
Balancing Study and Work: An Analysis of Part-Time Employment among University Students and Its Implications for Human Capital Development

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Abstract:

This study aims to explore in depth the experiences, challenges, and strategies of students in balancing their dual roles as learners and part-time workers. The phenomenon of working students is increasingly common; however, qualitative research examining their subjective perspectives remains limited. Using a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews with ten active students from various study programs who held part-time jobs in Solo. The findings indicate that balancing academic and work responsibilities is a dynamic process influenced by multiple factors. Effective time management, flexible work schedules, and social support from family, friends, and the campus environment are key to students' success. Participants revealed that part-time work not only fulfills financial needs but also contributes to the development of independence, interpersonal skills, and relevant professional experience. Nevertheless, they also face significant challenges. The study concludes that the success of part-time student workers largely depends on a combination of adaptive personal strategies and strong external support.

Keywords: *Part-Time Student Workers, Balance, Qualitative Study, Time Management*

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1. Introduction

College life inevitably involves challenges related to time management, making it crucial for individuals to organize, control, and optimize their productivity and effectiveness. Based on Law No. 20 of 2003, higher education serves as the next level after secondary education, designed to prepare students to become competent and responsible members of society both academically and professionally. Effective time management helps students maintain equilibrium between academic obligations and personal activities (Maharani et al., 2024). Research conducted by Jackson (2024) revealed that students who demonstrate good time management skills are generally more disciplined in attending lectures and more consistent in completing academic assignments (Javanis et al., 2024). Nevertheless, several students at Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta who take on part-time jobs face difficulties in maintaining

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concentration, often producing rushed academic work or depending on others' efforts because their attention is divided between employment and study.

University students inherently possess a strong drive to develop their abilities and competencies, which often leads them to juggle multiple responsibilities at once (Sabar et al., 2022). Many are involved in both academic and extracurricular endeavors such as student organizations or part-time employment that require considerable time and effort, sometimes resulting in difficulties maintaining balance between their roles (Darmawanti et al., 2022). The pace of economic growth has further spurred social and financial shifts, encouraging students to seek part-time work as early preparation for professional life (Prasetya & Alkadri Kusalendra Siharis, 2023). Nevertheless, managing these dual roles can create conflict between academic performance and financial obligations. Education, as a vital human need, plays a central role in shaping quality human capital to support national development (Nuckols, 2023). As the cost of living and tuition continues to escalate, many students are driven to pursue additional income sources to finance their education and daily necessities (Mardalis et al., 2023, as cited in Agustina & Mardalis, 2024).

Part-time employment can be an effective option for students with strong ambitions to enhance their skills, as it offers flexibility in managing work schedules around academic commitments (Puspita, 2023). However, balancing work and study is not without challenges; students often struggle to manage their time, energy, and priorities between professional responsibilities and academic demands. These dual obligations may lead to difficulties in time management and an increased risk of stress (Ni Wayan Lasmi et al., 2024). Furthermore, working while studying can reduce the time available for academic activities (Trintipohl et al., 2022). Nonetheless, part-time work can also foster valuable traits such as time management, discipline, and a stronger motivation to learn.

This study, which delves into the narratives and subjective experiences of part-time working students, aims to enrich and deepen the understanding of the complex interplay between academic life and employment. It is expected to provide both theoretical contributions to the comprehension of the working student phenomenon and practical implications for educational institutions, employers, families, and the students themselves in fostering supportive environments that promote academic achievement and professional success in the future.

2. Theoretical Background

The phenomenon of students engaging in part-time employment has increasingly attracted scholarly attention due to its implications for academic performance, personal development, and psychological well-being. Time management has been widely recognized as a critical competency in this context, serving as a determinant of students' ability to balance multiple roles effectively. According to Maharani et al. (2024), effective time management enables students to organize academic responsibilities while maintaining productivity and well-being. Similarly, Jackson

(2024) emphasize that students with strong time management skills exhibit higher levels of discipline, punctuality, and task completion consistency.

Part-time employment among university students is often driven by both economic necessity and the pursuit of experiential learning (Asmawan, 2025). As economic conditions evolve, students increasingly seek employment opportunities to alleviate financial burdens and prepare for future careers (Prasetya & Siharis, 2023). Such engagements not only provide financial support but also contribute to the acquisition of soft skills, professional exposure, and a sense of independence (Puspita, 2023). From a developmental perspective, participation in part-time work can enhance interpersonal competencies and adaptability attributes essential in the transition to professional life.

