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Rise and Learn: Understanding the Morning Shift from the Perspectives of Students

Paulino S. Angga*, Hazzell A. Elminero
Davao City Special School, Davao City, Philippines

*Corresponding Author email: paulsped1969@gmail.com

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Abstract. This study addressed the challenges experienced by morning shift students, focusing on their academic performance and well-being. It examined issues such as disrupted sleep-wake cycles, reduced energy levels, and difficulties maintaining focus during early lectures. External factors, including rush hour traffic, early bedtimes, and persistent morning grogginess, compounded these challenges, contributing to social isolation and limited engagement with complex topics. The study also highlighted difficulties in achieving peak alertness due to late-night commitments, time management struggles, and balancing home responsibilities with academic demands, underscoring the gap in understanding how morning shift schedules impact students holistically. A qualitative research design was employed, using interviews to gather in-depth perspectives from morning shift students. The findings revealed that effective strategies, including consistent sleep patterns, calm evening routines, efficient time management, and proper hydration, significantly enhanced students' readiness and performance. Personalized approaches, such as active learning techniques, nutrient-rich meals, and time-blocking strategies, were also found to improve focus and sustain energy throughout early classes. The study concluded that addressing morning shift students' academic and well-being challenges requires a comprehensive approach. Integrating lifestyle adjustments, strategic planning, and personalized routines can enhance their learning experiences and overall health. These insights offer valuable implications for educators and administrators in optimizing support systems for morning shift learners.

Keywords: Academic performance; Students; Morning shift.

1.0 Introduction

Starting the school day early poses significant challenges for elementary students, particularly those in morning-shift classes. Early risers often experience physical, emotional, and cognitive difficulties that hinder their ability to engage fully in academic activities. Disrupted sleep patterns and insufficient rest are common issues as young students struggle to adapt to early morning schedules. Carskadon and Dement (2005) assert that sleep deprivation significantly impacts cognitive functioning, reducing alertness and impairing students' ability to concentrate and retain information.

Owens et al. (2017) further substantiates the negative effects of inadequate sleep, finding that insufficient rest leads to reduced attention spans, academic underperformance, and emotional distress among children. These challenges are particularly pronounced for morning-shift students, who face additional pressures, such as managing early-morning routines, commuting, and preparing for class, often leaving them fatigued and disengaged.

In Davao City, systemic educational issues exacerbate these difficulties. The Department of Education (DepEd-Davao Region, 2020) highlights problems like teacher shortages, overcrowded classrooms, and a lack of essential resources, necessitating double-shifting schedules. While this strategy addresses resource limitations, it introduces challenges for morning-shift students, including disrupted sleep patterns and diminished readiness to participate in learning activities. Realino (2018) observed that early-morning routines disproportionately affect students from disadvantaged backgrounds, such as the Kalagan learners, who face additional barriers like poor study habits, anxiety, and insufficient home support. Educators also report difficulties maintaining students' attention and energy levels during early hours. Fredriksen et al. (2004) emphasize that early schedules often lead to decreased participation and enthusiasm for learning, making it challenging for teachers to foster an engaging and productive classroom environment.

This study, Rise and Learn: Understanding the Morning Shift from Students' Perspectives, explores the unique experiences of morning-shift elementary students, focusing on their challenges and coping strategies. By examining these dynamics, the research seeks to provide valuable insights for educators and policymakers, ultimately contributing to a more inclusive and supportive learning environment for early risers.

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological methodology to explore the lived experiences of elementary students attending morning classes. Phenomenology, as outlined by Moustakas (1994), was chosen for its ability to capture the essence of participants' experiences and perceptions of early class schedules, focusing on academic engagement and coping strategies. Grounded in the strengths of qualitative research (Creswell & Poth, 2018), this approach provided a framework for examining how morning shifts influenced students' academic performance and learning environments. Reflective practices of educators and action research were also integrated to address the challenges faced by students during morning classes. By analyzing nonnumerical data, the study sought to offer insights into supportive interventions that could optimize learning conditions and outcomes for young learners in morning shifts.

2.2 Research Locale

The study was conducted at Davao City Special School, Davao City, during the 2024–2025 school year. Renowned for its inclusive education, the school primarily enrolls special learners while maintaining a small population to ensure personalized educational support. Three elementary students were included as participants, which is sufficient for qualitative research (Creswell, 2013), as the focus is on the depth of data rather than sample size. Their experiences reflect morning-shift learners' challenges and coping strategies, making this school an ideal setting for the study.

