

Coping with uncertainties: Unveiling the lived experiences of working students in the new normal

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ABSTRACT

The Covid-19 pandemic has caused widespread disruption in school institutions. This has given a challenging routine to working students who work for a living while supporting their studies. This study seeks to unveil the lived experiences of the working students in the new normal education. A descriptive phenomenological study was utilized to explore and capture their lived experiences. The purposive sampling technique was utilized to collect the data from 11 working students who passed the inclusion criteria. A modified Colaizzi's seven-step method was used for data analysis, wherein codes, categories, and themes were extracted from the responses of the semi-structured interviews. After the data analysis, five major themes emerged: (1) challenges and struggles during a pandemic, (2) meeting financial and social needs, (3) seeking support, (4) commitment and self-discipline, and (5) work-study balance. Based on the results, working students have adapted quickly to address the challenges and struggles in the new normal education. However, support and measures should be given to them to help and ensure that their studies and work will not be compromised.

1. Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic has caused widespread disruption, such as the closure of schools (Viner et al., 2020), travel restrictions (Al Jazeera, 2020; Chinazzi et al., 2020), and layoffs and suspension of workers (Quiambao, 2020; Zeidner, 2020). In the Philippines, face-to-face classes are compromised, and community lockdown and community quarantine were implemented (Crawford et al., 2020) due to the prohibition following the General Health and Safety Protocol (Bagood, 2020). The temporary closure of schools has affected more than 1.2 billion learners worldwide, with more than 28 million learners in the Philippines (UNESCO, 2020). This has given a challenging routine for working students who work for a living while supporting their studies.

The challenges experienced by the working students started even before the pandemic. According to Carnevale, Smith, Melton, and Price (2015), students have worked and studied at the same time for over 25 years and their average working hours are 30 hours per week (Rapacon, 2015). The number of students who combine work and study has increased, especially those whose parents have a low educational level (Sanchez-Gelabert, Figueroa, & Elias, 2017). Mounsey, Vandehey, and Diekhoff (2013) found that working students displayed more anxiety and reported more stress and fewer buffers than their non-working counterparts. In addition, Kurata, Bano, and Matias (2015) also found out that a high level of workload can affect academic performance, including physical and psychosocial factors in maximizing the student's potential in learning. By this, students must have excellent time management skills to survive the hectic schedule and

maintain a social life. Whether working and studying simultaneously provides more advantages than disadvantages vary based on the perspectives of everyone. Some people might view working while studying as unfavorable, while some view it as positive.

Since the outbreak of the pandemic, research has shown that the employment status and lives of working students were affected. Working students were concerned about their living expenditures and tuition fees. Students who were aware of financial instability had a more significant percentage of students who had poor self-rated health. Over half of working students lost their employment, affecting their lives, education, and health (Tsurugano, Nishikitani, Inoue, & Yano, 2021). Wallengren-Lynch, Dominelli, and Cuadra (2021) revealed that the students struggled with private and personal boundaries, felt the physical and mental effects of working and studying from home, and had difficulty meeting expectations. Previous studies were conducted using survey questionnaires. Due to the limited research regarding working students' experiences during the pandemic, the researchers wanted to fill in the gap by unveiling the lived experiences of the working students in the new normal education using a descriptive phenomenological study.

A descriptive phenomenology is a powerful tool for understanding subjective experience and gaining insights into people's behaviors and motives, questioning traditional knowledge, and cutting through long-held preconceptions. It might help develop new theories, policy changes, or reaction changes (Holloway & Galvin, 2016; Rodriguez & Smith, 2018). It depicts phenomena, or how things look, as a lived experience (Carpenter, 2007; Speziale, Streubert, & Carpenter, 2011). Lived experiences are the instant awareness of life's occurrences before thought and interpretation, and both internal and external factors impact them. The lived experience gives meaning to everyone's perception of a particular phenomenon and thus presents to the individual what is accurate and authentic in their lives (Giorgi, 1997). It offers a fundamental shift from a positivist cause-effect focus to one of human subjectivity and discovering the meaning of actions (Giorgi, 2005). This study seeks to unveil the lived experiences of working students in the new normal education, describe their challenges and struggles experienced, time-management skills, and shed light on the coping mechanisms despite the uncertainties experienced.

