



TRIALS AND TRIUMPH: LIVED EXPERIENCES OF SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL WORKING LEARNERS IN BALANCING ACADEMIC DEMANDS AND WORKPLACE RESPONSIBILITIES

Eleonor P. Badayos

Rizal Memorial Colleges, Inc. RMC Buildings, Poblacion 8-A, Lopez Jaena and Torres Streets, Marfori Height, 8000 Davao City

ABSTRACT

This study explored the lived experiences of senior high school learners who are simultaneously engaged in part-time employment while pursuing their chosen careers. The purpose of this research was to gain a better understanding of how learners balance their study and work commitments, the challenges they face in doing so, and how they cope with those challenges in order to develop better career guidance programs and learners support services in schools. The data for this study was obtained through semi-structured in-depth interviews, with a sample of nine learners (from a public school system in Samal Island, Philippines) selected by means of purposive sampling. Analysis of the interview data was conducted using thematic analysis, which provided a basis for identifying key quotes, themes, and patterns. The participants offered insight into their experiences as a working learners through their testimonies, describing how they encountered numerous challenges such as limited time and conflicting responsibilities between being a learners and worker along with both physical and emotional stress. In spite of various challenges, learners showed their resilience with their various coping methods such as self-control, seeking social support, having proper time management, and prioritizing tasks. The study showed that working learners need to be provided with more effective career counseling and flexible academic support in order for them to be successful both academically and professionally.

KEYWORDS/PHRASES: *Trials and Triumph, Narratives, Senior High School Working Learners*

INTRODUCTION

I observed that some senior high school learners struggle to divide their time and energy between school work and job duties. This situation can make learning more difficult because students may attend classes while feeling tired, pressured, or mentally occupied by work-related concerns. At the same time, workplace responsibilities may reduce the time they need for assignments, projects, review, rest, and participation in school activities. Because of this concern, I considered it important to explore how senior high school working learners personally experience the challenge of balancing academic demands and workplace responsibilities. Thus, this study focused on the lived experiences of senior high school working learners in the Island Garden City of Samal Division using a phenomenological approach.

In South Africa and the broader African educational context, Kanu et al. (2025) emphasized that students who combine school and work often experience difficulty in managing academic tasks, job duties, and personal responsibilities. Their discussion shows that work-study-life balance becomes a serious issue when learners are expected to perform well in school while also spending time and energy on work. Similarly, Mahoko (2023) explained that rural educational settings may experience limited institutional support, which can make learning adjustment more difficult for students facing social and economic pressures. His discussion suggests that learners in less-supported school environments may struggle more when academic expectations are added to other life responsibilities. Thus, the African context shows that working learners may face pressure not only from school and work demands, but also from the limited support available in their learning environment.

In Brazil, Leal (2025) explained that students from disadvantaged backgrounds may experience difficult educational pathways because social and financial barriers affect their academic preparation. This means that learners who need to support themselves or their families may find it harder to focus on school tasks, especially when economic pressure becomes part of their daily life. In the same context, Kemechian et al. (2023) discussed that decent work, equal opportunity, and career development remain major concerns for individuals facing work-related and social barriers. Their discussion shows that employment conditions and social expectations can increase the burden of learners who are trying to pursue education while preparing for work. Therefore, the Brazilian context reflects how academic success may become more difficult when learners must divide their time and energy between school responsibilities and work-related needs.

In Vietnam, Kieu et al. (2023) explained that technical-vocational education students often need employment tactics and strategies as they prepare for career and professional development in the labor market. This indicates that learners may experience pressure when school activities are closely connected with future work expectations and employment preparation. Likewise, Phan et al. (2025)



discussed that individuals in educational settings may experience role conflict when they are required to manage several responsibilities at the same time. Their discussion suggests that carrying multiple roles can create mental strain, time pressure, and reduced energy for academic and personal tasks. Hence, the Vietnamese context shows that learners may struggle when academic demands, work preparation, and personal responsibilities occur together.

In Metro Manila and other urban areas in the Philippines, Libago et al. (2024) emphasized that being a working student is closely related to academic performance and time management concerns. Their discussion suggests that students who work while studying may have difficulty completing school tasks, attending learning activities, and maintaining enough time for rest. Meanwhile, Remojo and Cacho (2026) discussed the challenge of balancing school, work, and life among Filipino learners who carry multiple responsibilities. Their work points to the possibility of emotional stress and role strain when school expectations and work schedules overlap. Thus, the Philippine urban context shows that working learners may need stronger school support to manage their time, energy, and academic participation.