2.3 Research Participants

The participants were three Grade 6 learners enrolled in morning shift classes at a local school. They were purposively selected for their direct experience with the challenges of early school schedules, ensuring relevance to the study's focus. Aligned with Creswell and Poth's (2018) recommendation for small sample sizes in qualitative research, this selection enabled an in-depth exploration of participants' perspectives. A homogeneous sampling technique ensured that all participants shared the common characteristic of attending morning classes, facilitating a focused examination of their experiences (Etikan et al., 2016). In-depth interviews were conducted at convenient times, with participants informed of their rights, including the option to withdraw without consequences (Cohen et al., 2018). This approach ensured the collection of rich, relevant data reflective of the academic and personal challenges morning shift learners face.

2.4 Research Instrument

The study utilized an interview guide designed to align with the research objectives, focusing on the challenges morning shift students face, their time-management strategies, and academic engagement issues. The questions were tailored to the participants' context to ensure relevance and depth. A panel of experts reviewed and rated the interview guide, providing feedback that informed revisions and ensured the instrument's validity. This process aligns with Briggs et al. (2012) and Roulston (2010), who emphasize the importance of structured interview

guides in gathering focused, reliable data. Consistency and topic coverage, as highlighted by Creswell and Poth (2018), were maintained to enhance the quality of data collection.

2.5 Data Gathering Procedure

The researcher obtained consent from participants and their guardians, along with participant assent, ensuring ethical compliance in research involving minors (Cohen et al., 2018). Signed consent forms confirmed voluntary participation and approval for audio-recorded interviews. In-depth interviews were conducted to gather detailed insights into the experiences of morning shift students, focusing on their challenges, coping strategies, and academic engagement. Audio recordings ensured accurate documentation. Thematic analysis was applied to identify and present key themes, capturing the essence of participants' experiences.

2.6 Data Analysis

The data collected from in-depth interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis, as Braun and Clarke (2006) outlined. The process involved transcription, coding, and categorization, guided by Creswell and Poth's (2018) framework. Participant responses were transcribed, translated, and reviewed to ensure alignment with the study's objectives. Confidentiality was maintained through data coding, which identified key concepts and recurring themes. Colaizzi's method deepened the analysis, transforming significant statements into formulated meanings and constructing a thematic framework. These steps provided a clear and organized understanding of participants' experiences.

2.7 Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to ethical research principles to safeguard participants' rights and well-being. Informed consent was obtained, ensuring participants and their guardians were briefed on the study's purpose, voluntary nature, and withdrawal rights. Confidentiality was maintained by anonymizing data and securely handling recordings in compliance with the Data Privacy Act of 2012. Risks, such as emotional discomfort, were minimized through sensitive interviewing and debriefing. Participants were selected equitably, and tokens of appreciation were provided as a gesture of gratitude. These measures upheld transparency, respect, and accountability, ensuring the research's integrity and social value.

3.0 Results and Discussion

3.1 Challenges Faced By Morning Shift Students

Table 1 presents morning shift students' challenges, categorized under two major themes: disruption of sleep patterns and energy levels and the impact of early class schedules on productivity, social life, and cognitive performance.

Table 1. *Challenges faced by morning shift students*

Major Theme	Sub-theme
Disruption of Sleep Patterns and Energy Levels	Disruption of Sleep-Wake Cycle
	Morning Grogginess
	Challenges with Adjusting Sleep Routines
Impact of early class schedules on productivity, social life, and cognitive performance.	Cognitive Performance Variability
	Post-Morning Energy Slumps
	Social Isolation

Disruption of Sleep Patterns and Energy Levels

Morning shift students face significant disruption to their sleep patterns and energy levels, as reflected in the subthemes of sleep-wake cycle disruption, morning grogginess, and challenges with adjusting sleep routines. The misalignment of early class schedules with students' natural circadian rhythms makes it difficult for them to maintain energy levels throughout the day. As one student shared,

"*I try to wake up earlier, but my body does not adjust. I am always tired and struggling to focus in class.*"

Despite efforts to wake up earlier, many students experience morning grogginess, significantly impairing their ability to stay alert and concentrate in class. One participant explained,

"*Even if I wake up an hour earlier, I still feel sleepy, and it is hard to concentrate in the first few classes.*"

Furthermore, students often face challenges in adjusting their sleep routines, as the temptation to stay up late, either due to academic work or personal habits, conflicts with the need to wake up early, leading to sleep deprivation. A student noted,

"*I know I should sleep early, but I always stay up late doing schoolwork, and then I am exhausted in the morning*."