2. Theoretical basis

2.1. *Work-Life Balance (WLB) theory*

Work-life balance involves attentive engagement in multiple roles (Marks, 1977; Marks & MacDermid, 1996; Sieber, 1974)), equal time and involvement across multiple roles (Greenhaus, Collins, & Shaw, 2003; Kirchmeyer, 2000), and balanced satisfaction across life domains (Clark, 2000; Greenhaus et al., 2003; Kirchmeyer, 2000). Sirgy and Lee (2016) proposed an integrated model (Figure 1) to identify four groups of individuals that experience work-life balance and life satisfaction differently. The model addresses the positive conditions of work-life balance (balanced role commitment and positive spillover) and the adverse conditions (social alienation and role conflict). It distinguishes among individuals who experience different levels of role commitment, positive spillover, role conflict, and social alienation.

The literature review found work-life balance among students. Millennial students' desire for a better work-life balance starts long before considering having children (Twenge, Campbell, Hoffman, & Lance, 2010). National Chamber Foundation (2012) found that members of this group were willing to work hard but also wanted work-life balance. Furthermore, Yusuf, Saitgalina, and Chapman (2020) studied graduate students' work-life balance and well-being. The results provide a broad picture of work-life balance, three components of well-being - the quality of life, physical health, and mental health - and factors such as program climate, sense of well-being, stressors, and sources of support.

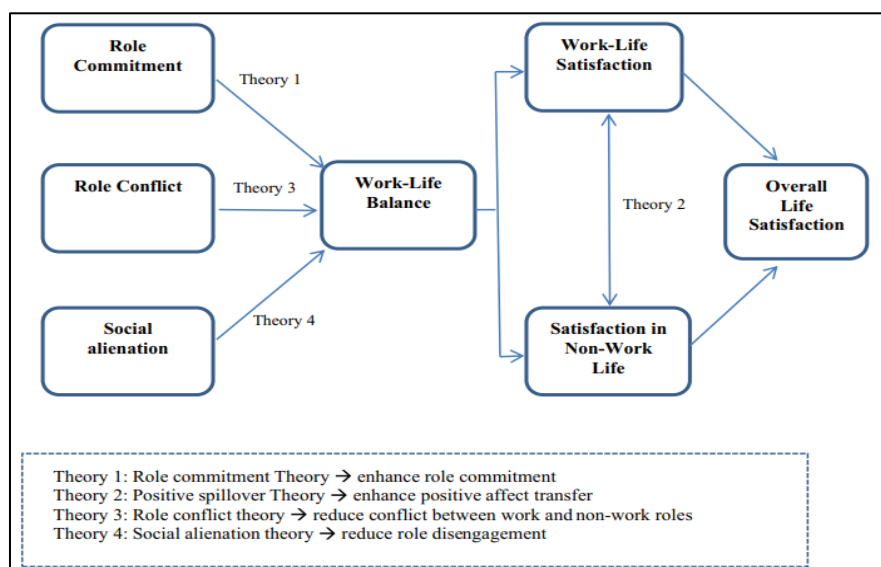


Figure 1. The life satisfaction model of work-life balance:
Integrating four theoretical approaches

Source: Sirgy and Lee (2016)

2.2. Student's resiliency

Resiliency is a significant aspect to consider when examining the experiences of working students. The concept of resiliency has been studied in a variety of fields. It can be described as the ability to recover from change quickly, difficulty, or a problematic situation (Center for Creative Leadership, 2011). It is important to recognize factors that will foster a more positive lifestyle. Individuals who have been exposed to stress have a track record of positive adaptation and a likelihood of continued exposure to potential stress. In addition, Van Breda (2018) defined resilience as a process that leads to an outcome, and the central focus of resilience research is on the mediating processes (Figure 2). The resiliency paradigm suggests that resilience is innate in all people and is the product of human growth (Masten, 2001; Thomsen, 2002).

Students' resiliency can be found in the literature. First, First, and Houston (2018) identified that the intervention could help students develop resiliency by allowing them to share and validate their own experiences, express, and process their thoughts and feelings about a problem, observe their existing coping strategies, learn new positive coping strategies from peers, participate in group problem solving, and feel good about helping others. Positive results of fostering resiliency include academic success, positive behavior patterns, school attendance, and graduation rates (Wahome, 2003). Mostafa and Lim (2020) recognized and described resilient college students. The resilient group displayed higher job satisfaction and used precise cognitive emotion control techniques such as strategic planning, constructive refocusing, and restructuring the situation from an optimistic point of view.



