

# Living Between School and Soil: A Phenomenological Study of Student Farmers' Academic Lives in Rural Mankayan

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## ABSTRACT

This qualitative study explored the lived academic and farming experiences of student farmers enrolled in a public senior high school in Mankayan, Benguet. Anchored in a phenomenological–thematic approach, the research sought to understand how student farmers experience schooling while simultaneously engaging in sustained agricultural work, the challenges they encounter, the strategies they use to cope, and how these experiences shape their personal growth and motivation.

Ten senior high school student farmers participated in in depth, semi structured interviews. Data were analyzed using a phenomenological–thematic procedure informed by Colaizzi's method, allowing shared meanings to emerge from participants' narratives while preserving the integrity of their lived experiences. Analysis revealed that academic life for student farmers is characterized by persistence under constrained conditions, shaped by time scarcity, physical fatigue, and overlapping responsibilities between school and farm work.

Findings showed that student farmers cope through personal discipline, deliberate time management, family support, and situational school based consideration. Rather than disengaging from schooling, participants actively sustained academic participation by adapting routines and prioritizing responsibilities. Farming experiences also contributed to personal growth, fostering responsibility, resilience, independence, and strengthened motivation to continue schooling. Hardship was not viewed solely as a burden but was reframed as a source of meaning and direction.

The study concludes that the academic experiences of student farmers are inseparable from their agricultural responsibilities and community context. Education is lived alongside labor, shaping how students construct meaning, manage challenges, and envision their future. The findings highlight the importance of understanding student farmers' experiences holistically and recognizing lived responsibility as an integral part of learning in rural and agricultural settings.

**Keywords:** student farmers, lived experience, phenomenological thematic analysis, academic engagement, rural education

## INTRODUCTION

In many rural communities, schooling does not take place in isolation from everyday life. For a number of learners, education unfolds alongside responsibilities that are necessary for household survival. Students are not only expected to attend classes and complete academic requirements, but also to contribute labor within the family. These responsibilities are not occasional interruptions to schooling but form part of a continuous routine that shapes how learning is experienced.

Within this broader group of working students, those engaged in farming occupy a distinct position. Agricultural work is not episodic or easily adjustable. It follows seasonal cycles, requires sustained physical effort, and is closely tied to family livelihood. In farming households, participation in agricultural tasks often

begins early and continues throughout adolescence. As a result, students involved in farming do not simply divide their time between school and work. Instead, they live within a setting where both are interwoven, each influencing how the other is carried out.

In the context of Mankayan, Benguet, farming remains central to everyday life. Many families depend on small-scale agriculture, and students commonly assist in planting, harvesting, and maintaining crops. These activities are embedded in daily routines and are shaped by both environmental conditions and family expectations. For student farmers, a typical day may involve early morning farm work, attending school during the day, and returning to agricultural tasks or academic responsibilities in the evening. This pattern places continuous demands on their time, physical energy, and attention.

Existing research on working students has documented how employment can affect academic engagement, often focusing on part-time or wage-based work in urban settings. However, such accounts do not fully capture the conditions experienced by students engaged in family-based agricultural labor. Unlike wage employment, farming responsibilities are less flexible and more deeply embedded in household routines. They are not easily postponed, negotiated, or separated from daily life. This difference raises questions about how student farmers experience schooling when academic participation must be sustained alongside continuous labor demands.

Studies in rural education suggest that learners in agricultural communities often maintain school attendance despite these constraints, demonstrating persistence and commitment. At the same time, their participation in learning is shaped by fatigue, limited time for preparation, and competing expectations. While these patterns are recognized, much of the existing literature approaches them in segmented ways, examining academic performance, labor participation, or access to education separately. Such approaches provide useful insights but do not fully explain how these elements are experienced together in everyday life.

What remains less examined is how student farmers themselves understand and navigate this intersection. There is limited attention to how they organize their daily routines, how they make sense of competing demands, and how they sustain engagement in both school and farming over time. In particular, there is a need to move beyond descriptive accounts toward an understanding of how these experiences are lived, interpreted, and given meaning within a specific context.

This study responds to that need by focusing on the lived academic and farming experiences of student farmers in one public senior high school in Mankayan, Benguet. By adopting a phenomenological approach, the study examines how students experience schooling alongside sustained agricultural work, how they encounter and manage challenges, and how these experiences shape their sense of responsibility, motivation, and personal development. Rather than treating schooling and farming as separate domains, the study considers them as interconnected aspects of everyday life through which meaning is continuously constructed.

In rural agricultural communities, some students carry responsibilities that extend beyond their role as learners. Student farmers attend school while actively participating in farm work that supports their families' livelihood. Although these students are present in many public schools, their everyday experiences are often understood only through academic outcomes such as grades, attendance, or completion rates. This limited perspective overlooks how student farmers actually experience schooling while managing sustained farming responsibilities.