In the Davao Region, Amago and Gempes (2025) discussed work-life journeys, showing that individuals who carry several roles may face challenges in managing productivity, personal well-being, and daily responsibilities. Their discussion implies that learners who also work may experience similar difficulty when their time and energy are divided across school, work, and family demands. In a related view, Solon et al. (2024) focused on the challenges encountered by working students, especially the need for morale, support, and encouragement while continuing their studies. Their discussion suggests that working learners may experience fatigue, limited study time, and difficulty sustaining motivation when academic and workplace duties occur together. Consequently, the Davao Region context supports the need to explore the lived experiences of senior high school working learners, especially in settings where school-level support may help reduce their burden.

In the Island Garden City of Samal Division, senior high school working learners may experience difficulty in balancing school demands with workplace responsibilities, especially when they are involved in family livelihood, service work, tourism-related employment, or other income-generating tasks. Their work schedules, physical fatigue, transportation concerns, distance, household duties, and limited rest may affect their attendance, completion of assignments, class participation, lesson review, and overall school engagement. Although many studies on working students focus on academic performance, time management, or measurable outcomes, these may not fully capture the personal meanings, emotional burdens, coping actions, and school support needs of senior high school working learners. Thus, a qualitative phenomenological approach was considered appropriate because the study aimed to explore their actual voices and lived experiences within an island-based school context. Therefore, this study was necessary to generate local evidence and school-level policy insights that may help create more responsive, compassionate, and learner-centered support for senior high school working learners in the Island Garden City of Samal Division.

The current study was anchored on Career Development Theory by Super (1990), which explains that career development is a lifelong process where individuals form their self-concept through different life roles. This theory was appropriate because senior high school working learners performed both student and worker roles, which shaped their responsibilities, priorities, and future career direction. It was supported by Social Cognitive Career Theory by Lent et al. (1994), which emphasizes that self-efficacy, outcome expectations, personal goals, and environmental supports or barriers influence learning actions and career choices. This theory helped explain how confidence, motivation, family needs, fatigue, limited time, financial pressure, and workplace demands affected the learners' ability to continue studying and working. Furthermore, the Theory of Work Adjustment by Dawis and Lofquist (1984) supported the study by explaining how learners tried to maintain balance when their school duties and work responsibilities required continuous adjustment.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the lived experiences of senior high school working learners in balancing school demands and work responsibilities in the Island Garden City of Samal Division. I used a phenomenological approach to deeply understand how these learners made sense of their roles as students and workers while managing academic tasks, job duties, family needs, and personal challenges. Through in-depth interviews, I gathered their personal stories, struggles, coping strategies, and insights on how working affected their attendance, participation, motivation, and well-being. This study aimed to give voice to their real-life experiences and to highlight the support they need from teachers, school heads, families, and the school community. By understanding their perspectives, I hoped to provide meaningful recommendations for developing responsive, compassionate, and learner-centered support programs for senior high school working learners.

METHODOLOGY

This study used a qualitative research design, specifically a phenomenological approach, to explore the lived experiences of senior high school working learners in balancing academic demands and workplace responsibilities in the Island Garden City of Samal Division. This design was appropriate because it allowed the researcher to gather rich and detailed descriptions from the learners' personal experiences as students and part-time workers. Through phenomenology, the study focused on how the learners understood their struggles, adjustments, coping actions, and support needs. It also helped identify common meanings and themes from their shared narratives. Thus, the approach provided a deeper understanding of their emotional, academic, personal, and work-related realities.



The researcher observed ethical standards by ensuring social value, informed consent and assent, privacy, confidentiality, justice, transparency, and participant safety. The study aimed to help school heads, teachers, parents, and education stakeholders understand the real conditions of senior high school learners who managed both schooling and part-time work. Before the interviews, the informants were informed about the purpose of the study, their voluntary participation, and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. Since some informants may be below legal age, parental or guardian consent and learner assent were secured when necessary. Their identities were protected through codes or pseudonyms, while all gathered data were stored securely in accordance with the Data Privacy Act of 2012.

The study involved nine (9) senior high school learners from the Island Garden City of Samal Division who were working part-time in certain establishments while studying. They were chosen through purposive sampling because they had direct experience with the phenomenon being explored. The informants were required to be enrolled in Grade 11 or Grade 12, working part-time in food service, retail, small businesses, tourism-related establishments, or other local workplaces, and willing to share their experiences through interviews. The main research instrument was a semi-structured interview guide composed of open-ended questions about their school experiences, work responsibilities, challenges, coping strategies, and needed support. This guide was validated by experts and pilot-tested with a non-participant learner with similar experiences to ensure clarity, relevance, and credibility.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the results generated from the data gathered. It is sequenced based on the objectives of the study as presented in the first chapter.