Figure 2. Resilience as process and outcome

Source: Van Breda (2018)

Most studies on resilience phenomena have focused on children and adolescents (Ayyash-Abdo, Sanchez-Ruiz, & Barbari, 2016; Solivan, Wallace, Kaplan, & Harville, 2015; Troy & Mauss, 2011; Zakszeski, Ventresco, & Jaffe, 2017). In this time of the pandemic, the education system can build resiliency. The role of learning and teaching support units is crucial in this regard, more than ever before (Naidu, 2021). Teachers should create environments that encourage students to be resilient. Motivating students to achieve practical and aspiring goals is also part of building resiliency. Teachers need to consider respecting and cultivating students' abilities and potentials (Henderson & Milstein, 2003). Therefore, Thomas and Asselin (2018) pointed out that educators build student resilience to aid them in thriving in the ever-changing chaotic environment. Teaching about the ability to face adversity and grow more substantial is a critical skill that needs to be addressed in clinical education. Fostering school climate has the power to overcome risk factors in the lives of students (Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018; Post, Grybush, Elmadani, & Lockhart, 2020).

The studies mentioned above and the literature reinforced the present study by providing the researcher's knowledge, information, and insights about work-life balance and resiliency. Various authors' ideas, concepts, results, and findings support the present study. However, the researcher also wanted to unveil the experiences of working students in the new normal education.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research design

This study used a qualitative research design: the descriptive phenomenology technique. Husserl (1970, 2012) provided the philosophical underpinning for phenomenology. The purpose was to examine a phenomenon as individuals experience it and directly describe it without considering its causal explanations. The focus was on the subjective experience of the learners who are working students. Phenomenology requires a new way of looking at things; researchers must step out of their own experience with all their predispositions and focus on the commonality of a lived experience within a particular group. The goal of the approach is to come up with a description of the nature of the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

3.2. Research participants

The participants of the study were working students in a public secondary school. Eleven students were recruited using the purposive sampling technique. Sampling continued until data were saturated, which in phenomenological studies can range from as few as 05 participants to up to 15. The selection criteria were as follows: (a) working student; and (b) bonafide students in a secondary school. There were ten female and one male student. Females dominated the sampling since male working students opted not to participate in the interview process.

3.3. Data collection and ethical considerations

A certificate from the school principal was secured before the conduct of the study. Upon approval, an invitation and informed consent form was given to the participants indicating voluntary participation in the study and understanding all the rights of withdrawal and refusal. Strict confidentiality was assured to the participants, which was specified in the informed consent form. Adhering to the ethical principles during the conduct of the entire study was also observed. Any personal information like names, telephone/cellphone numbers, and address or direct identity obtained during this study that could identify the participants was kept strictly confidential.

A semi-structured face-to-face interview was conducted adhering to the general safety and health protocols in a public secondary school in Cebu City, Philippines, during the first semester

of the school year 2021 - 2022. Marton and Booth (1997) recommend the interview as the preferred data collection tool in phenomenological research because interviews provide flexibility in probing for clarification and gathering sufficient detail to develop a detailed description of participant perceptions. Each interview lasted 10 - 20 minutes. Students completed the interview in which they were asked to describe their experiences as working students and how they overcame the challenges and struggles in the new normal education. New participants were interviewed until data saturation was achieved, that is, until the quality, completeness, and amount of the information were sufficient, and no new themes were elicited in the interviews. A total of 11 participants were interviewed. Participant interviews were audio-taped and transcribed, and both the tapes and the transcripts were secured to assure confidentiality.

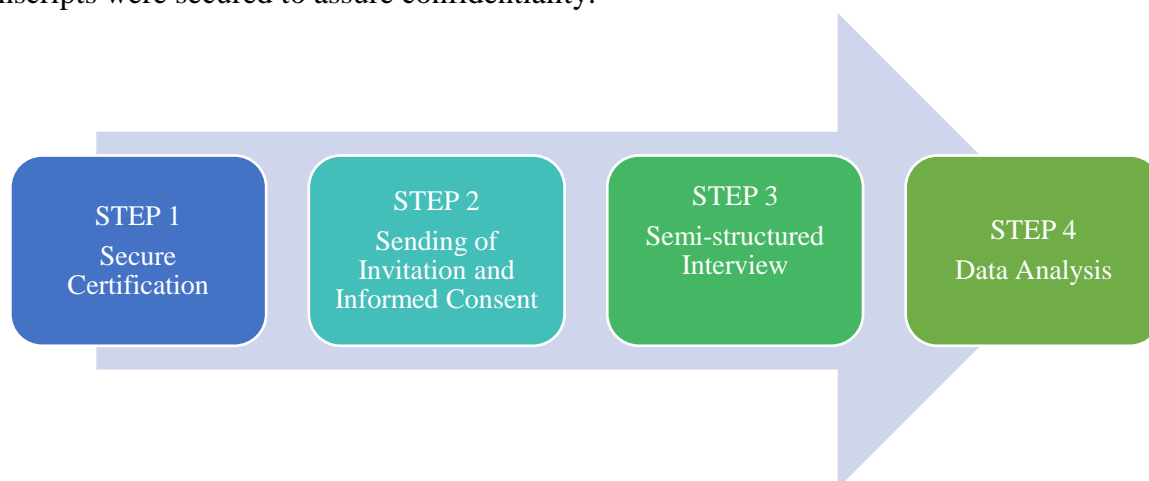


Figure 3. The implementation process of the study

Source: Researcher's framework of the study

3.4. Research instrument and data analysis

A semi-structured interview was used in the study consisting of two parts - Part A. demographic information and Part B. semi-structured questions. The interview guide was constructed in three versions: English, Filipino, and Cebuano versions as deemed appropriate.