Existing discussions on working students tend to focus on employment in formal or urban contexts, with less attention given to students engaged in family based agricultural work. Farming involves continuous physical labor, seasonal demands, and shared family responsibility, which differ from other forms of student work. As a result, the lived experiences of student farmers, particularly how they balance school and farm responsibilities, remain underexplored. Without examining these experiences, it is difficult to understand how student farmers navigate academic life, cope with challenges, and sustain motivation.

There is a need to explore student farmers' experiences from their own perspectives to gain a clearer understanding of how they manage competing demands in daily life. Understanding their academic experiences, the challenges they face, and the strategies they use to cope can provide insight into how education is lived in

agricultural contexts. Such understanding is necessary to recognize student farmers not only as learners, but as individuals managing multiple responsibilities that shape their schooling and personal development.

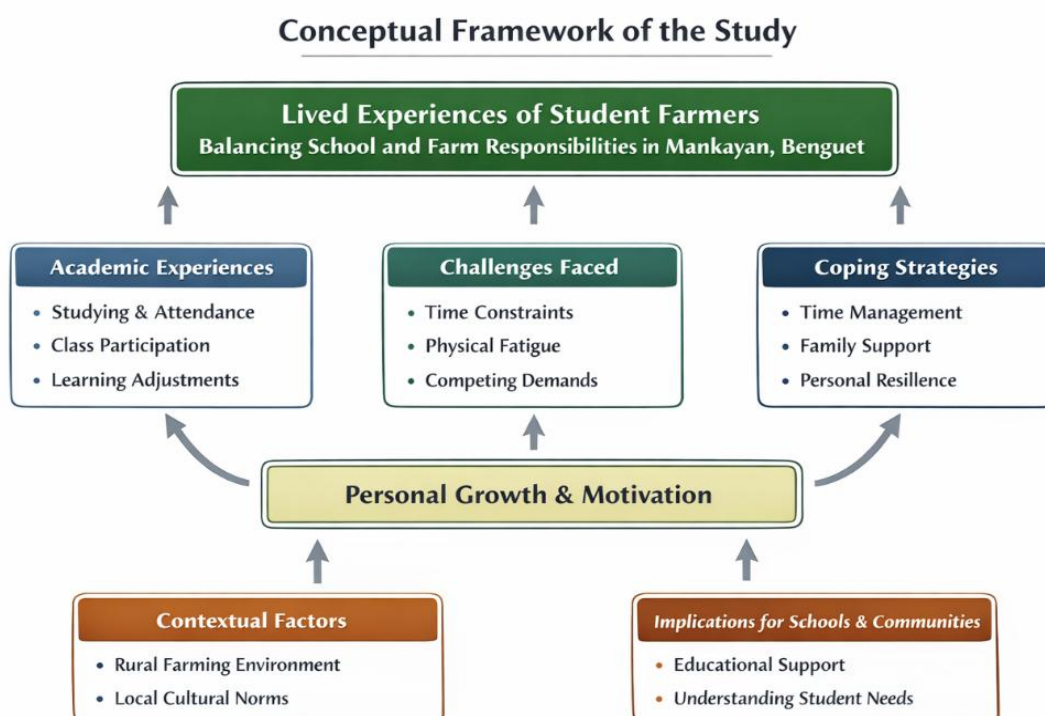
This study aimed to explore the lived experiences of student farmers in one public high school in Mankayan, Benguet. Specifically, it sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the academic experiences of student farmers while balancing school and farming responsibilities?
2. What challenges do student farmers encounter in balancing school and farming tasks?
3. How do student farmers manage their time and responsibilities in school and farming?
4. What strategies or support systems do student farmers use to cope with both school and farming tasks?
5. How does working on the farm affect the personal growth and motivation of student farmers?

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This study is anchored on a phenomenological understanding of the student farmer’s experience as one shaped by the intersection of schooling and agricultural labor within a rural context. Rather than viewing education and farming as separate domains, the framework treats them as coexisting and mutually shaping dimensions of everyday life. It assumes that the experiences of student farmers are formed through the continuous negotiation of academic demands and labor responsibilities, both of which are embedded in family expectations, local livelihood practices, and material conditions.

At the center of the framework is the lived experience of student farmers, understood as a dynamic condition shaped by the interaction of time, labor, and learning. These elements do not operate independently. Time is structured by the rhythms of both school schedules and agricultural cycles, labor is shaped by the demands of farming and household survival, and learning is influenced by the conditions under which students engage with academic tasks. Together, these dimensions form the context within which students organize their daily lives and interpret their experiences.



