

The Dual Life of Off-Campus Working Students: A Phenomenological Study

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ABSTRACT

Working students often face time constraints, academic pressure, and personal responsibilities while striving to achieve their educational goals. This study explored the lived experiences of off-campus working students who balance academic responsibilities with employment. This qualitative study employed a phenomenological research design to capture the participants' lived experiences. A purposive sample of ten (10) off-campus working students from a selected higher educational institution in the Philippines participated in in-depth interviews. The collected data were analyzed using the Colaizzi method.

The findings revealed three major themes: Bearing the Weight of a Divided Life, which reflects the struggles of managing academic, work, and personal responsibilities; Working Out of Necessity and Hope, which highlights financial needs and aspirations as primary motivations for employment; and Becoming Through Hardship, which describes the development of resilience, discipline, and personal growth shaped by challenging experiences. The results show that participants experienced stress, exhaustion, and academic pressure while balancing dual roles, yet these challenges also contributed to their growth and strengthened sense of responsibility.

Therefore, the life experiences of off-campus working students demonstrate that balancing work and academic responsibilities, despite significant difficulties, fosters resilience and meaningful personal development. It is recommended that higher education institutions implement supportive programs, flexible academic arrangements, and accessible student services to better assist working students in managing their dual roles effectively.

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KEYWORDS: *coping strategies, lived experiences, off-campus working students, student resilience, time management, work-study balance.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The increasing number of working students in higher education reflects the growing economic pressures faced by many college learners, particularly in developing countries such as the Philippines. Many students come from low-income households and must work to sustain their education by covering tuition, transportation, and daily living expenses (Tan, 2023; Pekyar, 2023). Rising educational costs, limited scholarship opportunities, and broader socioeconomic challenges have compelled many students to seek employment outside the university. As a result, off-campus work has become an essential means of financial survival for many learners, shaping their academic engagement and personal development within higher education (Mutya et al., 2022).

Balancing the dual roles of student and employee presents unique challenges that require significant adaptability, discipline, and perseverance. Working students frequently encounter conflicting expectations between academic responsibilities and workplace demands. These competing obligations align with the principles of role conflict theory, which explains how individuals experience stress when multiple roles compete for limited time, attention, and energy (Samaratunga & Kamardeen, 2025). Consequently, working students often face stress, fatigue, sleep deprivation, and limited time for rest or leisure. Despite these challenges, many also develop independence, resilience, and a strong work ethic as they navigate their dual responsibilities

(Acheampong, 2023). These contrasting experiences highlight the complex realities faced by students who strive to achieve both financial stability and academic success.

Employment may influence academic performance in both positive and negative ways, depending on work conditions, job demands, and hours worked (Mergal et al., 2019). While part-time employment may help students develop valuable skills such as time management and financial literacy, physically demanding jobs or long work hours can lead to exhaustion, missed deadlines, and reduced academic participation (Alarilla, 2024). Many off-campus working students are employed in service-oriented occupations such as retail, food service, or security, which often involve irregular schedules and strict attendance requirements. These conditions may hinder their ability to attend classes regularly, complete academic requirements, or maintain focus during lectures (Smith & Ramprogus, 2022).

In the Philippines, the number of college students employed continues to rise. Reports indicate that approximately 216,000 college students—representing about 8% of the total student population—are employed while pursuing their studies (CHED, 2022). While on-campus employment often offers flexible schedules and proximity to academic facilities, off-campus work presents additional challenges such as long commuting hours, physically demanding tasks, and strict workplace policies (El Galad et al., 2024; Bartolome, 2023). These factors may increase stress and create greater conflict between work and academic obligations. Furthermore, off-campus working students often have limited participation in campus activities and reduced access to institutional support services (De Vera, 2020). Despite these difficulties, off-campus employment can also contribute to the development of discipline, responsibility, and life skills that support long-term personal and professional growth (Sebullen & Kitani, 2023).