A modified Colaizzi's seven-step method was used for data analysis. It is an iterative refinement process to ensure no detail of the phenomenon is missed (Colaizzi, 1978). The interviews were transcribed, and transcriptions were read twice to determine themes and subthemes. Conventional content analysis, an inductive approach, was utilized. For the inductive analysis process, first words, phrases, and sentences will be compared, and meaningful units showing patterns will be identified. Then open coding was used; concepts were determined, and subthemes were created and defined. Next, relationships between subthemes were assessed using tables and diagrams to indicate conceptual patterns. Finally, themes were formulated through the progress of line-by-line coding and integration of sub-themes through constant comparison, modification, and analysis of concepts. Findings were discussed with a group of experts to ensure adequate analysis and interpretation of the data (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

3.5. Rigor and trustworthiness

The participants in the study were chosen based on the inclusion criterion to narrate their experiences as working students. Findings were checked and reviewed for authenticity, and essentiality was established to the situation as set by the problem. Credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability ensured the qualitative data was trustworthy (Houghton, Murphy, Shaw, & Casey, 2015; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). After conducting the interviews, the

researcher transcribed voice recordings to improve the data's credibility. When the researchers found expression confusing or could not understand, participants were called and requested to confirm what they wanted to express. Then, the data were coded, and themes were drafted. The researcher explored the subthemes and their relationships with the data many times. Finally, the sub-themes were combined to form themes. In terms of data conformability, the emerging trends were submitted to the participants, who were to provide input about what they said during the interviews to accurately recount their experiences.

4. Results and discussion

4.1. Result

4.1.1. Demographic profile of the participants

A total of 11 participated in the study. Table 3 shows the descriptive statistics of the demographic characteristics of participants. Demographic information of the working students consists of sex, age, work, and income class bracket. Most of them were female (90.91%), and their age group was 15-20 years old. Two participants were attendants/tellers, one cook and law firm secretary, two service crew members, and four house helpers. All of the participants came from low-income families.

Table 1

Demographic profile of the participants

Variables	Profile	Responses	
		F	%
Sex	Male	1	9.09
	Female	10	90.91
Age	15 - 20	5	45.45
	21 - 25	4	36.36
	25 - above	3	18.18
Work	Attendant/Teller	2	18.18
	Cook	1	9.09
	House helper	4	36.36
	Law Firm Secretary	1	9.09
	Sales personnel	1	9.09
	Service Crew	2	18.18
Income Class Bracket (monthly)*	₱10, 957 below	10	91.00
	₱10, 957-₱21,914	1	9.09
	₱10, 957-₱21,914	0	0
	₱43, 828-₱76,666	0	0
	₱76, 666-above	0	0

* Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS) (2018)

Source: Author's analysis

4.1.2. Academic performance of the working students

The academic performance of the working students is shown in Figure 4. It can be gleaned from the data that two students got grades ranging from 75 - 80, which can be interpreted as fairly satisfactory; six students got grades between 81 - 85, elucidating a satisfactory academic performance; moreover, there were only three students that got a very satisfactory performance academically. Nonetheless, the majority of the students' academic performance ($n = 11$) fell in the satisfactory classification.