Surrounding this core are three interrelated domains that reflect the key areas of inquiry in the study. The first domain is the organization of daily life, which captures how student farmers structure their time and activities in response to competing demands. This includes the sequencing of tasks, prioritization of responsibilities, and adjustments made to accommodate both schooling and farming. The second domain is the experience of constraint and challenge, which refers to the physical, temporal, and cognitive pressures that arise from balancing these roles. These constraints are not limited to fatigue or lack of time but extend to difficulties in maintaining focus, completing academic requirements, and sustaining participation in both domains. The third domain is the process of adaptation and meaning-making, which reflects how students respond to and interpret their situation. This includes the development of coping strategies, the negotiation of expectations, and the ways in which students assign value to both their academic and farming roles.

These domains are not discrete categories but are interconnected and continuously influencing one another. The way students organize their daily life affects how they experience constraints, while their responses to these constraints shape how they interpret their roles and responsibilities. In turn, these interpretations influence future actions, creating a recursive process through which experience is formed and reformed over time.

The framework also recognizes the role of the broader social and environmental context in shaping these experiences. Family expectations, community norms, and local economic conditions provide the conditions within which student farmers operate. These factors influence not only what students are expected to do but also how their efforts are understood and valued. As such, the lived experience of student farmers cannot be separated from the context in which it is situated.

This conceptual framework guided the analysis of the study by providing a lens through which participants' narratives were examined and interpreted. The themes and subthemes identified in the results were organized according to how students describe the structuring of their daily routines, the constraints they encounter, and the ways they adapt to and make sense of their experiences. Rather than treating these themes as isolated findings, the framework allowed for an integrated interpretation that highlights the relationships among time, labor, and learning. Through this approach, the analysis captures the lived experience of student farmers as a coherent yet dynamic process shaped by both individual action and contextual conditions.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Design**

This study employed a qualitative descriptive phenomenological design to examine the lived academic and farming experiences of student farmers in a rural context. Phenomenology was selected as it allows for a close examination of how individuals experience and interpret their everyday realities, particularly in situations where multiple roles and expectations intersect. In this study, the focus is not on measuring outcomes or comparing variables but on understanding how student farmers navigate the coexistence of schooling and agricultural labor as part of their daily lives.

The approach is grounded in the assumption that experience is not simply a reflection of external conditions but is shaped through interpretation, interaction, and ongoing adjustment. By focusing on lived experience, the study seeks to capture how student farmers make sense of their routines, challenges, and responsibilities within the specific context in which they are situated.

### **Research Locale**

The study was conducted in a public senior high school in Mankayan, Benguet, a rural municipality in the Cordillera region of the Philippines. The area is characterized by a strong reliance on small-scale agriculture, where farming remains a primary source of livelihood for many families. In this setting, students' participation in agricultural work is a common and often necessary part of daily life.

The selected locale provides a context in which schooling and farming are not separate spheres but are closely intertwined. Students routinely assist in planting, harvesting, and other farm-related tasks alongside their

academic responsibilities. This makes the site particularly suitable for examining how educational engagement is experienced under conditions where labor demands are continuous and embedded within family and community expectations.

### **Participants and Sampling**

The participants of the study were student farmers enrolled in senior high school who were actively engaged in agricultural work within their households. A total of ten (10) participants were selected using purposive sampling, which is appropriate for phenomenological research as it prioritizes individuals who have direct and sustained experience of the phenomenon under study.

The inclusion criteria were as follows: (1) currently enrolled as a senior high school student, (2) actively involved in farming activities as part of family livelihood, (3) residing in the selected community in Mankayan, and (4) willing and able to articulate their experiences. Participants were selected to capture variation in terms of grade level and extent of farming involvement, allowing for a broader range of perspectives while maintaining depth of analysis.

The sample size is consistent with phenomenological inquiry, where the emphasis is on detailed exploration of experience rather than representativeness. The goal is to identify shared meanings across participants while preserving the nuance of individual accounts.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

Data were gathered through in-depth, semi-structured interviews designed to elicit detailed descriptions of participants' lived experiences. The interview guide consisted of open-ended questions that focused on daily routines, academic responsibilities, farming tasks, challenges encountered, and strategies used to manage these demands.

Interviews were conducted in a language familiar to the participants to ensure clarity and ease of expression. Each interview lasted approximately 30 to 60 minutes and was carried out in a setting that allowed for privacy and minimal interruption. With participants' consent, all interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed verbatim.

During the interviews, probing questions were used to encourage participants to elaborate on their responses and to clarify meanings. This allowed for a deeper exploration of how participants experience and interpret the relationship between schooling and farming in their everyday lives.

### **Data Analysis**

The data were analyzed using Colaizzi's (1978) phenomenological method, which provides a systematic approach to identifying and describing the essential structure of lived experience. The analysis involved several stages.

First, the transcripts were read repeatedly to gain a sense of the overall content and to become familiar with participants' accounts. Second, significant statements relevant to the phenomenon were identified and extracted. Third, meanings were formulated from these statements, staying as close as possible to the participants' intended sense. Fourth, these meanings were organized into clusters of themes, which were then examined for consistency and coherence.

