test fees (Rodriguez, 2020).

Lack of Resources

Academic performance depends on having access to resources like the Internet, libraries, and other teaching aids. Regrettably, a lot of people have trouble getting these resources, which might make it harder for them to do well in school. Having no resources impedes learning to take place. Lack of internet connection is one of the biggest problems that students face. The Internet is an essential resource for communication and study in the current digital era. Without it, students could find it difficult to get the information they need for assignments or to work with classmates on group projects. This lack of resources is anchored by the fact that the participants were residing far from the proper of Barangay Sto Niño, Tanjay City. No available internet access, weak signals, and a lack of study centers due to the far-flung distance they have as their common address. This leads the students to work while studying since their employer resides at the proper of the Barangay where internet access and other instructional resources are available. This is corroborated by the statements of the participants.

Participant 4 said,

"We are residing far from the proper Barangay. There is no internet connection and weak signals. We don't have other learning resources which made it hard to comply with the tasks given by the teachers."

Furthermore, participant 2 added,

"I reside in Lamwas. It takes 1 and a half hours to navigate from our place to going to school. And since it remoted, there are no available learning resources at home. I have a cellphone, but I cannot use it to surf online since our signal is weak. This is one of the reasons why I needed to get into being a working student near the school."

Participant 5 answered,



"Aside from the fact that my parents cannot afford to spend for my education, I also entered as a working student because that is the only way I can continue my studies, and there in my employer's environment, I can access the internet and other sources of information for my studies."

Participant 1 added,

"When I was residing at Sitio Naga, I found it hard to do my assignments especially tasks that require online surfing. It suddenly changed when I decided to work at my neighbor's relative near the proper Barangay where the internet is available and accessible. "

Lastly, participant 3 stated,

"At first, it was hard on my part to do my tasks as a student because I didn't have a cellphone to use whenever surfing online. In our place, there is no Internet, and we don't have books to read only handouts given by some teachers. This is one of the reasons why I needed to work at my aunt's house for convenience."

Living in remote locations can have a big impact on students' access to the Internet and other educational tools. The deficiency of infrastructure in isolated areas frequently results in restricted access to dependable internet connections for residents. This can be a major obstacle to using online learning environments, doing research, and corresponding with peers and teachers. Moreover, learners' access to learning materials may also be hampered by the absence of physical resources, such as libraries and educational institutions, in remote locations. If there isn't a well-stocked library or computer lab available, students could have trouble finding the materials they need to finish their assignments and advance their education. Inadequate access to educational materials can negatively affect students' academic achievement and overall educational experience. In this regard, the study of Torres, (2024) relates this common issue among students who are living far from far-flung areas. Due to a lack of learning resources, such as cellphones, laptops, libraries, and internet connection, students get frustrated with their education. These issues were highlighted by the participants as one of their reasons for entering as working students.

Struggles in the Workplace

Working students encounter difficulties that may make their academic journey more challenging than that of their classmates who do not have to balance employment and school obligations. It can be quite difficult to juggle work and school at times. Balancing study and work is one of the biggest challenges faced by working students. They have to split their time between work, school, studying, and other responsibilities, unlike typical students who may concentrate just on their education. This can be a difficult undertaking, particularly during hectic times when work assignments, exams, and deadlines all appear to fall on the same day. This theme is clearly emphasized by the participants' statements.

Participant 2 said,

"I know that what I entered is challenging but didn't think this hard until I was here in this situation. I can do the tasks however, there were times that I was stuck with the other house chores and needed to study especially exam week. This is hard. I missed my family and friends. Now that summer is approaching, I can finally visit my family."

Participant 5 added,

"Me too. Sometimes, I got scolded by my employer whenever I explained to them that I could not do other tasks at home since it was our exam week. I felt sad knowing that I could not even go to my family and friends at home. I don't want to let them know of my situation since I know this is just a part of my journey. Besides, I don't want them to be bothered."

Moreover, participant 1 answered,

"There was a time when I needed to study but was prevented because I needed to finish other tasks. It was frustrating since I just wanted to get high scores so I could have good credentials for college admission. As much as I wanted to visit my family frequently, I couldn't."

Participant 4 stated,

"It's not easy on my part that I have to deal with this. I would get out of this situation if it weren't for my education. It's helping that I am now near the proper barangay so I can access the internet and other instructional materials for my education yet sometimes, I need to prioritize the household chores when I in fact need to prioritize my education too. There was a time when I got scolded by my employer for the missed tasks that I should have done. I forgot about it since it was our exam week, and my mind was focused on studying. It is difficult for me to deal with this, but I am learning as well. Although I missed my family a lot, my employer allowed me to visit them every Friday and come back on Saturday afternoon."