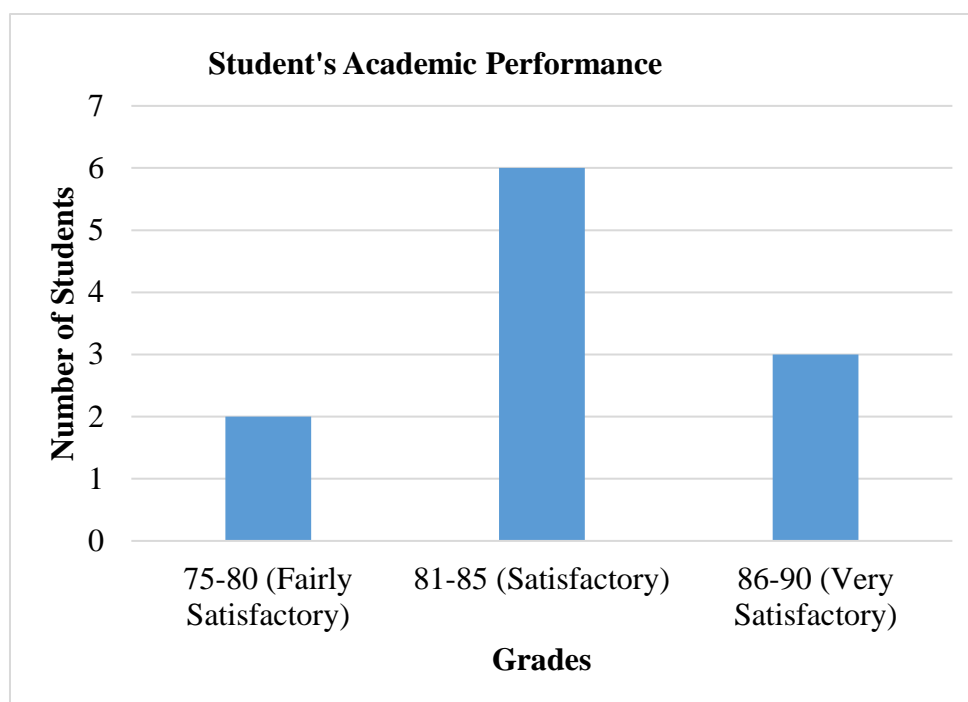


Figure 4. Students' academic performance

Source: School Registrar's Office

4.1.3. Themes

Eliciting accurate descriptions of the participants' experiences was done by asking the appropriate questions. This focused on identifying the main essence of the central theme that expands knowledge. The descriptive analysis of transcripts revealed five (5) major themes which characterized the participants' responses: (1) challenges and struggles during the pandemic; (2) meeting financial and social needs; (3) seeking support; (4) commitment and self-discipline; and (5) work-study balance. These themes were labeled using direct quotations from the participants; this was done to express the original idea conveyed by the participants. Responses were translated into English, and pseudonyms were used for each participant to protect their identity.

Theme 1: Challenges and struggles during the pandemic

The participants experienced challenges and struggles with their studies during the pandemic. Managing time between work and studies was quite challenging for the working students. These can be observed from the responses of the students. In fact, participants narrated:

Jane: *"I have a hard time balancing my schedule between work and study. I must work from 8 A.M. to 6 P.M. After working, that is the time that I will answer my modules."*

Daisy: *"I am in a tough situation between studies and work. I cannot focus on answering my modules. I cannot understand the lesson because no one can teach me."*

Ella: *"...the Covid-19 pandemic had a big effect on my studies, and the modules are challenging to comprehend..."*

Chloe: *"...sometimes there is a conflict between work and studies. I cannot attend the online class because of the conflict of time..."*

Aubrey: *"It is difficult to answer the modules much more in understanding the lesson, unlike in the face-to-face classes where you can ask the teacher. It is hard to focus on studies while working."*

The participants felt exhausted from their studies and work and could not focus on answering the modules. They had difficulties coping with the demands of completing all the written and performance tasks in their modules. They had to finish the modules in each period which was very stressful and very hard for them. The participants explicitly affirm this:

Jenny: *"...it takes me many days to answer all the modules. Imagine I need to answer all the modules in just one week. It is too much for me."*

Daisy: *"...there are so many modules that need to be answered...."*

Sophia: *"My greatest struggle is beating the deadline for all the modules. It's challenging and confusing. I need to work overtime and stay late at night because I want to submit the modules on time."*

Aubrey: *"There are too many modules for every quarter, and I cannot understand all of them. I think I need two more weeks to answer the modules. Because I need to submit all the modules on time, I just leave other questions unanswered."*

The participants had difficulty answering the lessons due to a lack of in-person activities. Because of the distance learning modality, physical interaction between teacher and students is missing; then, the students tend to lose personal interaction with their teachers, and thereby the mental buildup of students may get hampered. Most students prefer to learn when their teachers are physically present in the classroom. Two participants narrated that:

Chloe: *"...I encountered challenges in answering the modules because there is no teacher to teach us the lesson, unlike in the face-to-face set-up..."*

Aubrey: *"The lack of in-person activities made it harder for me to understand the lesson."*

As part of the distance learning delivery, teachers conducted online classes to assist the student with their learning. However, the participant had an internet connection problem. This struggle hindered the students from attending the class caused of having no signal of their location, no load, and no Wi-Fi connection. They said there were occasions when they needed to connect to the internet, but they could not do so, which made them frustrated and anxious. Participants said:

Daisy: *"...if you don't have data in online classes, you cannot join the class, and you will get behind or get late in classes..."*

Ella: *"On some occasions, I struggle to buy load if the internet is down, and I need to search something about my modules. It's so frustrating and makes me grumpy all day."*

Chloe: *"I struggle to search my questions online because sometimes the internet has a slow connection."*

The participant felt difficulties during the pandemic as a working student and could not focus on studies due to myriads of work. This struggle hindered them from concentrating on their modules and spending time on their studies. Two participants narrated that:

Olivia: *“As a working student, I cannot focus on my studies due to various work. I cannot finish answering the modules. Sometimes, I cannot balance my time between work and studies. There were instances that I needed to have overtime in my job due to unfinished work.”*

Sophia: *“... because of the modules and the nature of my work, my life as a working student is difficult. As a result, I find it difficult to organize my time. My parents expect me to assist them at home, particularly in the kitchen and with my siblings. I didn’t do these activities on school days; instead, I did them on Saturdays and Sundays...”*

The participants revealed that they experienced challenges and struggles during the pandemic as working students. Some of these problems can hinder them from focusing on their studies and answering the modules. It can be observed as well that online-related difficulties such as network and internet connection problems and cost of buying data were the most feasible reasons behind students’ stress and eventually their suicide in this time of the pandemic.

Theme 2: Meeting financial and social needs

The participant became working students because they did not have the financial resources needed to finish school. Working while studying is quite challenging for the students, but they have no choice because of the financial and social problems. There is a variety of reasons students work while they are in school. Participants stated that:

Jenny: *“I became a working student because of the financial problem. My parents could not support me in my studies because my brother was already in college. That is why I need to work so that I can support my studies.”*

Sophia: *“I became a working student to support my schooling. I want to finish my studies even though it is difficult because of the pandemic. My parents could not afford to send me to school, but I worked hard, became an independent person, and experienced the hardship of being a working student.”*

Bea: *“I work at the same time I attend classes because I am the family’s breadwinner. I have younger siblings that I need to support after finishing my studies. My family is just a farmer.”*

The participants’ responses showed that they became working students to meet their financial and social needs. It can be gleaned from the profile of the participants that most of them belong to low-income backgrounds. This does not hinder the participants from continuing with their studies. Their experiences prove that poverty is not a hindrance to success, and determination is the biggest key to success; when you are determined, nothing can stop you.

Theme 3: Seeking support

Modular distance learning enables the learners to control their understanding and accepts greater responsibility for their education. It demands a higher level of maturity on the side of the student. However, some participants cannot understand some features of the lessons from the modules and seek help from someone for assistance and support with the problems they are facing. Participants claimed that they sought assistance and support from their friends, classmates, or teachers to cope with their struggles. Four participants shared that:

James: *“If I have some questions or concerns about the module, I reach out to my teachers through their social media accounts. I ask them some questions regarding the topic, and sometimes I ask for a favor like an extension of the submission of the modules because of the conflict between work and studies. Luckily, the teachers are very understanding and allow me to answer my modules at my own pace.”*

Ella: *"I asked my classmates if I did not know what to do with my modules. I tried to ask them what they understood about the topic in the module and how they came up with the answer so that I would have an idea what to do next."*

Bea: *"I overcame the challenges that I encountered in answering the modules by reaching out to my friends, classmates, and teachers. I was able to answer my modules and pass them on time because of them."*

As a working student, the conflict between work and studies may arise. A support system is essential in the workplace to cope with the demand of time. Participants asked their co-workers to replace them to start the modules or attend online classes. Two participants mentioned:

Anna: *"I asked my co-worker to replace me in my work If I have online classes or if there is a conflict of time. In that way, I completed all the requirements and passed the modules on time."*

Bea: *"I sought help from my co-worker in the store to assist and help me so that I could focus on answering my modules and attending online classes. I am fortunate that I have good co-workers."*

The participants' responses showed that they cope with the challenges and struggles in work and school by asking for support from others. This support is usually emotional and academic and can encourage a collaborative work environment. Communicating with other people can help build relationships and inspire them to do work. Students get emotional support from the pieces of advice, sympathy, and encouraging words that they get from their friends, classmates, teachers, and co-workers.

