

Key Determinants of Work–Study Balance among Higher Education Students; a Case Study of Weekend Course Students at ATI Gampaha

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ABSTRACT

Adults pursuing education often face the challenge of balancing both work and study. This study centers on week end course students pursuing the Higher National Diploma in Accountancy (HNDA) and the Higher National Diploma in Information Technology (HNDIT) at the Advanced Technological Institute, Gampaha. This research explores both the advantages and challenges of balancing work and study. It aims to gain insights into the dual roles of student and employee, focusing on how individuals manage their commitments effectively. The survey reveals that students see flexible work-study programs as the most helpful support for balancing work and studies, followed by counseling and financial aid. While most students would still choose part-time work, they acknowledge the significant stress it adds. Overall, balancing work and studies is tough but rewarding, with students recognizing the need for strong time management and support systems. The findings of this study can assist educators, policymakers, and institutional support teams in providing enhanced assistance to students juggling work and studies.

Keywords: Work-Study Balance, Higher Education, work full time, study part time, Determinants

INTRODUCTION

Adults pursuing education often face the challenge of balancing both work and study. Some choose to study full-time while taking on part-time jobs, such as those pursuing doctorates, while others work full-time and study part-time—often those who were unable to complete their education after school. The motivations for this approach vary: some seek further education to overcome financial challenges, others pursue studies for career advancement, and some do so simply out of personal interest. Regardless of the reason, managing studies, work, and personal life is undeniably a challenging task. These dual responsibilities can lead to several challenges, such as exhaustion, increased stress, and occasional feelings of homesickness, as professional obligations often encroach on time meant for academic pursuits and social engagements.

Background

This study centers on week end course students pursuing the Higher National Diploma in Accountancy (HNDA) and the Higher National Diploma in Information Technology (HNDIT) at the Advanced Technological Institute, Gampaha. These students are employed during weekdays and attend lectures on weekends. This research explores both the advantages and challenges of balancing work and study. It aims to gain insights into the dual roles of student and employee, focusing on how individuals manage their commitments effectively.

LITERATURE RIVIEW

Balancing full-time work with academic studies has become challenging and it mainly depends on number of hours worked and the nature of the job. Many research have been done on the topic to study both benefits and challenges.

(Susan Curtis, 2002) in a study of 359 undergraduates at Manchester Metropolitan University, documented a sharp rise in term-time employment. Their findings disclosed adverse academic consequences, including missed lectures and students' perceptions that their coursework grades were lower than they would have been without working. However, the study also highlighted positive outcomes, such as skill development, business awareness, and enhanced confidence, suggesting that employment may aid personal development despite its potential to disrupt academic routines.

Similar conclusions were drawn by Lederman (2009), who emphasized the dual nature of student employment. While part-time work can cultivate independence, responsibility, and time management skills, excessive working hours were found to conflict with academic demands. In particular, students working longer hours experienced reduced study time and higher stress levels. Conversely, moderate levels of employment did not necessarily hinder academic performance and, in some cases, enhanced transferable skills beneficial for future careers.

The detrimental effects of student employment become especially evident when work commitments exceed 20 hours per week. (Gary R. Pike, 2008) reported that students working beyond this threshold, whether on- or off-campus, showed declines in academic performance. (Watanabe, 2005) also found that extended working hours reduced study time, delayed graduation, and increased the risk of burnout. These findings suggest a clear tipping point, beyond which the negative academic consequences of employment outweigh potential benefits.

Despite these challenges, several studies highlight the positive outcomes of part-time employment. (Marcia Devlin, Richard James, & Gabrielle Grigg, 2008) and (Tyman, 2011) observed that students gained valuable real-world experience, financial independence, and personal growth from working during term-time. In addition, (Susan Curtis, 2002) found that employment enhanced organizational abilities, built self-confidence, and allowed students to apply academic learning in practical contexts. These findings indicate that, when work commitments are balanced, employment can complement rather than hinder academic development.

Given these mixed outcomes, universities play a crucial role in supporting students who work while studying. (Curtis, 2007) suggests that institutions should provide flexible schedules and enhanced support systems to help students balance academic and employment responsibilities. However, most of the existing research has focused on students in Western higher education contexts. Limited attention has been given to students in developing countries, such as those enrolled in HNDIT and HNDA programs in Sri Lanka. Further research is needed to examine how these students balance employment and academic commitments, and what institutional support mechanisms might be most effective in addressing their unique challenges.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a mixed-method approach, combining quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews, to offer a comprehensive understanding of the challenges encountered and benefits experienced by first- and second-year HNDIT and HNDA students at ATI, Gampaha.

To collect data, a questionnaire created using Google Forms was distributed via student WhatsApp groups, aiming to gather quantitative and categorical information on students' work-study dynamics. Additionally, to gain deeper qualitative insights into individual experiences—particularly from high-performing students—a face-to-face interview was conducted through a video call.