Fifth, an exhaustive description of the phenomenon was developed by integrating the themes into a unified account. Sixth, the fundamental structure of the experience was identified, capturing the core elements that define the lived experience of student farmers. Finally, the findings were returned to selected participants for validation to ensure that the interpretations accurately reflected their experiences.

This analytic process allowed the study to move from individual descriptions to shared meanings while maintaining a close connection to the data.

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## Data Saturation

Data collection continued until thematic saturation was reached, where no new patterns or insights emerged from additional interviews. Saturation was observed when participants' accounts began to reflect recurring structures of experience, indicating that the data were sufficient to capture the core aspects of the phenomenon.

## Researcher Reflexivity and Bracketing

Given the interpretive nature of phenomenological research, the researchers engaged in reflexivity throughout the study. This involved a continuous examination of their own assumptions, experiences, and potential biases related to education, labor, and rural life.

Bracketing was practiced by consciously setting aside prior expectations in order to attend more closely to participants' descriptions. Reflective notes were maintained during data collection and analysis to document emerging thoughts and to monitor how interpretations were formed. This process helped ensure that the findings remained grounded in participants' accounts rather than being shaped by preconceived ideas.

## Trustworthiness of the Study

To ensure rigor, the study adhered to established criteria for trustworthiness. Credibility was supported through prolonged engagement with participants and member checking, where participants reviewed summaries of their responses for accuracy. Dependability was addressed through clear documentation of research procedures, allowing the process to be followed and examined. Confirmability was ensured by grounding interpretations in the data and maintaining an audit trail of analytical decisions. Transferability was supported through detailed descriptions of the research context and participants, enabling readers to assess the applicability of the findings to similar settings.

## Ethical Considerations

Ethical standards were observed throughout the conduct of the study. Participants were informed of the purpose of the research, the nature of their involvement, and their right to withdraw at any point without consequence. Written informed consent was obtained prior to data collection.

Confidentiality was maintained through the use of pseudonyms, and all identifying information was removed from the transcripts and final report. Data were stored securely and accessed only by the researchers. Care was taken to conduct interviews in a manner that respected participants' dignity and well-being, particularly when discussing experiences that may involve difficulty or strain.

## RESULTS

The analysis of participants' narratives reveals that the lived experiences of student farmers are structured through a continuous engagement with schooling and agricultural labor, both of which are embedded within family life. These experiences do not unfold in separate spheres but are interwoven across the day, shaping how students organize their routines, respond to challenges, and interpret their roles.

Five superordinate themes emerged from the data: (1) living a split day life shaped by schooling, farming, and family context, (2) managing academic engagement under conditions of limited time, (3) experiencing challenges in balancing school and farming responsibilities, (4) coping through adjustment, support, and sustained participation, and (5) personal growth, motivation, and meaning construction. Each theme is composed of subthemes that reflect distinct yet interconnected aspects of experience.

### Living a Split Day Life Shaped by Schooling, Farming, and Family Context

Participants describe their daily lives as structured through a continuous sequence of responsibilities that begin early in the morning and extend into the evening. Schooling, farming, and family obligations are not experienced

as separate activities but as interconnected components of a single routine. This pattern reflects a way of living in which balancing roles is not an occasional adjustment but an ongoing condition.

### **Structured Daily Sequencing of Roles**

Participants consistently organize their day through a sequence that accommodates both farming and schooling. The day often begins with agricultural tasks, followed by school attendance, and continues with either additional farm work or academic requirements. This sequencing provides a sense of order, allowing students to manage multiple responsibilities within limited time.

Rather than following a rigid schedule, this structure remains flexible, shaped by the demands of the farm, school requirements, and household needs. Students adjust the timing of tasks based on urgency and availability, creating a routine that is responsive rather than fixed. Over time, this sequencing becomes habitual, forming the basis of how they navigate daily life.

### **Persistent Physical Fatigue as a Normalized Condition**

Physical fatigue emerges as a constant presence in participants' accounts. Farming tasks require sustained effort, often involving manual labor under physically demanding conditions. This fatigue is not described as an occasional challenge but as a regular aspect of daily life.

Despite its impact, fatigue is not framed as a barrier that prevents participation. Instead, it is accepted as part of the routine. Participants continue to attend school and complete tasks while experiencing exhaustion, suggesting that fatigue has been integrated into their understanding of what daily life entails.

### **Early and Continuous Exposure to Farming Alongside Schooling**

Participants' involvement in farming is not a recent development but begins early in their lives. This early exposure shapes how they perceive their responsibilities, making the integration of school and farm work appear natural rather than disruptive.

Because farming has been part of their routine since childhood, students do not experience the dual role as a sudden burden. Instead, it is understood as a continuation of established practices within the household. This long-term exposure contributes to the normalization of balancing multiple responsibilities.