Theme 4: Commitment and self-discipline

The participant observed that self-learning is the distance learning modality adopted by the DepEd because of the pandemic. In distance learning, students can study and learn at any time and place they want; however, they are responsible for assessing, managing, and planning their learning process. Students utilized resources such as the internet to research lessons that they did not understand. It is essential to commit to work, studies, and self-discipline, especially in a pandemic. In fact, participants stated that:

James: *"There are lessons that are difficult to understand if there is no teacher to guide us, unlike face-to-face. But I tend to use the internet to learn it myself and have independent learning."*

Daisy: *"If you read the modules carefully, the answer is there. You can understand the lesson. Sometimes, I search it online if I have data on my phone to get an idea about the lessons."*

Olivia: *"As a student, I find a way to understand the lesson and answer all the written and performance tasks."*

Chloe: *"I read the modules carefully so that I can understand the lesson and I can learn how to answer the activities."*

Aubrey: *"Aside from the time management, it is important to have the self-discipline to overcome the challenges and struggles in school and work brought by the pandemic."*

The participant accepts the reality of the situation and the uncertainties brought by the pandemic. As a pandemic that many assumed would be over in a matter of weeks lingers and becomes our new reality, we must grapple with how to deal with the mental health consequences. When things are not going our way, it can be beneficial to shift our focus to acceptance. This can be observed in the responses of the participants.

Sophia: *"We should stay positive, happy, and motivated in all the things that we do to finish*

our studies. We should not feel sad and down because every problem has a solution. We should also reflect on ourselves. It is essential because we can sometimes be the source of our difficulties. Before we can manage our circumstances, we must first manage ourselves. We must be prepared to confront any obstacles that may arise.”

Bea: *“I was able to accept the reality of the situation and the uncertainties brought by the pandemic. We should accept it completely and totally with our body, heart, and mind. We have a choice to move forward and open ourselves to the reality of the present moment.”*

The participants’ responses show that to overcome the uncertainties brought by the pandemic, and there is a need to be committed to work and studies. Self-discipline is also a tool to overcome the crisis during the pandemic. Taking time to reflect on ourselves and what is coming up is necessary to move forward in this life. There are some things that we cannot possibly anticipate in this life.

Theme 5: Work-study balance

The working students overcame the challenges and struggle brought by the pandemic. Students have different coping mechanisms, such as managing time and taking breaks. Students scheduled their time between answering their modules and their work. The participants said that having time management effectively balances their studies and their responsibilities at work. These were their common responses.

James: *“During this pandemic, I managed my time between studies and work due to skeletal time in my workplace. I can request specific days for a day off to spend answering the modules. I would spend my day off for my studies. Overall, the pandemic has no great effect on my studies.”*

Aubrey: *“If there is no customer, that is the time that I will answer my modules. I brought my modules to the workplace. If there is no customer, that is the time that I will do my modules.”*

Chloe: *“If I can attend online classes, I multitask between work and studies. I asked my teacher that I would turn off my camera so that I could continue with my work.”*

The participant values time management skills in balancing work and studies. Having time management skills is essential for optimal academic functioning. Time is a finite source and needs to be effectively managed. Time management is about planning and controlling the amount of time you spend on a specific task. Participants said:

Jane: *“I used not to enjoy the weekend because I crammed in finishing my activities in the modules. But now, I already have a priority list and schedule. I try to limit my time to distractions like checking my social media accounts. Instead of spending hours on social media, I try to spend about 20 minutes. And then after that, I focus on my modules.”*

Olivia: *“I worked at the same time. I need to answer the modules to pass them on time. If there is a delay in submitting the modules, I cannot cope with the delay. We should always have time management, especially during a pandemic. If you don’t have time management, it will lead to work overload and burnout.”*

James: *“As a student, the key to balancing my studies and work is to recognize the importance of time management to keep on track with my studies when work gets busy.”*

The participants’ responses showed that they coped with the challenges and struggles during the pandemic by giving importance to time management skills to achieve a work-study balance. Although it is challenging to do, having a good plan is the best thing to do to get through it. Keeping the goals and reasons in mind is essential to achieving the goals in life.

4.2. Discussion

The study unveils the lived experiences of working students in the new normal education, describes their challenges and struggles experienced, time-management skills, and sheds light on the coping mechanisms despite the uncertainties experienced.

The analysis of the demographic profile of the working students revealed that most of them came from low-income families. Carnevale and Smith (2018) found that out of the 14 million working learners, about 06 million (43%) are low-income students. The study also revealed that students work while studying to meet their financial and social needs and support their studies. Students seek work for various reasons, including financial, personal, or career-related reasons (Curtis & Shani, 2002; Hall, 2010; Perna, 2010; Scott-Clayton, 2012). Students have families and may need to work to offset the financial burden of tuition (Gardner & Gopaul, 2012).