Beyond academic challenges, balancing work and school can also affect students' physical and mental well-being. Long working hours, particularly night shifts or physically strenuous tasks, may lead to sleep disturbances, body fatigue, and chronic stress (Alhamed, 2023). These conditions may negatively influence academic concentration, classroom engagement, and overall academic performance. Nevertheless, some working students demonstrate remarkable coping abilities by organizing structured schedules, prioritizing academic tasks, and maintaining strong personal motivation (El Dine & Kaoud, 2022). These adaptive strategies illustrate

how students actively manage competing demands while remaining academically engaged.

Coping strategies and time management are crucial for helping off-campus working students maintain a balance between employment and academic responsibilities. Many students develop adaptive techniques, such as prioritizing tasks, using planners, negotiating work schedules, and creating structured daily routines, to manage overlapping commitments (Samaratunga & Kamardeen, 2025). Emotional and social support from family members, peers, and mentors also plays a significant role in sustaining motivation and reducing stress (Tumin et al., 2020). In the Philippine context, cultural values such as strong family obligation, perseverance, and resourcefulness—or *diskarte*—often influence how students respond to adversity and build resilience (Santos, 2022).

In addition to practical and academic challenges, off-campus working students may also experience significant psychological and emotional pressures. Constant exposure to demanding responsibilities, fatigue, and competing expectations can lead to anxiety, burnout, and feelings of inadequacy (Ravhuhali et al., 2022). At the same time, overcoming these challenges can foster emotional strength, self-efficacy, and a deep sense of accomplishment (Condori et al., 2022). These emotional experiences reveal the internal struggles and personal growth associated with maintaining dual roles, emphasizing the importance of understanding students' lived experiences beyond traditional academic performance indicators (Aquino, 2022).

Institutional support also plays a vital role in shaping the experiences of off-campus working students. Universities that offer flexible academic policies, blended learning opportunities, accessible counseling services, and supportive faculty environments can significantly reduce the burden on working learners (El Galad et al., 2024). However, many higher education policies remain designed primarily for traditional full-time students, often overlooking the needs of those who must work to sustain their education. The absence of inclusive policies and targeted support systems may intensify the challenges faced by working students and limit their academic success (Bartolome, 2023; De Vera, 2020).

Although existing studies have examined working students in general, much of the literature focuses on quantitative indicators such as academic grades, study hours, and employment rates. Limited research explores the deeper lived experiences of off-campus working students, whose work environments and responsibilities differ significantly from those

employed within campus facilities. Furthermore, few studies focus specifically on criminology students, whose academic programs often involve demanding schedules, fieldwork, internships, and practical training requirements. These unique conditions may intensify the challenges faced by students who must simultaneously fulfill academic and employment obligations.

Given these gaps, there is a need for an in-depth exploration of how off-campus working students experience and interpret their dual roles. A phenomenological approach is particularly appropriate because it seeks to understand the meanings individuals attach to their lived experiences. Through this method, researchers can explore how students perceive their struggles, motivations, coping strategies, and personal growth as they navigate the realities of balancing work and education. By capturing these lived experiences, the study aims to provide a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the realities faced by off-campus working students.

This study, therefore, seeks to explore and understand the lived experiences of off-campus working students through a phenomenological lens. Specifically, it aims to uncover the challenges they face, the coping strategies they employ, the emotional journeys they experience, and the meanings they construct as they manage their dual responsibilities. The findings of this study are expected to provide valuable insights for educators, higher education institutions, and policymakers in developing supportive academic policies and programs that address the needs of students who must work while pursuing their education. This study was significant as it provided deeper insights into the lived experiences of traffic investigators, particularly in managing the operational, emotional, and psychological demands of accident investigation. It contributed to the development of evidence-based training programs and institutional support systems that can enhance investigators' well-being and professional effectiveness. The findings also offered valuable implications for law enforcement agencies and policymakers in strengthening road safety initiatives and improving investigative practices. Furthermore, this study served as a reference for future researchers seeking to explore occupational stress, resilience, and lived experiences among law enforcement personnel.