Lastly, participant 3 emphasized,

"I cried when my employer scolded me for a task I forgot to do. I was focused on completing my assignments since the final submission was near. I didn't notice that I had forgotten something until my employer found it out. I just realized that is not easy to be a working student. I also missed my family. I cannot visit my family anytime I want since I have to prioritize my work and my studies. But my employer gave me a schedule as to when I can go home."



Based on the statements of the participants, being a working student is not an easy choice. If it weren't for their education, they could have outed themselves from that situation. They have personal struggles, and these include difficulty in working studying, and mental issues for the times that they can't see and bond with their families and friends. This is supported by the study of Maquiling, (2018) who says that friends and families of working students often complain about the time they spend with them. Moreover, the feelings of the working students were also emphasized when they showed how they long for their family and friends, and sometimes, they cannot do it since they have to work and study for their future. They had to keep by themselves so their families would not be bothered. This led the participants to feel stress and burnout which was mentioned by Admin, (2022).

Resiliency and Resourcefulness Amidst Challenges

Working students are distinguished by their ability to endure in the face of difficulties and overcome hardship. Even though balancing a job, school, and other obligations can be quite difficult, many working students manage to maintain their motivation and goal-focused attitude. They are prepared to put in the extra work necessary to achieve because they recognize the value of their education. Students who work frequently encounter particular challenges, including long hours, rigorous work schedules, and financial strains. Despite these difficulties, individuals show incredible resilience by overcoming hardship and keeping an optimistic outlook on their objectives. Moreover, another important quality that distinguishes working students is resourcefulness. To properly manage their time, they have to balance a variety of obligations and come up with innovative solutions. Working students show creativity in overcoming challenges by planning study sessions during lunch breaks or using online resources for research. Thus, the participants expressed their statements.

Participant 2 said,

"I know how hard it is to become a working student, but I have learned so much. I developed myself to become an independent person. I have learned to prioritize what is urgent and what is important at the moment. Time management is the key. I needed to find ways to manage my time in working and studying. I also do my projects on time so I can work on the household chores."

Participant 1 added,

"As a working student, I have learned to be responsible with my actions. I appreciate the value of time management. Although being a working student can be challenging, it helped me become a responsible individual and strengthened my will to finish my studies."

Participant 5 answered,

"Despite the challenges I encountered in my situation, I can say that it taught me to give importance to time and work. It taught me to be responsible and stronger to face my problems. This is a big challenge in my journey as a student and I needed to be resilient and resourceful to pursue my studies. I needed to be determined in the name of studies and a good future."

Participant 4 stated,

"Being a working student poses no easy job for a student like me. It is hard to balance my time for study and work but at the same time taught me a significant lesson in life, and that is to appreciate time management and resiliency in times of doubt and uncertainties. This course of my life taught me to be resourceful to overcome what I thought was hard for me. When things come into my mind simultaneously, I just think of my will and determination. This helped me to stick to my principles to achieve my goal and that is to finish my studies."

In addition, participant 3 said,

"Whatever hardships I may encounter in my life, my determination will help me win over those. As a working student, I have learned to embrace my mistakes and learn at the same time. This has taught me to appreciate rules, time, and management. There were times when I felt so down and had no one to run to, I just believed in myself that I could carry everything, and with the help of Almighty. I find ways to make myself calm and stay positive despite the problems that come in my life. I wanted to finish my studies and to do that, I need to be strong."

Working students' tenacity and resourcefulness are evidence of their commitment to reaching their academic and professional objectives. Their resolute persistence and creative problem-solving abilities serve as excellent examples of the traits required to succeed in the current competitive climate. As expressed by the participants, being resilient and resourceful is a direct result of their determination to win whatever challenges they need to face as working students. This is substantiated by the Self-Determination Theory of Edward L. Deci and Richard M. Ryan in the 1980's. By achieving the three fundamental needs satisfactorily, relatedness, competence, and autonomy, people are most likely to be intrinsically motivated and that means that there is a driving force that enables the person to pursue and do whatever he/she wishes to happen (Ackerman, 2024).

Conclusion

Based on the results of the study, the researchers concluded that the reasons why the participants entered the life of being a working student were financial problems and unavailability of learning resources such as the internet, library, or study hub, which can be found and accessed at the proper of Barangay Sto Niño where the school is located. Living from a distance led them to experience inconvenience. Furthermore, the participants undeniably experienced struggles in terms of balancing their time for work and study and the time spent with their families and



friends. Despite these challenges, the participants demonstrated resiliency and resourcefulness by prioritizing urgent things, organizing tasks for on-time completion, and staying positive and determined especially in the most downfall times in their lives which is expressed in Self-Determination Theory.

The result evident in the study suggested that schools especially Sto Niño High School should develop a support system that will aid working students in their education. For future researchers, a mixed method can be a better approach to unveil the support system of the schools and its impact on the working students' education.

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