Impact of Early Class Schedules on Productivity, Social Life, and Cognitive Performance

The impact of early class schedules extends beyond energy levels to affect productivity, cognitive performance, and social life. The subthemes of cognitive performance variability, post-morning energy slumps, and social isolation illustrate these challenges. Many students report cognitive performance variability, with their minds typically clearer later in the day than in the morning. One participant shared,

"*I feel like I can think more clearly after lunch, but in the morning, my brain is still foggy*."

This misalignment with peak cognitive function hampers their ability to focus and perform well in early classes. Post-morning energy slumps are also frequent, as students experience significant fatigue after their morning classes, impacting their ability to remain productive. As one student described,

"*By the time my last class rolls around, I am completely drained and have trouble paying attention*."

Additionally, early class schedules interfere with students' social lives, as they must go to bed earlier to wake up for morning classes, leaving them out of sync with their peers' social activities. One participant noted,

"*It is tough because my friends stay up late, but I must go to bed early for my morning classes. It feels like I miss out on a lot*."

3.2 Effective Strategies Students Employ to Manage Time and Energy for Early Class Schedules

The findings in Table 2 highlight several major themes related to effective strategies that students employ to manage their time and energy for early class schedules.

Table 2. *Specific strategies or techniques employed by the morning shift students to manage their time and energy effectively*

Major Theme	Sub-theme
Establishing a Healthy Evening Routine	Wind-Down Time
	Avoiding Stimulating Activities
	Streamlined Nightly Schedule
Optimizing Morning Preparations	Efficient Routines
	Energizing Activities
	Hydration and Nutrition
Enhancing Focus and Engagement in Classes	Active Note-Taking Techniques
	Movement Breaks
	Mindfulness Practices

Establishing a Healthy Evening Routine

One significant strategy students use to manage their time and energy for early class schedules is establishing a healthy evening routine, which includes subthemes such as wind-down time, avoiding stimulating activities, and a streamlined nightly schedule. Students allocate specific time to relax and prepare for sleep, signaling their bodies that it is time to rest. One student shared,

"I turn off all screens an hour before bed and read a book instead. It helps one unwind."

This routine is crucial for improving sleep quality and preparing students for the next day's challenges. Students consciously avoid stimulating activities before bedtime, such as using electronic devices or engaging in intense discussions. One participant noted,

"I try not to scroll through social media before bed because scrolling through social media before bed keeps one's mind racing."

Avoiding these distractions promotes better sleep hygiene and helps students feel refreshed. Furthermore, students follow a streamlined nightly schedule, planning tasks for the following day to reduce stress and avoid morning chaos. A student shared,

"I write down everything I need to do at night so I can just follow my list in the morning."

This structured approach reduces decision fatigue and enhances morning efficiency. These findings suggest that establishing a healthy evening routine is essential for improving sleep and readiness for early classes.

Optimizing Morning Preparations

Another key strategy is optimizing morning preparations, which includes subthemes such as efficient routines, energizing activities, and hydration and nutrition. Students implement efficient routines to streamline their morning activities, such as laying out clothes and preparing breakfast the night before. One student explained,

"I always lay out my clothes the night before so I can just get dressed quickly in the morning."

These routines help reduce morning chaos and ensure punctuality for early classes. Additionally, students engage in energizing activities, such as quick workouts or listening to upbeat music, to boost their energy levels. One participant stated,

"I do a quick workout or listen to my favorite podcast while getting ready; it wakes me up!"

Engaging in such activities helps combat morning grogginess and improves alertness for classes. Moreover, students prioritize hydration and nutrition, starting their day with a glass of water and a nutrient-rich breakfast to maintain energy levels throughout the morning. A student remarked,

"I always drink a glass of water first thing in the morning; it helps me feel more awake."

Proper hydration and nutrition are key for cognitive function and sustained energy. These findings suggest that optimizing morning preparations through efficient routines and energizing practices is vital for students to start their day positively and effectively manage their time during busy mornings (Yim, 2024).