2. Methods

This study employed a qualitative research approach, specifically utilizing a phenomenological research design. Qualitative research aims to explore and understand human experiences by examining how

individuals interpret and give meaning to their lived realities. In particular, qualitative descriptive research systematically gathers information to describe a phenomenon, situation, or population from the perspectives of those who experience it. According to Martin and Blinder (2021), this approach provides a detailed profile and description of the essential aspects of a phenomenon based on participants' viewpoints. This method was appropriate for the present study because it allowed the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of off-campus working students. Through this approach, the researcher documented participants' emotions, challenges, coping strategies, and the personal meanings they attach to balancing their academic responsibilities with employment.

This study was conducted among Criminology students enrolled in one of the Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs) within the province of Bukidnon. The province hosts several institutions offering criminology programs that attract students from Valencia City and nearby municipalities in Bukidnon, as well as other areas in Northern Mindanao. Bukidnon was selected as the research locale due to the noticeable number of criminology students who engage in part-time and full-time employment while pursuing their academic studies. This setting provided an appropriate context for exploring the experiences of students who balance employment with the demanding academic requirements of a criminology program. Moreover, the diverse socioeconomic backgrounds of the student population offered a valuable opportunity to examine the varied lived experiences, challenges, and coping strategies of off-campus working students. Such a context enabled a deeper understanding of how these students manage the dual responsibilities of employment and academic life.

The participants of the study were ten (10) third-year and fourth-year Criminology students who were currently employed as part-time workers in fast-food chain establishments while pursuing their academic studies. The study utilized a **snowball sampling procedure**, a non-probability sampling method appropriate for identifying individuals who meet specific research criteria. These students were selected because they were more likely to have substantial experience in balancing academic responsibilities and employment demands. To identify qualified participants, the researcher employed snowball sampling, a nonprobability sampling technique in which initial participants were asked to refer other individuals who met the study's criteria.

To ensure that the participants were relevant to the objectives of the research, the following inclusion criteria were established: (1) the student must be officially enrolled in the Criminology program during the conduct of the study; (2) the student must be employed off-campus, specifically in a fast-food chain establishment; (3) the student must have at least one year of work experience in their current job; and (4) the student must be willing to participate voluntarily and share their lived experiences related to balancing employment and academic responsibilities.

The researcher used a researcher-developed interview guide to collect data on participants' lived experiences. The interview questions were designed based on the general statement of the problem to ensure alignment with the study's objectives. Prior to data collection, the interview guide was subjected to expert validation to ensure the clarity, relevance, and appropriateness of the questions. During the interview process, follow-up and probing questions were asked when necessary to clarify participants' responses and obtain more detailed information about the phenomenon under investigation. With participants' consent, a voice recorder was used during the interviews to accurately capture and document their narratives. This process ensured that the collected data were reliable and could be thoroughly analyzed during data interpretation.

Ethical Consideration

Prior to conducting the study, the researcher secured formal approval from the Misamis University Research Ethics Committee (MUREC) to ensure that all research procedures complied with the institution's established ethical standards. Participation in the study was entirely voluntary, and individuals were invited to participate only after being fully informed about the nature of the research. An informed consent form was provided to each participant, explaining the purpose of the study, the procedures involved, the expected duration of participation, and any potential risks or benefits. The form also emphasized the participants' right to withdraw from the study at any time without any penalty.

To ensure anonymity and confidentiality, participants were not required to disclose any identifying personal information. Each participant was assigned a unique code number, which was used throughout the data collection and analysis process. All collected data, including interview transcripts, field notes, and audio recordings, were securely stored and accessible only to the researcher. The information gathered from participants was treated with strict confidentiality and was used solely for academic and research purposes.

The researcher also ensured that the interview process did not cause any physical, psychological, or emotional discomfort to the participants. The interview guide included a cover letter reiterating the voluntary nature of participation, the confidentiality of responses, and the participants' rights throughout the research process. Upon completion of the study, all collected data were properly disposed of in accordance with applicable data privacy laws and ethical research guidelines to maintain the continued protection of participants' information.