Nevertheless, the dual role of being both a student and a worker presents notable challenges. Research indicates that juggling academic and occupational commitments can lead to cognitive overload, fatigue, and diminished academic engagement (Ni Wayan Lasmi et al., 2024). Whittard (2024) further highlights that students who allocate significant time to work often experience reduced study hours and difficulties in maintaining academic performance. The tension between fulfilling financial needs and achieving academic excellence underscores the importance of adaptive coping strategies and institutional support systems.

Furthermore, Darmawanti et al. (2022) note that the increasing involvement of students in non-academic activities such as part-time work or organizational participation reflects a shift toward multidimensional self-development. However, without adequate support, these pursuits may compromise academic outcomes. Educational institutions thus play a crucial role in providing flexible learning systems and counseling services to help students maintain equilibrium between their studies and employment.

In summary, prior research converges on the notion that the success of part-time student workers is contingent upon three interrelated factors: individual time management ability, institutional flexibility, and social support. While part-time employment offers valuable experiential learning and financial independence, its sustainability depends on the student's capacity to integrate these experiences without undermining academic objectives. This theoretical foundation underscores the relevance of exploring the lived experiences of working students to gain deeper insight into how they negotiate, adapt, and construct meaning within their dual roles.

3. Methodology

This study employs a descriptive qualitative research design to deeply understand students' subjective experiences in balancing their roles as learners and part-time workers. Using a phenomenological approach, which focuses on exploring and interpreting lived experiences of individuals or groups (Nasir et al., 2023), the researcher conducted in-depth interviews with three informants to gather rich and

detailed data (Jackson et al., 2024). This approach allows the researcher to thoroughly examine and identify the core issues faced by students (Puspita, 2023), including the impact of part-time work on their academic and personal lives. Data collection was carried out through interviews to obtain direct insights from participants via structured conversations (Hardani, 2024). Therefore, by engaging directly with participants in real-life contexts, this study ensures the depth, reliability, and validity of its findings.

4. Empirical Findings/Result

Research result

Thematic analysis of in-depth interviews with ten participants revealed four major themes illustrating their experiences in balancing academic responsibilities and part-time work. These include (1) motivation and personal goals driving their engagement in both domains, (2) management strategies employed to allocate time and energy effectively, (3) challenges encountered and the resulting impacts on academic performance and well-being, and (4) personal growth and benefits gained through enhanced self-discipline, resilience, and skill development.

Motivation and goals

All participants stated that their primary motivation for working part-time was to meet financial needs, ranging from covering personal expenses such as pocket money, transportation, and meals to helping ease their parents' financial burden. As Participant 4, a barista, explained, "My parents already have a heavy burden paying for my tuition, not to mention daily expenses, so I work to pay for rent and food." Beyond financial reasons, several participants also expressed non-financial motivations, including gaining work experience, developing new skills, and fostering independence. Participant 7, a graphic designer, remarked, "I don't want to be overwhelmed after graduation, and graphic design is a skill I can use as a side job."

Self-management strategies

To balance their dual roles, participants developed adaptive self-management strategies. Most emphasized the importance of strict time management by creating daily or weekly schedules. As Participant 2, a private tutor, explained, "Every week I make a schedule what assignments to do today, what time I work tomorrow; discipline is essential." Flexibility emerged as a key factor, with those in flexible jobs (such as freelancers) finding it easier to manage their time compared to those with fixed shifts. Participants also learned to prioritize tasks, particularly during exam periods or major assignment deadlines.

Challenges and impacts

Balancing dual roles is not easy, as all participants acknowledged experiencing both physical and mental fatigue. Their tight schedules often led to a lack of rest. One participant, a restaurant waitress, shared, "Sometimes I get home late from work, then have morning classes the next day. I feel so exhausted and often get sleepy in class." Another major challenge was a decline in academic focus, as participants found it difficult to concentrate on their studies while their thoughts were divided between

work responsibilities and academic demands. This often affected their grades and understanding of certain subjects. As one cashier noted, “Sometimes while doing assignments, I keep thinking about my night shift tomorrow, so I can’t focus, and some of my grades have dropped.”

Benefits and experience

Although challenging, part-time work experiences provide significant benefits for participants. Beyond financial independence, they develop a stronger sense of responsibility and maturity while gaining practical skills such as communication, teamwork, and problem-solving. As one participant, a barista, stated, “I used to rely on my parents for everything. Now, I handle everything myself, so I’ve become more independent.” This experience also broadens their understanding of the professional world, helping them plan their future careers and recognize the connection between academic theory and real-world practice. Interview findings further reveal that most students initially sought part-time jobs to support their tuition fees, living expenses, and other financial responsibilities. The recurring theme among them was the desire to achieve financial independence without relying on family support.

