

Working Student Nurses: A Husserlian Phenomenology of Study-Work Balance

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Abstract. This research examined the experiences of 12 nursing students who are working while studying, using Husserlian phenomenology as a framework. The study was conducted at Baguio Central University and employed a qualitative approach, including semi-structured interviews and phenomenological reduction, to uncover the core aspects of their experiences. The participants were twelve fourth-year nursing students who were balancing their academic responsibilities with employment. The data collected were transcribed and analyzed thematically using NVivo software, which facilitated the systematic coding of transcripts and helped identify emerging themes and patterns across participants' accounts, incorporating ideas from the Phenomenology of Perception and Embodiment. The findings indicated that: (1) working nursing students commonly experience the challenges of balancing roles and sacrificing self-care; (2) they use time management as a resilience strategy; (3) they face health strain and emotional exhaustion due to juggling work and study; (4) their views on professional readiness are influenced by support systems and grounding practices; and (5) financial motivation and professional growth help them remain resilient in managing both work and study. Their coping strategies included establishing time-based routines, engaging in spiritual practices, and finding joy through short breaks and leisure activities. Despite facing academic fatigue, emotional stress, and physical tiredness, the participants exhibited a strong sense of agency and were developing their professional identities. The study concludes that while working while studying is challenging, it fosters growth and a goal-oriented mindset among nursing students. They cope by effectively managing their time, maintaining a positive outlook, seeking support, and relying on their faith. Balancing both responsibilities impacts their health and academic performance, although some students become more motivated to succeed. This experience enhances their confidence and skills while also exposing them to the harsh realities of the nursing profession. A sense of purpose, self-confidence, drives their resilience, and the determination to persevere despite fatigue.

Keywords: Embodiment; Identity formation; Intersubjectivity; Resilience; Student nurses; Study-work balance; Temporal discipline.

1.0 Introduction

This study on work-life balance among student nurses is a global issue affecting working students, particularly in the nursing field. This indicates that students are increasingly being required to assume the role of the learner-worker due to financial pressures. Globally, many nursing students are required to balance academic commitments with employment. For instance, in Vietnam, a study found that more than 60% of nursing students had to balance work and research (Abou et al., 2024). In Malaysia, approximately half of the nursing students are employed during their academic programs, and financial constraints have been identified as the primary reason

for this decision (Aryuwat et al., 2023). These figures show the extent of the problem within the region and are therefore useful. This financial necessity is not limited to Southeast Asia. In Kenya, more than 40% of nursing students engage in part-time or full-time employment while studying, with financial limitations being cited as a key motivator (Ministry of Health, Republic of Kenya, 2022a). Brazil further echoes this trend, where studies show that over 35% of nursing students work while studying, navigating both the academic demands of their programs and the practical responsibilities of their jobs (Tiase et al., 2022).

Although there is limited research on the particular experiences of working university students, especially nursing students, the literature remains scarce. Globally, more than half of university students receive remunerated work while studying (Samartzis et al., 2020); the same applies to nursing students, for instance, with 50.3% in Colombia (John et al., 2025). Nevertheless, most studies are conducted on the general student population, and limited efforts are made to examine the specific issues that nursing students face due to their heavy academic requirements and clinical practice schedules.

In addition, the literature reviews revealed that working more than 20 hours per week is detrimental to academic achievement; 44.5% of nursing students in one study received low grades and extended the time to complete the program due to working (Cheng, 2023). Although research has been made on the effects of employment on students' performance, almost none of them distinguished between nursing and other fields without mentioning the additional clinical practices that nursing students have to perform (Shen et. al., 2024).

This missing gap in research calls for a more explicit understanding of how working nursing students navigate between the two roles and how their experiences differ from those of other students. Since nursing education is crucial in the healthcare system, this gap should be addressed to enhance the policy and support services that promote academic achievement and wellness among nursing students (Bifarin, Ticha, & Rabiee, 2022).