3. Results and Discussion

Three central themes emerged from the analysis and interpretation of the 10 interview transcripts using Paul Colaizzi's (1978) phenomenological data analysis method. These themes include: Bearing the Weight of a Divided Life, Working Out of Necessity and Hope, and Becoming Through Hardship. The researcher transcribed the interviews after each session. Before transcribing, the researcher carefully listened to the recorded interviews to ensure accuracy and completeness of the participants' responses. To generate meaningful findings from the collected data, the researcher applied the seven-step phenomenological data analysis process proposed by Paul Colaizzi (1978), which involves extracting significant statements, formulating meanings, organizing them into themes, and developing a comprehensive description of the participants' lived experiences.

Colaizzi's Seven-Step Method of Data Analysis

1. *Making sense or acquiring a feeling for the protocol*

Before conducting the data analysis, the researcher reviewed the protocols for this study. The researcher also transcribed the interview data and reviewed it several times to ensure consistency between the transcriptions and the recorded interview. This process will check participants on what to convey and ensure nothing is lost during transcription. The written transcription of each participant does not contain their names for privacy and confidentiality.

2. *Extracting Significant Statements*

The next step for the researcher was to identify and extract significant statements from the written transcriptions. Extracting significant statements means that the researcher returns to each transcript and selects phrases or sentences that directly relate to the investigated phenomenon, as described by Colaizzi (1978, p. 59). The significant statements were then organized in a table format and aligned with the participants' expressed feelings and information. Each transcription was analyzed after every interview, and the significant statements (SS)

were coded and numbered consecutively (e.g., SS1–SS10) from Participant 1 to Participant 10. In total, 150 significant statements were extracted from the ten participants who were interviewed (see Appendix 83).

3. Formulation of meanings

After identifying the significant statements from the transcription, the next step in the research process was the formulation of meanings (FMs), derived from these statements, as described by Colaizzi (1978). A total of 150 formulated meanings were generated from the 150 significant statements, with one formulated meaning corresponding to each significant statement. Because meaning formulation is an intricate process, the researcher ensured that the derived meanings did not deviate from the original intent of the data. To maintain accuracy and consistency, the researcher repeatedly reviewed and verified each formulated meaning against the corresponding significant statement. The formulated meanings were numbered consecutively from 1 to 10 (see Appendix 83).

According to Colaizzi (1978), in deriving formulated meanings, the researcher must uncover and illuminate the implicit meanings within participants' descriptions while considering the various contexts and horizons of the phenomenon, and must not generate meanings unrelated to the original data. To remain guided and focused during this process, the researcher consulted with the research adviser for validation. After all formulated meanings were completed, the researcher proceeded to cluster them into thematic categories.

4. Organizing the cluster of themes

The last step was to formulate the cluster themes from the formulated meanings. The 150 coded formulated meanings were organized into three (3) themes. These are:

Theme Cluster 1: Bearing the Weight of a Divided Life

Theme 1	Role Strain
Theme 2	Divided Focus
Theme 3	Mental Fatigue
Theme 4	Sleep Deprivation
Theme 5	Academic Pressure
Theme 6	Schedule Instability
Theme 7	Time Discipline
Theme 8	Role Balancing
Theme 9	Self-Management
Theme 10	Time Efficiency

Theme Cluster 2: Working Out of Necessity and Hope

Theme 11	Financial Survival
Theme 12	Educational Pressure
Theme 13	Family Responsibility
Theme 14	Parental Aspirations
Theme 15	Family Pride
Theme 16	Family Support
Theme 17	Spiritual Reliance

Theme Cluster 3: Becoming Through Hardship

Theme 18	Responsibility
Theme 19	Resilience
Theme 20	Independence
Theme 21	Character Strength
Theme 22	Gratitude
Theme 23	Meaning-Making
Theme 24	Competence Growth

The three theme clusters were reviewed and compared to the original interview transcripts for validation. This was achieved by rereading the transcript and reviewing the FMs and SS to ensure that no theme cluster was added that was not found in the original interview data. Consultations were made with the researchers' adviser regarding the formulated meanings, themes, and the three themes. The three themes are defined below, along with excerpts from the interview.