5. Discussion

Motivation Dynamics and Role Shifts

The finding that UMS students are motivated by both financial and non-financial factors, such as the pursuit of experience and independence, aligns with contemporary studies. Financial motivation remains a fundamental driver due to the rising cost of living and education, while the emphasis on self-development and autonomy reflects a shift in students’ roles from mere learners to emerging professionals. This perspective is reinforced by Humayra and Kumalasari (2025), who found that students’ decisions to engage in part-time work are also influenced by their desire for independence and practical experience.

Adaptive Strategies and Time Management Limitations

The dependence of UMS students on strict time management and prioritization as their main strategy aligns with findings from numerous studies, which emphasize that time management is a key mediating factor linking part-time work to positive academic outcomes. Students who effectively allocate their time using techniques such as time blocking or chunking (Alifia & Sholeha, 2025) tend to maintain learning productivity (Lubis et al., 2025). However, the challenges of physical and mental fatigue reported by UMS participants indicate that time management alone is insufficient. The high level of work–study conflict requires adaptive coping strategies (Karnia et al., 2025), revealing a gap between time management intentions and the actual realization of physical and cognitive energy needed to sustain academic and occupational performance.

Double Impact: Between Role Conflict and Skill Development

The experiences of UMS students highlight the dual nature of part-time work. On one hand, its negative impacts such as reduced academic focus and the risk of burnout

align with findings by Prasetya and Alkadri Kusalendra Siharis (2023), who identified a significant negative relationship between part-time employment and academic achievement when poorly managed. Role conflict arising from work commitments can also trigger stress and burnout (Mou, 2023). On the other hand, the positive aspects such as the development of interpersonal skills, independence, and soft skills affirm that part-time work can be an asset. The competencies gained through work, known as Work Enhancement of Personal Life, contribute to improved personal quality of life and job readiness. Thus, when aligned with one's field of study, part-time employment serves as a vital bridge toward career preparedness, offering UMS graduates a competitive advantage in the future workforce.

The Role of Institutions in Work-Life Balance

These findings implicitly highlight the need for more structured institutional support from Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta. Work-life balance has been shown to significantly influence academic performance (Mou, 2023). Institutional initiatives such as flexible academic policies, counseling services focused on occupational stress management, and the availability of blended learning courses (Karnia et al., 2025) can help UMS students mitigate the work-study conflicts they experience. Overall, UMS students' experiences reflect a contemporary dilemma: part-time employment serves both financial and self-developmental needs but entails considerable psychological costs. True balance is achieved when external flexibility (work) aligns with internal maturity (self-management), supported by empathetic institutional policies.

Part-time jobs for university students have both positive and negative impacts. Students who choose to work while studying must carefully consider their ability to manage time and energy so that their academic responsibilities are not neglected (Zhao & Xue 2023). Those who successfully balance both roles often demonstrate proactivity, maturity, and independence. Achieving high academic performance and completing their studies on time are essential goals, while their success in part-time work largely depends on persistence, determination, and strong motivation.

Part-time jobs commonly chosen by university students include tutoring, waiting tables, working as a barista, graphic designing, photography, and many others. Balancing academic responsibilities with part-time work is often challenging, as it requires maintaining focus on studies while managing job commitments, which can significantly influence students' learning behavior and academic performance. Students with strong intrinsic motivation such as genuine interest and passion for their work tend to manage their time and responsibilities more effectively (Prasetya & Alkadri Kusalendra Siharis, 2023). According to Lesner et al. (2022), motivation is an internal drive that stimulates individuals to act; this drive encourages behaviors aligned with one's internal desires, which may take various forms such as the urge to learn, work, or achieve.

6. Conclusions

The findings reveal that part-time employment among students has a dual impact. On the positive side, it provides financial benefits that help alleviate living and tuition expenses, offers practical work experience, expands professional networks, and enhances essential soft skills such as communication and responsibility. Conversely, the main challenge lies in time management, as many students struggle to balance work demands with academic responsibilities, often leading to physical and mental fatigue, reduced study time, and potential academic decline. The study highlights that effective time management, strong learning motivation, and clear prioritization are critical factors for maintaining balance. These results imply the need for structured support from both universities and workplaces, including career and time management counseling services as well as reasonable academic flexibility for working students.

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