Experiences of Senior High School Working Learners in Pursuing their Chosen Careers While Engaging in Part-Time Jobs

Results revealed that senior high school working learners experienced time and role struggles as they balanced school demands and part-time work responsibilities. One learner shared, *“the biggest challenge jud kay time,”* while another stated that after duty at the café, there was already limited time left for studying. These narratives show that learners struggled with assignments, projects, research tasks, class activities, and work schedules because their time and energy were divided between school and employment. This finding supports Afandi et al. (2022) and Darolia (2021), who emphasized that working learners often experience role conflict and time constraints that affect academic engagement. Hence, the learners’ experiences reflected the difficulty of maintaining academic responsibilities while fulfilling workplace duties.

The findings also showed that school tasks were sometimes compromised because of work demands and conflicting schedules. One participant narrated, *“naa mi group project then kinahanglan pud ko mu duty sa work,”* showing the pressure of choosing between school activities and job responsibilities. Other learners shared that work in cafés, eateries, stores, repair shops, and welding shops caused lateness, absences, delayed assignments, and reduced study time. This supports Broadbridge and Swanson (2021), Ramos and Cuadra (2020), and Soria et al. (2020), who noted that employment may interfere with academic participation when work hours and school requirements overlap. Thus, the learners’ experiences showed that part-time work can affect school performance when support systems and schedule flexibility are limited.

Moreover, the study revealed that senior high school working learners experienced physical, mental, and emotional exhaustion from their dual responsibilities. One learner expressed, *“kulang ko tulog kay night shift ko,”* while another shared, *“murag ma breakdown ko kay sabay ang exams ug work schedule.”* These statements show that lack of sleep, fatigue, stress, burnout, and emotional pressure affected their focus, motivation, and well-being. This finding agrees with Brough et al. (2021), Hirshkowitz et al. (2020), and Khan et al. (2022), who stressed that multiple demanding roles can result in exhaustion, reduced concentration, and psychological strain. Overall, the results affirm Career Development Theory, Social Cognitive Career Theory, and the Theory of Work Adjustment by showing how senior high school working learners continuously adjusted their roles, beliefs, goals, and support needs while pursuing their education and chosen career paths.

Coping Mechanisms of Senior High School Working Learners on the Challenges of Balancing Their Academic Responsibilities and Part-Time Jobs

Results revealed that senior high school working learners coped with school and work demands through strategic time management and academic prioritization. One learner shared, *“mag plan ko sa akong tasks,”* while another stated, *“Helpful sa akong ang pag lista sa tasks para makita nako unsay unahon,”* showing how planning and listing helped them manage urgent school requirements before reporting to work. They also studied in advance, made simple schedules, used free time in school, reviewed during work breaks, and completed assignments at night after work. This finding supports Calonia et al. (2023) and Rahayu and Listiyandini (2021), who emphasized that prioritization, scheduling, and self-regulated task organization help learners manage academic stress and improve task completion. Thus, the learners managed time-related challenges by organizing their duties and maximizing available time to sustain both academic and work responsibilities.



The findings also showed that learners relied on social and institutional support systems to cope with the pressures of being both students and workers. One participant narrated, “*Dako kaayo tabang ang akong family kay ginadasig nila ko,*” while another shared, “*Akong classmates mutabang pud sa akong,*” indicating the importance of family encouragement and peer academic support. Learners also received help from understanding teachers who gave small extensions and from employers who adjusted schedules during exams or allowed breaks for school tasks. These experiences support Li and Jiang (2022), Kim and Park (2021), and Garcia and Santos (2021), who noted that family, peer, school, and workplace support strengthen learner resilience and reduce stress. Hence, the learners were able to continue their studies and work responsibilities because of the encouragement, flexibility, and assistance provided by people around them.

Moreover, the study found that senior high school working learners coped through self-regulation, emotional control, rest, and personal motivation. One learner stated, “*ginaremind nako akong self nga importante ang education para sa akong future,*” while another shared, “*naga listen ko ug music para makarela,*” showing how they used self-reminders and relaxation to manage stress. They also talked to friends, bonded with family, took short breaks, rested when possible, ate properly, and encouraged themselves that their struggles were temporary. This supports Shi et al. (2025), Torres and Villanueva (2021), and Hernando and Cruz (2021), who emphasized that emotional regulation, self-motivation, and recovery practices help learners remain resilient under pressure. Overall, the coping mechanisms of the learners showed discipline, resilience, and determination in balancing academic responsibilities and part-time jobs despite time pressure, fatigue, and emotional stress.