### **Farming Embedded in Family Life and Shared Household Responsibility**

Farming is closely tied to family life, with tasks distributed among household members. Participants describe working alongside parents and siblings, contributing to a collective effort that sustains the family's livelihood.

This shared arrangement shapes how responsibilities are experienced. Rather than viewing farming as an individual obligation, participants understand it as part of a broader system of cooperation. Family involvement provides both practical support and a framework through which responsibilities are understood and justified.

### **Limited Personal Time and Continuous Engagement Across the Day**

The combination of schooling and farming results in limited personal time. Participants describe days that are fully occupied, leaving little opportunity for rest or leisure. Activities are organized around fulfilling responsibilities, with few intervals dedicated to personal pursuits.

This continuous engagement contributes to a sense of extended effort, where the day is experienced as a series of tasks rather than distinct periods of activity. Personal time, when it occurs, is often brief and shaped by remaining energy after completing required tasks.

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## **Managing Academic Engagement Under Conditions of Limited Time**

Academic participation is shaped by the constraints of time and energy. Rather than disengaging from schooling, participants adapt how they engage with academic tasks, finding ways to maintain involvement despite limited resources.

### **Fragmented Study Time and Compressed Academic Preparation**

Participants often study in short intervals rather than extended periods. Academic tasks are completed during available gaps, such as late evenings or brief moments between responsibilities. This fragmentation affects how students engage with learning, as sustained focus becomes difficult to maintain.

Preparation for classes is often compressed into limited time, resulting in rushed or incomplete work. Despite this, students continue to meet academic requirements, demonstrating a commitment to schooling even under constrained conditions.

### **Prioritization and Adjustment of Academic Tasks**

Students prioritize tasks based on urgency, deadlines, and available time. Academic responsibilities are adjusted to fit within existing schedules, with some tasks delayed or modified to accommodate farming duties.

This process of prioritization reflects a practical approach to managing competing demands. Rather than attempting to complete all tasks equally, participants make decisions about where to allocate effort, balancing immediate needs with long-term goals.

### **Sustained School Attendance Despite Constraints**

Despite the challenges associated with balancing roles, participants maintain regular school attendance. This persistence indicates that schooling remains a central aspect of their lives, even when engagement is shaped by limitation.

Attendance is not always accompanied by full participation, as fatigue and time constraints affect concentration and performance. However, the act of continuing to attend school reflects a sustained commitment to education.

### **Experiencing Challenges in Balancing School and Farming Responsibilities**

The coexistence of schooling and farming introduces a range of challenges that affect participants' physical, cognitive, and emotional experiences. These challenges are not isolated but occur as part of ongoing daily life.

#### **Physical and Cognitive Strain**

Participants describe the combined demands of farming and schooling as physically and mentally taxing. Fatigue affects concentration, making it difficult to engage fully in classroom activities. Cognitive strain arises from the need to shift between different types of tasks, each requiring attention and effort.

This strain is experienced as a continuous condition rather than a temporary difficulty, shaping how students approach both schoolwork and labor.

#### **Overlapping Responsibilities and Conflicting Demands**

Situations where school requirements and farming tasks overlap create moments of conflict. Participants must decide which responsibility to prioritize, often resulting in incomplete tasks or reduced engagement in one domain.

These conflicts introduce a form of tension that remains unresolved. Rather than eliminating competing demands, students learn to navigate them as part of their routine.

## **Pressure from Family and School Expectations**

Participants experience expectations from both family and school, each requiring attention and effort. Family expectations emphasize contribution to farming, while school expectations focus on attendance and academic performance.

These expectations are internalized, leading students to hold themselves accountable to both. The resulting pressure contributes to the overall experience of constraint, as students attempt to meet multiple demands simultaneously.

## **Coping Through Adjustment, Support, and Sustained Participation**

In response to these challenges, participants develop ways of managing their situation that allow them to continue participating in both schooling and farming.

## **Continuous Adjustment of Time and Activities**

Coping involves adjusting schedules and activities based on changing conditions. Students reorganize their routines to accommodate immediate demands, shifting tasks as needed.

This adjustment is ongoing, reflecting the absence of a stable or fixed routine. Flexibility becomes a necessary approach to managing daily responsibilities.

## **Endurance as a Central Coping Response**

Endurance emerges as a defining feature of how participants cope with their situation. Rather than seeking to eliminate challenges, students focus on continuing their responsibilities despite difficulty.

This persistence is not framed as a deliberate strategy but as a necessary response to their circumstances. Endurance allows students to sustain participation over time.

## **Role of Family, Peers, and Teachers**

Support from family, peers, and teachers contributes to participants' ability to cope. Family members share labor and provide encouragement, while peers and teachers offer understanding and assistance when possible.

These forms of support do not remove the constraints faced by students but provide moments of relief and reinforcement that help sustain engagement.