V Data Analysis

The survey results reveal that the majority of students (60%) are engaged in office or administrative work, making it the most common type of job among respondents. This preference is likely due to the accessibility of such roles and their compatibility with academic schedules. Other types of employment reported include teaching/tutoring, sales, IT, software development, hospitality (e.g., restaurants and hotels), electronic companies, and audit firms, though these represent smaller proportions of the sample.

According to figure 1 a significant portion of students indicate that their jobs are related to field of study. Some roles offer partial relevance, possibly in transferable skills while few respondents indicated no direct connection between their jobs and their academic field.

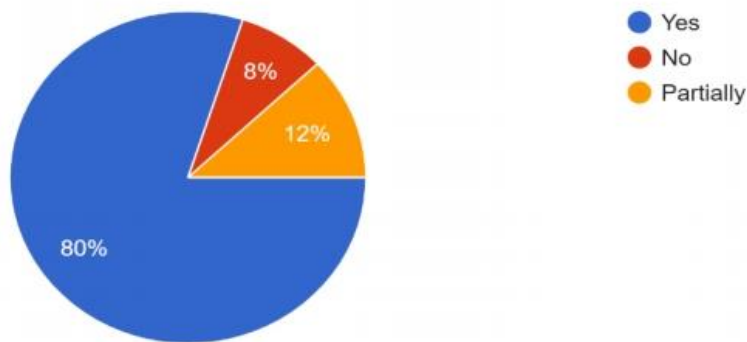


Figure 1: relation between job and field of study

As per figure 2 a significant portion of students (52%) work more than 20 hours per week, highlighting that many are managing heavy workloads alongside their studies. Meanwhile, 44% of students reported working less than 10 hours per week, suggesting that this group prioritizes lighter work schedules to dedicate more time to academics. Only a small fraction (4%) fall within the 10–20 hours range, showing that moderate work commitments are less common. Overall, the results suggest that while students balance varying levels of work commitment, a considerable number are engaged in demanding work schedules that may impact their academic performance and well-being.

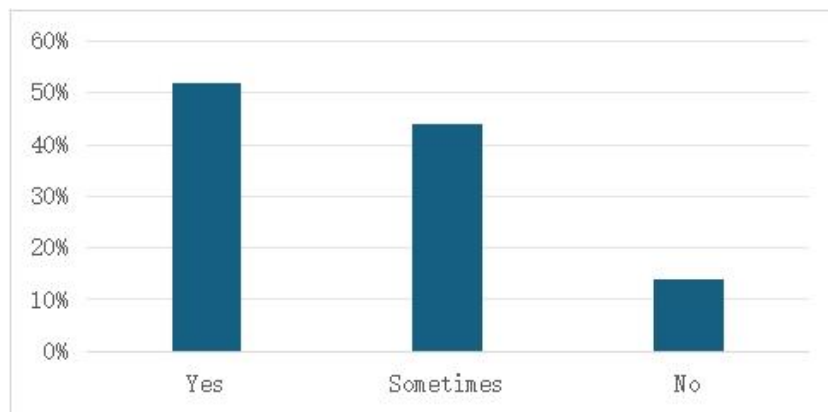


Figure 2: Employer Support for Academic Schedules

The results show that the majority of students (60%) manage deadlines by planning in advance, making it the most preferred strategy for balancing work and academic responsibilities. However, a significant portion (28%) cope with deadlines by working late or sacrificing sleep, which highlights the pressure they face in managing multiple commitments. A smaller group (12%) rely on requesting extensions, suggesting that while this option is available, it is the least favored. Overall, the findings emphasize that while proactive planning is common, many students still struggle with workload management and often compromise their well-being to meet deadlines.

For almost half of the students job provides flexibility to manage studies during critical times while for almost same percentage of students are in non supportive jobs so a significant portion of students (40%) feel overwhelmed frequently, highlighting the high pressure associated with balancing academic and work responsibilities. As a result many students (48%) have considered quitting their jobs, reflecting the significant pressure of balancing work and studies. It is regrettable to note that the majority (68%) have not sought professional assistance to address this issue. That may be due to barriers like lack of awareness, access, or stigma surrounding mental health support.

DISCUSSION

The survey reveals that students see flexible work-study programs as the most helpful support for balancing work and studies, followed by counseling and financial aid. While most students would still choose part-time work, they acknowledge the significant stress it adds. Time management and setting clear boundaries were the most common advice given, emphasizing the importance of planning and avoiding burnout. Many students shared that the experience, though challenging, helped them develop valuable skills like multitasking and prioritization. Overall, balancing work and studies is tough but rewarding, with students recognizing the need for strong time management and support systems.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study can assist educators, policymakers, and institutional support teams in providing enhanced assistance to students juggling work and studies. Additionally, the insights can help future students navigate the challenges of balancing employment with academics, fostering a well-informed and supportive environment that encourages success in both educational and professional pursuits.

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