Despite this trend being observed worldwide, in-depth, qualitative research on the experiences of working students is scarce, especially in certain countries, such as the Philippines. In the Philippines, nursing students often have to work to supplement their income, and this has become the norm rather than the exception. A local survey among nursing students found that 70.8% of the students hold part-time or full-time jobs while studying in the nursing program, an increase from previous years (Lamswood, 2024). The causes of this trend are multifaceted. Sixty-five percent of the students cited financial need as the reason, while 30% pointed to the need to gain practical experience in the healthcare sector. However, very little research has been conducted on how these students manage the academic and emotional implications of being students while working, specifically within the socio-economic and cultural context of the Cordillera Administrative Region (Lamswood, 2024).

Research on working students is well-established in nursing education, but there is a lack of qualitative, phenomenological studies that aim to understand the subjective experiences of these students. Most studies are quantitative in approach, focusing on aspects such as the percentage of students who work or the costs and benefits of the studies. For instance, the CHED (2018) in the Philippines reported that 45% of the country's nursing students work while studying. Still, the study does not explain the emotional and coping processes associated with this dual role. Furthermore, various studies have been conducted on the challenges faced by working students; however, they do not explain how the student's dual role as a learner and a worker affects their identity, learning process, and coping mechanisms.

Despite the increasing number of working student nurses, a significant gap remains in understanding how their dual roles impact not only their academic performance but also their overall well-being and future career readiness. Existing literature (Krasniqi et al., 2019) highlights the challenges these students face, including difficulties with time management, exhaustion, and social isolation. However, while these challenges are acknowledged, there is limited research on how working student nurses develop coping mechanisms, resilience, and professional competencies through these experiences. Current studies focus on the difficulties encountered, but lack a comprehensive examination of the long-term benefits and adaptive strategies that these students employ to navigate their demanding schedules successfully. As a working student nurse himself who personally pays his tuition fees, the researcher recognizes the importance of shedding light on these lived experiences and the complex interplay between academic responsibilities and financial self-sufficiency.

Furthermore, financial strain exacerbates the difficulties faced by working student nurses, particularly in the

Philippines, where rising education costs and economic instability prompt students to take on part-time employment (Ministry of Health of the Republic of Kosovo, 2022b). While the financial burdens and academic sacrifices of student workers have been discussed, a research gap remains in exploring how financial pressures influence their academic persistence, career motivations, and eventual transition into professional nursing practice. With approximately 216,000 working students in the country, including 8% of college students taking part-time jobs (Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Kosovo, 2020), there is a need for further investigation into the policies and institutional support systems that can better assist nursing students in balancing their dual responsibilities while ensuring their academic success and well-being.

Despite the increasing number of studies examining the experiences of nursing students, a gap remains in the literature regarding the specific issues that working nursing students face, who must balance studies with jobs. For instance, a survey by the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Kosovo (2020) examined nursing students in clinical practice. Still, it did not include students who are also gainfully employed. Similarly, the research by Guardiano et al. (2022) provides valuable insights into the process of becoming a student nurse; however, it does not address the challenges of balancing work and study.

This further emphasizes the importance of conducting more phenomenological research that investigates the everyday experiences of working nursing students, including the difficulties that they encounter, how they deal with these difficulties, and the consequences of this dual role for their learning and well-being. Additionally, there is a lack of comprehensive research addressing the specific situations of nursing students in various educational and healthcare settings, particularly in the Philippines. This is important in light of the gap that needs to be explored to design institutional policies, support programs, and flexible learning strategies that can help nursing students achieve a work-life balance, thereby enhancing their academic performance and professional endeavors.

This study aims to explore the study-work balance among student nurses by examining their lived experiences as they manage academic responsibilities alongside employment. It specifically seeks to understand the coping mechanisms they employ to handle the demands of both roles, as well as the impact of this dual engagement on their academic performance, mental health, and overall well-being. Furthermore, the study examines how these experiences influence their perceptions of professional readiness and career aspirations, as well as how they interpret and develop resilience within the context of balancing their studies and work.