Career Guidance Program Implications to Promote Sound Career Decision-Making and Employable Skills Among Learners

Results revealed that senior high school working learners gained important insights on the need for flexible and responsive academic support systems. The learners’ experiences showed that balancing school and part-time work became easier when teachers provided extensions, accessible materials, and understanding classroom arrangements. These forms of support helped reduce pressure caused by time constraints, work schedules, fatigue, and academic workload. This finding supports Schneider and Council (2021) and Graham et al. (2020), who emphasized that flexible learning environments and responsive instructional support improve learner engagement and outcomes. Thus, the learners’ insights suggest that schools need adaptable academic support systems that respond to the realities of working learners.

The findings also showed that structured career guidance and life skills development programs are necessary for senior high school working learners. Their experiences revealed that many learners developed discipline, motivation, decision-making, and work-related skills through personal experience rather than formal career preparation. This shows the need for guidance programs that help learners understand their strengths, clarify career goals, manage responsibilities, and prepare for future employment. This supports Butal and Pevida (2025), Farao (2024), and Ilagan and Pesigan (2021), who noted that organized career guidance improves career confidence, employability readiness, and informed decision-making. Therefore, schools should strengthen career guidance programs that combine career planning, life skills training, and practical support for working learners.

Moreover, the study revealed that effective career guidance for working learners should combine academic flexibility with structured developmental support. Flexible school policies can help learners remain engaged in their studies, while career guidance and life skills programs can prepare them for future career pathways. These insights show that working learners need not only academic consideration but also support in time management, decision-making, communication, resilience, and employable skills. This finding agrees with OECD (2021), Tavakoli et al. (2020), and Eze et al. (2026), who emphasized the value of flexible pathways, personalized support, mentorship, and skills training in career development. Overall, the insights highlight the need for responsive school programs that promote sound career decision-making and employable skills among senior high school working learners.

IMPLICATIONS

The findings revealed that senior high school working learners experienced difficulty in balancing academic responsibilities and part-time job demands. Their lived experiences showed time constraints, physical fatigue, role conflict, schedule difficulties, and pressure in meeting both school and work expectations. These realities imply that schools may need to provide more flexible and inclusive academic support for working learners, such as reasonable deadlines, accessible learning materials, and careful consideration of attendance and workload concerns. The findings support Career Development Theory by Super (1990), which explains that learners develop their self-concept and career direction through different life roles and experiences. Thus, the learners’ part-time work experiences contributed to their career maturity, self-awareness, and understanding of future goals.

In addition, the learners developed coping mechanisms such as time management, task prioritization, social support, self-regulation, and emotional coping. These strategies helped them continue their studies while fulfilling work responsibilities, although many of these coping practices were developed through personal effort rather than structured school guidance. This implies that schools may strengthen learner support by integrating time management, stress management, self-discipline, and life skills training into guidance programs. The findings are consistent with Social Cognitive Career Theory by Lent et al. (1994), which emphasizes that self-efficacy, outcome



expectations, personal goals, and environmental support influence career-related actions. Hence, the learners' persistence reflected their belief in their ability to succeed despite challenges, while also showing the need for stronger support from families, teachers, peers, and workplaces.

From their lived experiences, the learners gained insights that emphasized the importance of flexible academic systems, structured career guidance, and employability skills development. These implications highlight that working learners need not only academic consideration but also practical preparation for future career pathways. Schools may enhance career guidance programs by including life skills training, career planning, work readiness, decision-making, and learner-centered support based on the real conditions of working learners. The findings also align with the Theory of Work Adjustment by Dawis and Lofquist (1984), which explains that individuals adjust better when their abilities, needs, responsibilities, and environment are properly matched. Overall, the study implies that responsive school policies and career guidance programs can help senior high school working learners succeed academically while preparing for meaningful employment and future career development.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The Department of Education may develop policies and programs that recognize the needs of senior high school working learners by strengthening flexible learning frameworks, career readiness programs, employability skills training, and access to guidance and counseling services. School principals may support this by implementing flexible academic arrangements, adjusted deadlines, modular options, and stronger collaboration among teachers, parents, guidance personnel, employers, and community stakeholders. Teachers may also adopt responsive instructional practices such as differentiated instruction, alternative assessments, mentoring, and regular communication to help learners manage time constraints, fatigue, role conflicts, and career decision-making. Moreover, schools may establish partnerships with local industries and establishments to provide structured support for learners who are already exposed to work environments. Future researchers may conduct longitudinal, mixed-methods, or comparative studies and include the perspectives of teachers, parents, employers, and school heads to better understand the long-term effects of balancing work and study on learners' academic performance, career outcomes, and well-being.

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