## **Personal Growth, Motivation, and Meaning Construction**

Participants attach meaning to their experiences, shaping how they understand their roles and future. These meanings influence their motivation and sense of identity.

## **Responsibility as a Central Value**

Students express a strong sense of responsibility toward their families. Farming is understood as part of fulfilling this responsibility, shaping how participants prioritize tasks and interpret their roles.

Responsibility is not experienced as an external demand but as an internalized value that guides action.

## **Education as a Pathway to Future Possibilities**

Despite challenges, participants view education as a means of improving their future. This perspective sustains their engagement with schooling, even when participation is constrained.

Education is positioned alongside farming, reflecting a dual orientation toward present obligations and future aspirations.

## Development of Resilience and Work Ethic

The experience of balancing school and farm contributes to the development of resilience and discipline. Participants describe becoming more capable of managing responsibilities and adapting to challenges.

These qualities emerge through repeated engagement with demanding conditions, shaping how students approach both current and future situations.

## Reframing Hardship as Meaningful Experience

Participants do not view hardship solely as a burden. Instead, they interpret it as part of a broader process of growth and learning. Challenges are understood as contributing to personal development, influencing how students make sense of their experiences.

The findings show that the lived experiences of student farmers are shaped by the continuous interaction between schooling, farming, and family life. Daily routines are structured through interwoven responsibilities, while academic engagement is maintained under constrained conditions. Challenges arise from physical fatigue, overlapping demands, and competing expectations, yet students continue to participate through adjustment and endurance.

At the same time, participants attach meaning to their experiences, emphasizing responsibility, aspiration, and personal growth. These meanings provide a framework through which students interpret their situation, allowing them to sustain engagement despite ongoing constraints.

Together, these themes reflect a dynamic process in which student farmers do not resolve the tension between school and farm but learn to live within it, shaping both their daily experiences and their developing sense of self.

## DISCUSSION

The findings of this study show that the academic lives of student farmers are best understood not as a matter of balancing two separate roles, but as a lived condition shaped by the constant intersection of schooling, agricultural labor, and family obligation. This pattern is consistent with the study's conceptual framework, which treats student experience as emerging from the interaction of time, labor, and learning within a rural context. The results indicate that these dimensions do not operate independently. Rather, they converge in everyday life and structure how student farmers organize their routines, encounter constraints, adapt to demands, and assign meaning to their situation. In this sense, the framework is not merely descriptive. It helps explain why the experiences reported by participants appear as interconnected processes rather than isolated academic or agricultural events.

The first domain of the framework, the organization of daily life, is strongly reflected in the findings on the split day life of student farmers. Participants described days that begin with farm work, continue through school attendance, and extend into further labor or academic preparation. This pattern suggests that time is not managed as a neutral resource available for individual allocation. It is already claimed by the rhythms of household livelihood, school schedules, and family expectations. What participants describe is therefore less a carefully designed schedule than a mode of living shaped by recurring obligation. This supports Corbett's (2007) argument that schooling in rural communities must be understood within the social and material structures of local life rather than as an activity detached from them. It also resonates with Bourdieu's (1986) view that daily practices are shaped by durable social conditions that influence how individuals perceive what is expected, possible, and necessary.

The findings on structured sequencing of roles further demonstrate that student farmers do not simply move between school and farm as if these were separate settings with clear boundaries. Their routines are patterned, but not stable in the formal sense. Tasks are rearranged according to need, urgency, and available time. This suggests that academic participation occurs within a shifting temporal order rather than under ideal conditions

for study. Such a pattern extends existing research on student work by showing that in rural agricultural settings, engagement with schooling is not interrupted by work alone but is continuously reorganized around it. Staff et al. (2010) and Warren (2002) have shown that work intensity affects academic engagement, but the present findings add a more contextual account by showing how this effect is lived in family based farming where labor is not contractual, time-bound, or easily reducible.

The results also make clear that **fatigue is not incidental**, but constitutive of how learning is experienced. Participants did not present tiredness as a temporary inconvenience. It appeared as a regular bodily condition that accompanies schooling. This is where the framework's second domain, the **experience of constraint and challenge**, becomes especially useful. Constraint is not limited to a shortage of time. It is embodied. The body carries the effects of labor into the classroom, and this affects concentration, comprehension, and academic stamina. In this regard, the study points to a dimension of educational experience that is often overlooked in conventional discussions of school participation. Learning is not only cognitive. It is shaped by physical wear, depleted energy, and the demands already placed on students before formal schooling begins. The findings therefore reinforce UNESCO's (2020) broader call to understand inclusion not only in terms of access to school but also in terms of the conditions under which meaningful participation becomes possible.