Enhancing Focus and Engagement in Classes

The third major theme involves enhancing focus and class engagement, with subthemes like active note-taking techniques, movement breaks, and mindfulness practices. To improve engagement and understanding, students employ active note-taking methods such as summarization, questioning, and using visual aids during lectures. One student noted,

"I take notes in my own words and draw diagrams; it helps me remember better."

These techniques help students stay engaged and improve retention of material. In addition, students integrate short physical activities, like stretching or walking, into their study sessions to maintain focus and energy. A participant explained,

"I take a five-minute break every hour to stretch; it refreshes me."

These movement breaks help counteract fatigue and enhance concentration during long periods of study or class. Finally, incorporating mindfulness exercises, such as meditation or breathing techniques, into their routines helps students clear their minds and reduce anxiety. One student shared,

"I spend a few minutes meditating each morning; it helps clear my mind for class."

These mindfulness practices improve focus, reduce anxiety, and create a more conducive learning environment for students with early class schedules (Renzulli et al., 2015).

3.3 Challenges Associated with Morning Classes Impacting Academic Performance and Engagement in Coursework

Table 3 presents the findings highlighting several major themes related to the challenges associated with morning classes that impact students' academic performance and engagement in their coursework.

Table 3. *Challenges associated with morning classes that impact students' academic performance and engagement in their coursework*

Major Theme	Sub-theme
Challenges of Early Class Schedules	Cognitive Peak and Engagement
	Time Management Struggles
	Social Adjustments
Impact of Home Responsibilities	Disruption of Morning Routines
	Sleep Quality Challenges
Strategies for Improvement	Prioritizing Sleep Quality
	Time-Blocking Techniques
	Active Learning Techniques

Challenges of Early Class Schedules

A significant theme emerging from the findings is the challenges of early class schedules, which include subthemes such as cognitive peak and engagement, time management struggles, and social adjustments. Students frequently struggle to achieve peak cognitive performance early in the day, which affects their ability to absorb complex information during morning classes. One student explained,

"I find it hard to focus on lectures before I have had enough time to wake up."

This challenge can lead to decreased academic performance and lower engagement during key learning periods (Karp & McCarthy, 2016). Additionally, students experience difficulties with time management, as they must balance sleep needs with academic responsibilities. One participant noted,

"I often feel rushed in the mornings, trying to get everything done before class starts, which affects how prepared I feel."

These rushed mornings can negatively impact students' class preparedness, resulting in poorer academic outcomes (Macan et al., 2011). Furthermore, early classes require students to adjust their social activities, often leading to social fatigue. A student shared,

"I have to skip out on social events just to ensure I can wake up for my early classes; it makes me feel disconnected from my friends."

This adjustment can reduce motivation and engagement in morning classes due to feelings of isolation (Cokley & McClain, 2016). These findings indicate that the challenges associated with early class schedules are multifaceted and can significantly impact academic performance and student well-being.

Impact of Home Responsibilities

Another major theme that emerged is the impact of home responsibilities, which includes subthemes like disruption of morning routines and sleep quality challenges. Home responsibilities can interrupt students' morning routines, making it difficult for them to prepare adequately for their classes. One student shared,

"Between getting my siblings ready and dealing with family issues, I often run out of time to prepare for my classes."

These disruptions can reduce concentration and preparedness during morning lectures (Goff & Moller, 2020). Moreover, balancing school-related commitments with late-night responsibilities can hinder sleep quality, thus impacting engagement in morning classes. A participant noted,

"I often stay up late finishing assignments; by the morning, I am too tired to focus."

Poor sleep quality affects cognitive function and academic performance, highlighting the need for better management of home and academic responsibilities (Walker & McCarthy, 2019). These results suggest that home

responsibilities are critical in shaping students' readiness for early classes, and routine disruptions can directly impact their academic success.

Strategies for Improvement

The third major theme is strategies for improvement, with subthemes such as prioritizing sleep quality, time-blocking techniques, and active learning techniques. Students who prioritize maintaining consistent sleep patterns report feeling more alert and ready for early morning classes. One student shared,

"I have started going to bed at the same time every night; it has made a huge difference in how alert I feel in the morning."

Prioritizing sleep helps enhance cognitive function and overall performance in academic activities (Lo et al., 2016). Additionally, students employ time-blocking strategies, allocating specific time slots for various activities, which helps promote a balanced and well-managed schedule. A participant noted,

"Using a planner has helped me manage my time better; I know exactly when to study or do chores."