This gap was addressed by this study, which employed Husserlian phenomenology and examined the experiences of working nursing students at Baguio Central University. This allowed the research to explore the positive aspects of working while studying, including the ability to manage emotions and time, as well as the impact of work and study on the body. Using these comparisons with global trends, this research provided a more detailed view of the specific experiences of nursing students in this dual role. The research examined the students' perceptions of the support offered by educational institutions and employers in the work-study balance, and what can be done to enhance it.

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research approach, utilizing Husserlian or Transcendental Phenomenology, to explore the lived experiences of working students at Baguio Central University's College of Nursing and School of Midwifery. As Hwang (2022) explains, qualitative research involves face-to-face interactions in natural settings to gain an understanding of beliefs, thoughts, and perceptions. Grounded in Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenology of Perception and Phenomenology of Embodiment, the study emphasized how bodily experiences shape students' understanding of their challenges, highlighting how exhaustion, stress, and learning are lived through the body. Bifarin, Ticha, and Rabiee (2022) further support the use of phenomenology as a method for grasping the meaning of lived experiences, making it especially relevant for examining how student nurses and midwives navigate time constraints, academic demands, and employment responsibilities.

2.2 Research Participants

The study was conducted at Baguio Central University's College of Nursing and School of Midwifery during the 2024–2025 school year, focusing on fourth-year nursing students who worked while studying. Twelve participants with continuous enrollment from first to fourth year were selected through extreme case sampling to provide in-depth insights into the challenges and coping strategies of balancing academic and work responsibilities. Only

currently enrolled nursing students with relevant work-study experience were included, while those from other programs or without sufficient experience were excluded. Participation was voluntary, and data were gathered through interviews.

2.3 Research Instrument

The primary data gathering tool was a semi-structured interview guide adapted from DeJonckheere and Vaughn's (2019) study, "Semi-structured Interviewing in Primary Care Research: A Balance of Relationship and Rigour." The questions focused on the lived experiences of student nurses balancing work and study, with follow-up questions used to clarify and deepen responses. Keywords were extracted from the original interview development guide to create relevant items, which the panel committee validated before use. Data collection was done through recorded interviews and note-taking.

2.4 Data Gathering Procedure and Analysis

Once the research problem received approval, the researcher obtained authorization from the Graduate School, College of Nursing, and School of Midwifery to proceed with the study. Interviews took place in a secure and comfortable environment, with participants' consent for recording. Informal discussions facilitated open communication, resulting in more in-depth conversations. The tapes were transcribed and analyzed using NVivo to code and identify themes systematically. Following the principles of Husserlian phenomenology, the researcher employed epoché, phenomenological reduction, and eidetic reduction to reveal the core of participants' lived experiences. NVivo's features helped to identify recurring themes such as resilience, time limitations, and identity, which were integrated into a unified narrative using direct quotes from the participants.

2.5 Ethical Considerations

Before initiating the study, the researcher adhered to the essential ethical guidelines to ensure responsible and respectful research practices. Written consent was obtained from school officials to distribute the research tools to the selected participants. Each participant received a letter with the research instrument, which explained that their identities would be kept private in line with the Data Privacy Law; all information would be handled with the utmost privacy; participation was voluntary and indicated by completing the instrument; responses would be presented in aggregate form; and the study was conducted solely to meet academic requirements. Furthermore, the researcher ensured that all sources referenced in the thesis were cited correctly and acknowledged. The author also revealed the use of generative AI technology, specifically ChatGPT (Version: GPT-4, Source: OpenAI), during the writing and editing phases. The AI's role was limited to enhancing language, paraphrasing, correcting grammar, summarizing, and formatting, without influencing conceptual development, data analysis, or result interpretation. All content generated by the AI was thoroughly reviewed and edited by the author, who maintained full responsibility for the scholarly quality, accuracy, and integrity of the final document.