The results on fragmented study time and compressed academic preparation further illustrate how constraint operates. Participants remain in school and continue to complete requirements, yet they often do so within narrow windows of time. This indicates that continued attendance should not be read as evidence that the conditions of learning are adequate. Rather, it suggests that participation is sustained through effort under constrained circumstances. The distinction matters. Formal access to education does not necessarily translate into equitable learning conditions. The World Bank (2018) has emphasized that education systems often focus on enrollment while overlooking the conditions that shape actual learning. The present study supports that concern by showing that for student farmers, academic persistence often coexists with reduced time for preparation, limited rest, and compromised attention.

The theme concerning **overlapping responsibilities and conflicting demands** extends this argument by showing that student farmers live within multiple systems of accountability. School expects attendance, deadlines, and engagement. The household expects contribution to agricultural work and responsiveness to family need. Participants do not appear to reject either. Instead, they attempt to satisfy both, even when such expectations are difficult to reconcile. This suggests that the tension they experience is not simply between work and study, but between two legitimate obligations that are each treated as non-negotiable. Here again, the framework helps clarify the phenomenon. Constraint is not merely external pressure. It is internalized through responsibility. What students experience is not only lack of time, but moral and practical pressure arising from their position within family and school structures.

The coping responses described in the results correspond directly to the framework's third domain, the process of adaptation and meaning making. Participants respond to difficulty through adjustment, endurance, and the use of available support. These responses should not be misread as evidence that the problem is solved at the individual level. Rather, they indicate how students sustain participation within conditions that remain structurally difficult. Their routines are flexible because they have to be. Priorities shift because demands compete. Endurance emerges because stable alternatives are limited. Folkman and Moskowitz (2004) describe coping as a dynamic process shaped by context rather than as a fixed set of traits, and the findings of this study support that position. Student farmers do not cope through abstract resilience alone. They cope through everyday recalibration.

At the same time, the nature of this recalibration deserves closer attention. Participants' adjustments are practical, but they are also relational. Family members share labor, teachers sometimes provide understanding, and peers offer social support. These forms of assistance do not remove structural pressure, but they affect how pressure is lived. This is a notable point because it shows that adaptation is not only individual. It is socially mediated. The study therefore extends existing discussions of coping by demonstrating that for student farmers, persistence depends not only on internal discipline but also on whether family and school environments offer even modest forms of accommodation. This is consistent with Lareau's (2011) broader argument that family context shapes

how young people navigate institutional expectations, although the present findings bring that argument into a rural agricultural setting where household labor is central to family functioning.

The findings on **endurance** are particularly significant. Participants do not describe coping in terms of overcoming hardship once and for all. They describe continuing despite it. This distinction is analytically important. Endurance here is not passive resignation. It is an active, if constrained, form of participation. Students remain present in both school and farm even when conditions are physically and mentally taxing. Their persistence reflects commitment, but it also signals the absence of easier options. In that respect, the study complicates celebratory narratives of resilience. The development of persistence and discipline is visible in the data, but these qualities emerge because students must navigate demanding conditions, not because the conditions themselves are educationally desirable.

This point becomes even clearer in the findings on personal growth, motivation, and meaning construction. Participants interpret farming not only as labor, but as family contribution. They also view schooling as a route toward future possibility. These meanings are central to understanding why they remain engaged. The significance of education lies not simply in formal attainment, but in the hope of a life less constrained by the conditions they currently inhabit. At the same time, farming carries moral meaning because it is tied to household survival, responsibility, and usefulness. The coexistence of these two orientations, toward present duty and future aspiration, is one of the study's most important contributions.

This meaning-making process reflects the recursive quality identified in the conceptual framework. Students' interpretations of hardship shape how they respond to it, and their responses, in turn, reinforce how they understand themselves. The findings on responsibility, resilience, and work ethic show that students do not experience hardship solely as deprivation. Many interpret it as formative. This does not mean that hardship should be romanticized. Rather, it means that participants actively construct meaning from their conditions in ways that allow them to continue. van Manen (1990) argues that phenomenological inquiry must attend to the meanings people assign to lived experience rather than reducing experience to external description. The present study follows that orientation by showing that student farmers' accounts are not only reports of difficulty, but interpretations of what that difficulty means in relation to self, family, and future.

The study therefore contributes to the literature in three ways. First, it shows that student farmers' academic lives must be understood through the combined analytic lenses of time, labor, and learning, rather than through educational outcomes alone. Second, it demonstrates that constraint is not singular but layered, appearing as time scarcity, physical fatigue, overlapping expectation, and reduced academic continuity. Third, it shows that adaptation is sustained through both practical adjustment and meaning-making, with family and school relationships playing a mediating role. These contributions respond directly to the gap identified in the introduction, namely, that existing studies often examine working students in segmented ways and do not fully capture how schooling and labor are lived together within rural agricultural households.

Viewed through the study's conceptual framework, the findings suggest that the academic lives of student farmers are shaped by a dynamic interplay of structure and agency. Their routines reflect material conditions they do not fully control, yet they remain active interpreters and organizers of their experience. They do not simply endure agricultural and academic demands. They assign value to them, adjust around them, and continue within them. This is precisely why a phenomenological reading is necessary. It reveals not only what student farmers do, but how they understand what they do and why that understanding matters.