The implementation of the distance learning modality resulted in a satisfactory rating of the working students' academic performance. Even though these students came from low-income families, they ensure their education will continue despite the uncertainties they encounter. This contradicts the study of Devlin, Kift, Nelson, Smith, and McKay (2012) and Smit (2012) that students from low socioeconomic backgrounds are associated with low entrance scores, decreasing standards, and academic struggle and failure. Furthermore, Darolia (2014) found no evidence of harming the students' grades by marginal work hours, but full-time students complete fewer credits per term when increasing work.

Findings revealed that working students experienced challenges and struggled with their studies during the pandemic. Yuzulia (2021) found that students faced some challenges in online learning, such as poor internet connection, easily getting distracted, and the myriad of school activities. This is supported by Atmojo and Nugroho (2020), Bailey and Lee (2020), and Sun and Chen (2016). In addition, the challenges that the students face during digital learning are mostly related to network connections. Especially students who lived in remote areas said it was challenging to have excellent and stable signals (Nartiningrum & Nugroho, 2020).

Despite the challenges and struggles in work and school, working students cope with these challenging situations by seeking support from others, whether emotionally or academically, which promotes an efficient individual. This actuation mechanism is similar to the findings of Remenick and Bergman (2021), which highlight the importance of establishing a support system among stakeholders that pave the way to creating positive impacts on students' performance in both work and scholastic avenues as they feel supported. For instance, adjustment of practices that disincentivize working students, crafting policies that utilize students' work experience, and providing on-campus part-time employment opportunities. Students seek support to improve their academic skills while working to sustain their basic needs and their education (Garcia-Melgar, East, & Meyers, 2021). Hence, a high level of empathy encourages working students to self-disclose the succor they genuinely need.

The extended empathy shown among working students enables the development of an atmosphere that stimulates commitment and self-discipline, allowing students to make choices that do not have heavy consequences and empowering students to take an active role in their learning. Bradley (2021) emphasized that learners can set their own learning goals, determine content and progress, choose skills and methods, monitor the entire process, and conduct self-assessments. However, most students have difficulty deploying these processes, which has led them to gain acceptance with the uncertainties of reality. Moreover, numerous studies accentuate that external support could enhance students' regulating skills and thus lead to learning gains as well as

commitment and actuation accountability (Krishna, Pelachaud, & Kappas, 2019; Poitras, Mayne, Huang, Udy, & Lajoie, 2019; Siadaty, Gašević, & Hatala, 2016). And, if we want students to continue to evolve in the reliable direction of becoming truly committed and disciplined learners, this must be intensively supported, facilitated, and evaluated.

Students' internalization of their academic and work desires allows opportunities to reflect on solutions and encourages work-study balance. Oreopoulos, Patterson, Petronijevic, and Pope (2022), indicated that students inclined with time management skills could increase their study time; in so doing, such efforts are inextricably linked to academic success despite the challenges experienced at work and during pandemics. It is worth noting that non-academic related factors such as time management affect students' chances of attaining success in education. Time is a significant aspect of day-to-day life since it influences a person's success or the achievement of various groups, such as students (Pugh & Nathwani, 2017); in addition, it is the most valuable commodity and asset in life and should be used positively (Alghaswyneh & Basri, 2015). Nonetheless, ineffective time management behaviors among students, both working and nonworking students could lead to poor academic achievement and other psychological effects. Therefore, teachers should instill skills and a positive attitude toward successful time management in their students to boost their self-efficacy in time management. Students should be aware of ineffective time drivers and take ownership of proper time management.

5. Conclusions & recommendations

Research about working students is widely conducted in different countries, but those researchers lack knowledge about their experiences during the pandemic and how they encountered the challenges and struggles between school and work. This study will help understand working students' experiences in the new normal education. The results revealed that students work while studying to meet their financial and social needs and support their studies. Even though these students came from low-income families, they ensure their work and studies continue despite the uncertainties. In fact, most of them got satisfactory grades which contradicts some researchers that students from low socioeconomic status are associated with low academic performance.

Despite the challenges and struggles the working students encounter in the new normal, they cope with these challenging situations by seeking support from others, which promotes an efficient individual. The extended empathy shown among working students enables the development of an atmosphere that stimulates commitment and self-discipline, allowing students to make choices that do not have heavy consequences and empowering students to take an active role in their learning. Students' internalization of their academic and work desires allows opportunities to reflect on solutions and encourages work-study balance.

The study recommends that intervention programs be given to working students that focus on strategic planning and positive refocusing and reinforcement. These intervention programs would benefit students in the school-to-work transition to help prepare them to meet societal and future needs and reduce the challenges and struggles. Support and measures should be given to them to help and ensure that their studies and work will not be compromised.

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