3.0 Results and Discussion

3.1 Profile of Preschool Teachers

This study explores the lived experiences of working nursing students through a Husserlian phenomenological lens, focusing on how they navigate the challenges of balancing academic responsibilities with employment. By examining their day-to-day struggles, coping strategies, and perceptions of resilience, the research reveals a complex interplay between fatigue and growth, as well as sacrifice and purpose. The findings highlight not only the burdens these students carry but also the transformative impact of their dual roles on their personal and professional development.

3.2 Struggling Between Two Worlds: The Daily Tug-of-War of Roles

Working nursing students navigate a constant tug-of-war between the roles of being a student and an employee, resulting in significant physical and mental strain. Most participants described their daily routines as exhausting, with overlapping academic and job demands pulling them in different directions. This conflict often manifested as mental distraction, fatigue, and self-doubt. One participant shared, "*Addaak iti trabaho ngem ti panunot ko ket agreview para kadagiti exam ko*" (I am physically at work, but mentally reviewing for my exams). Another echoed this by stating, "*Addaak klase ngem ti panunot ko ket adda idiay trabaho*" (My body is in class, but my mind is at work). These dual-role conflicts caused some to question their competence and capacity to succeed in both realms. The findings align with existing literature that highlights role conflict as a common stressor among student-workers in healthcare fields. For example, DeJonckheere and Vaughn's (2019) identified similar patterns of role strain and performance anxiety among working nursing students, especially when clinical duties clashed with academic

commitments.

3.3 The Cost of Commitment: Sacrificed Well-being and Social Life

Sacrifices in personal well-being and social life are a recurring reality for working student nurses, often resulting in burnout and emotional depletion. The demands of maintaining academic performance and job responsibilities leave little time for rest, nutrition, and personal relationships. Nine out of twelve participants admitted skipping meals, losing sleep, and avoiding social events due to their workload. One said, *“Adda dagiti aldaw maminsanak lang ah mangan. Kasapulak nga makaturog ngem jak itulok nga bumagsak ak”* (There are days I eat just once. I need sleep, but I can’t afford to fail). Another lamented, *“Manakaawat dagiti gagayyem ko ta saanak nga kanayon makikadwa kanyada nga rumwar”* (My friends understand now that I rarely join them to hang out or for group study). These narratives resonate with studies by Abou (2024), who found that academic overload reduces students’ capacity for self-care and social engagement, leading to emotional exhaustion. Likewise, Muyambi et al. (2022) reported that prolonged stress in student populations often manifests through poor eating habits, inadequate rest, and isolation, increasing vulnerability to anxiety and depression.

3.4 Resilience in Motion: Learning to Cope, Adapt, and Manage Time

Despite the physical and emotional toll, students reported developing resilience, effective time management, and adaptive strategies to cope with their dual roles. Many participants framed their experience as transformative, emphasizing how juggling work and studies taught them discipline, prioritization, and emotional strength. One shared, *“Nasursurok ay manplaplano sin amin ay banag, siduy di inyat ko ay nabiyag”* (I learned how to plan everything down to the hour. That is how I survive). Another reflected, *“Aw adi narigat manpay ngem amok ay para nan sin awak din am amagek”* (Yes, it is hard. But it is shaping me into a stronger nurse). These insights suggest that the adversity of balancing two demanding roles helped students cultivate skills essential for the nursing profession, such as stamina, planning, and composure under pressure. This is supported by Winkley et al. (2020), who posit that resilience is often built through continuous exposure to stress and adversity. Meanwhile, Cheng et al. (2023) found a strong link between time management skills and academic achievement. These studies confirm that resilience in student nurses emerges not despite hardship, but because of it.