For educational practice, the implications are clear. Academic participation among student farmers cannot be assessed solely through attendance or submission of requirements. These indicators do not reveal the conditions under which participation is sustained. Schools serving rural agricultural communities need to recognize that some students learn under circumstances structured by labor, responsibility, and physical exhaustion. A more context-sensitive response would not lower academic standards, but it would acknowledge that equity requires attention to the lived conditions of learning. The findings therefore support the need for educational arrangements that are responsive to rural livelihood realities while preserving the integrity of schooling.

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## Limitations of the Study

This study offers an in-depth account of the lived academic and farming experiences of student farmers within a rural community in Mankayan, Benguet. While the findings provide a detailed understanding of how students navigate the coexistence of schooling and agricultural labor, several limitations must be acknowledged in interpreting the scope and applicability of the results.

First, the study is based on a small group of ten participants. This is consistent with phenomenological research, which prioritizes depth and richness of experience over numerical representation. However, the findings are not intended to be generalized across all student farmers or rural contexts. The experiences described reflect those of a specific group situated within a particular setting, and variations may exist in other communities with different economic, cultural, or institutional conditions.

Second, the study is limited to a single rural locality where farming is a dominant livelihood. The patterns observed are closely tied to the agricultural practices, family structures, and community expectations present in this context. As such, the transferability of the findings depends on the extent to which similar conditions are found elsewhere. Experiences of student farmers in urban or less agriculture-dependent areas may differ in meaningful ways.

Third, the study relies on participants' self-reported accounts gathered through interviews. These accounts are shaped by memory, reflection, and personal interpretation. While this is appropriate within a phenomenological framework that centers on lived experience, it also means that the findings represent how participants understand and narrate their experiences rather than direct observation of their daily activities. Certain aspects of experience may be emphasized or omitted based on what participants consider meaningful or relevant.

Fourth, although efforts were made to maintain reflexivity and practice bracketing throughout the research process, the interpretation of data remains influenced by the researchers' perspectives. The process of identifying themes and constructing meaning involves interpretive judgment, which cannot be entirely detached from the researchers' own understanding of education, labor, and rural life. Steps such as reflective note-taking and systematic analysis were employed to remain grounded in participants' accounts, yet complete neutrality cannot be fully achieved.

Finally, the study focuses primarily on the perspectives of student farmers and does not include the views of other actors such as parents, teachers, or community members. These perspectives could provide additional insight into how expectations are formed, how support is extended, and how the relationship between schooling and farming is negotiated within the broader social context.

These limitations do not diminish the contribution of the study but instead define its scope. By situating the findings within a specific context and methodological approach, the study offers a focused understanding of how student farmers experience and make sense of their daily lives. Future research may build on this work by expanding the range of participants, incorporating multiple perspectives, or exploring similar phenomena in different settings.

## CONCLUSION

This study examined how student farmers in a rural community in Mankayan, Benguet experience schooling alongside agricultural labor. The findings indicate that education, in this context, unfolds within conditions shaped by continuous work, family obligation, and limited temporal and physical resources. Schooling is not detached from daily life but is carried out within it, often under circumstances that require sustained effort and adjustment.

Participants' accounts show that their routines are organized through a recurring sequence of responsibilities that begin with farm work, extend into school hours, and continue afterward. These activities are not experienced as separate roles but as interconnected demands that define the structure of the day. The absence of clear boundaries

between work and study influences how students engage with learning, as academic tasks are often completed under conditions of fatigue and restricted time.

The challenges associated with this arrangement are not confined to workload alone. They also involve navigating expectations from both family and school, each of which carries its own form of accountability. Students attempt to meet these expectations simultaneously, resulting in a form of tension that is managed rather than resolved. Their responses are characterized by ongoing adjustment, where priorities are continually reassessed in relation to immediate demands.

Despite these constraints, participants remain engaged in their education. Their continued attendance and effort suggest that schooling retains its value, even when conditions are not conducive to sustained academic focus. At the same time, farming is understood as part of fulfilling responsibility within the household, reinforcing its place within students' daily lives. This dual orientation toward present obligation and future possibility shapes how they interpret their situation.

The findings also point to the ways in which students develop forms of persistence, discipline, and adaptability through repeated engagement with demanding conditions. These qualities emerge through practice rather than instruction, reflecting how students learn to navigate their circumstances over time. The experience of difficulty is not framed solely as a limitation but is often understood as part of a broader process of becoming.

An account of student farmers' experiences requires attention to the conditions within which their education takes place. Their engagement with schooling cannot be separated from the labor they perform or the expectations they carry within their families and communities. Understanding this intersection provides a more grounded view of how education is lived in contexts where learning is sustained alongside work rather than apart from it.

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