Time management strategies can improve academic performance by ensuring students are adequately prepared for their classes (Britton & Tesser, 1991). Lastly, incorporating active learning techniques such as class discussions and mnemonic devices fosters interactivity and enjoyment in morning lectures. A student remarked,

"Engaging more in class discussions has made me look forward to my morning lectures instead of dreading them."

Active learning strategies enhance student engagement and improve academic performance (Prince, 2004). These findings suggest that adopting strategies such as improving sleep quality, managing time effectively, and using active learning techniques can help students navigate early class schedules.

4.0 Conclusion

The findings clearly illustrate the significant challenges morning shift students face, primarily stemming from the disruption of their natural sleep patterns and energy levels. The misalignment between early class schedules and students' circadian rhythms leads to difficulties maintaining adequate energy throughout the day, resulting in persistent morning grogginess and difficulty focusing during lectures. Additionally, the conflict between the need to wake up early and the inclination to stay up late for academic work creates a cycle of sleep deprivation that further hampers students' ability to perform optimally. Furthermore, early class schedules contribute to cognitive performance variability, as many students find their mental acuity peaks later in the day, leaving them feeling foggy and disengaged during morning sessions. This situation is compounded by post-morning energy slumps that diminish productivity and affect overall academic engagement. Lastly, the necessity of adhering to an early schedule often isolates students socially, as they miss out on late-night activities with peers, leading to feelings of disconnection. These challenges highlight the pressing need for strategies that can better support morning shift students in managing their academic responsibilities while prioritizing their health and well-being.

The findings reveal effective strategies students use to manage their time and energy for early class schedules, emphasizing the importance of structured routines for academic success. The first major theme, Establishing a Healthy Evening Routine, highlights the value of a wind-down period before sleep. By avoiding stimulating activities and following a streamlined nightly schedule, students can improve sleep quality and reduce decision fatigue, preparing them for early morning challenges. Optimizing Morning Preparations' second major theme demonstrates how efficient routines can ease the chaos of busy mornings. Preparing clothes and breakfast in advance, engaging in energizing activities, and prioritizing hydration help combat morning grogginess and enhance class alertness. These practices improve cognitive function and sustained energy levels throughout the day. Finally, the third major theme, Enhancing Focus and Engagement in Classes, underscores the role of active learning strategies in fostering academic engagement. Techniques such as active notetaking, movement breaks, and mindfulness enhance concentration and retention during lectures. Overall, these findings suggest that structured evening routines, proactive morning preparations, and active learning techniques can significantly improve students' academic performance and well-being in early morning classes.

The findings highlight students' significant challenges with morning classes, emphasizing their impact on academic performance and engagement. The first major theme, Challenges of Early Class Schedules, reveals that students struggle to achieve peak cognitive performance in the morning, which hampers their ability to absorb complex information. This misalignment with natural cognitive rhythms can lead to decreased academic performance and lower engagement. Additionally, time management becomes a struggle as students balance sleep needs with academic responsibilities, often resulting in rushed mornings that negatively affect preparedness. The second major theme, the Impact of Home Responsibilities, underscores how familial obligations disrupt morning routines and hinder adequate preparation for classes. These disruptions contribute to poor sleep quality, impacting cognitive function and academic performance. The third major theme, Strategies for Improvement, offers insights into enhancing academic experiences despite these challenges. Prioritizing sleep quality, implementing time-blocking techniques, and engaging in active learning strategies can improve alertness and performance in early morning classes while fostering better time management and engagement.

5.0 Contributions of Authors

The collaborative efforts throughout the research process were essential to the study's success. While the author took the lead in the conception, design, data collection, and analysis, many aspects of the research involved shared responsibilities. Collaborative writing was pivotal in the manuscript, with co-authors contributing to various sections. For example, the development of the literature review was a joint effort, drawing on the diverse expertise of colleagues who provided valuable insights and perspectives.

Moreover, the research process involved multiple revisions, with co-authors and peers offering constructive feedback to enhance the manuscript. These revisions focused on improving the text's clarity, coherence, and overall flow. The author worked closely with collaborators to incorporate their suggestions, ensuring that the final manuscript met high standards of accuracy and readability. This collective effort in writing, revising, and refining strengthened the study, producing a comprehensive and high-quality manuscript that adhered to established research standards.

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7.0 Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflicts of interest about the publication of this paper.

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