3.5 Between Exhaustion and Growth: Dual Role Impacts on Health and Learning

The dual-role experience has a significant impact on both academic performance and mental health, yet it also serves as a pathway for personal growth and self-awareness. Many students reported experiencing moments of dissociation and reduced cognitive function during lectures or clinical sessions, which resulted in lower academic engagement. One participant said, *“Sometimes I just sit in class and stare at the teacher, but nothing registers because I am too tired from duty.”* Another admitted, *“I cry in silence sometimes because everything feels too much. I try to keep it together, but my body feels heavy all the time.”* These experiences reflect how physical fatigue can disrupt not only memory and comprehension but also emotional well-being. This is affirmed by Aryuwat et al. (2023), who found that fatigue from clinical rotations and part-time jobs impairs attention and learning. Aryuwat et al. (2024) further noted that working students experience a decline in GPA proportional to their hours of employment, while Abou et al. (2024) linked emotional exhaustion to a fragmented identity and internalized stress. However, even in these difficulties, some participants discovered a more profound sense of self-discipline and meaning, reflecting what Lamswood et al. (2024) described as a *“crucible effect,”* where hardship becomes a medium for maturation and emotional endurance.

3.6 Purpose as Power: Resilience and Professional Becoming

Resilience, as perceived by the students, is a lived and embodied trait defined by endurance, adaptability, and a strong sense of purpose. Participants did not view resilience as merely coping, but as actively choosing to persist because of a future they are working toward. One stated, *“What keeps me going is my dream of becoming a nurse. That goal helps me bounce back when things get tough.”* Another added, *“I have conditioned myself to push through, no matter how exhausted I feel.”* Their motivation is not abstract; it is felt daily—in aching limbs, tired minds, and determined routines. This aligns with Merleau-Ponty’s concept of the body as a site of intentional action and perception. The findings are supported by Samartzis and Talias (2020), who noted that a *“purpose-driven coping mechanism”* helps nursing students navigate intense pressures. Additionally, Tiase et al. (2022) found that a well-defined professional identity enhances persistence and buffers against burnout. Through these embodied practices and goal-oriented mindsets, working student nurses forge a path forward, using their struggles not as setbacks but as stepping stones toward becoming competent and compassionate healthcare professionals.

4.0 Conclusion

The findings reveal that working nursing students face significant challenges in balancing their academic and employment responsibilities, often resulting in physical exhaustion, mental fatigue, and social isolation. Despite these difficulties, many develop resilience through disciplined time management, social support, and a strong sense of purpose. While their academic performance and well-being are often compromised, their lived experiences also foster personal growth, adaptability, and a deeper readiness for the nursing profession. The dual role, though demanding, becomes both a burden and a formative journey, shaping them into more focused, resilient, and purpose-driven future nurses. The study found that working while studying is challenging but meaningful for nursing students. Despite fatigue and stress, students developed maturity, focus, and motivation. They coped through time management, support systems, positivity, and faith. While some experienced academic struggles and health issues, others became more responsible and goal-driven. Their dual roles enhanced professional readiness and confidence, though concerns about long-term demands remain. Resilience, defined by purpose, self-belief, and perseverance, was key to navigating these challenges. The College of Nursing and School of Midwifery may offer flexible class schedules and asynchronous modules to support working students. Wellness programs, including counseling and stress-relief activities, should be explored. Faculty advisers can use digital tools to monitor student progress and well-being. Strengthening ties with health institutions for flexible clinical placements is recommended. Finally, peer support groups can foster resilience and shared coping strategies among student nurses.

5.0 Contribution of Authors

Mr. Jesse B. Bantali served as the principal researcher of the study. He led the conceptualization, research design, data collection, and analysis. He also authored the initial draft of the manuscript, integrating key insights and ensuring methodological rigor throughout the research process. Dr. Michael T. Sebulen, as the corresponding author, provided critical guidance and scholarly oversight. He contributed to refining the interpretation of findings, enhancing the discussion and conclusion sections, and ensuring the manuscript met the highest standards of academic writing. He also facilitated the final editing, formatting, and preparation for submission. The successful completion of this study reflects the authors' collaborative efforts and complementary expertise.

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7.0 Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that this research is free from any conflicts of interest. The study was conducted independently, and no financial, personal, or professional relationships influenced its planning, execution, or reporting. All authors affirm that they have no affiliations or involvements that could be perceived as potential sources of bias or conflicting interests concerning the content and outcomes of this study.

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