Discussion of Findings

Bearing the Weight of a Divided Life. This theme reflects the complex struggle faced by off-campus working students as they balance the simultaneous demands of academic responsibilities and employment. Participants described their daily lives as a constant negotiation between school requirements and work obligations, often resulting in divided attention, mental fatigue, limited rest, and heightened academic pressure. Several students expressed that their "mind is divided" between work and studies, illustrating the psychological tension created by overlapping responsibilities. These experiences demonstrate how competing expectations from school and employment produce role strain and emotional exhaustion among working students. The findings are consistent with Role Conflict Theory, which explains that individuals experience stress when the expectations of multiple roles exceed their available time and energy (Goode, 1960). Previous studies have similarly reported that working students often encounter psychological strain, fatigue, and time constraints because academic and occupational demands frequently overlap (Ravhuhali et al., 2022; Acheampong, 2023). Despite these pressures, the participants demonstrated adaptability by developing coping strategies, such as time discipline, task

prioritization, and self-management, to maintain balance in their responsibilities. These adaptive behaviors demonstrate the resilience of working students as they navigate the pressures of their dual roles.

Working Out of Necessity and Hope. The theme Working Out of Necessity and Hope highlights the motivations that drive students to pursue employment while continuing their academic journey. Participants revealed that financial necessity plays a significant role in their decision to work while studying, as many rely on employment to support tuition, transportation, and daily living expenses. Several students said that working enables them to help their families, meet household needs, and sustain their education despite economic limitations. Beyond financial survival, participants also described deeper emotional motivations such as fulfilling parental expectations, bringing pride to their families, and achieving long-term career aspirations. These motivations foster a sense of hope and determination, encouraging students to persist despite the challenges of balancing work and academic demands. Previous research supports these findings, suggesting that financial pressures and family obligations strongly influence students' decisions to work while studying (Kim & Kim, 2023; Santos & Besa, 2022). Moreover, participants identified emotional support from family members and spiritual faith as sources of strength that sustain their perseverance. These motivational factors illustrate how working students transform economic necessity into a meaningful pursuit of educational success and social mobility.

Becoming Through Hardship.

The theme Becoming Through Hardship captures the personal growth and transformation students experience as they navigate the challenges of balancing work and academic responsibilities. Participants described how their experiences as working students helped them develop important qualities such as resilience, responsibility, independence, gratitude, and a stronger sense of purpose. Through continuous exposure to demanding situations, students learned to manage their time effectively, solve problems independently, and maintain discipline in completing both academic and occupational tasks. These experiences also contributed to the development of practical competencies such as communication skills, adaptability, and decision-making abilities, which are valuable for their future professional careers. According to Resilience Theory, individuals often develop psychological strength and adaptive capabilities through repeated exposure to challenging

circumstances (Richardson, 2020). Similarly, Masten's (2020) research suggests that resilience emerges as individuals successfully overcome adversity and learn to adapt to demanding situations. Studies also indicate that working students who manage both employment and academic responsibilities often demonstrate greater independence, self-regulation, and personal competence than their non-working peers (Tumin et al., 2020; Alvarez & Garcia, 2023). In this context, the hardships participants experienced did not merely represent obstacles but also served as opportunities for growth, enabling them to turn their struggles into meaningful life lessons and personal development.

The lived experience of off-campus working students is characterized by a continuous, demanding effort to reconcile their dual identities as learners and employees. Their daily lives are shaped by the persistent realities of bearing the weight of a divided life, wherein academic obligations and employment responsibilities frequently overlap and compete for limited time, attention, and energy. Participants described role strain as they attempted to satisfy the expectations of both school and work, often feeling that they were being pulled in two directions at once, a condition commonly experienced by working students managing multiple social roles (Robotham, 2021). This divided focus affected their concentration in class, study habits, and emotional presence, as thoughts about unfinished schoolwork intruded during work hours, and concerns about job duties persisted during classes. The demands of this dual life also led to mental fatigue, as the constant cycle of attending classes, working shifts, completing requirements, and preparing for examinations left them psychologically drained, consistent with findings that combining employment with academic study increases stress and cognitive exhaustion among university students (Brougham & Haar, 2020). Sleep deprivation further intensified their burden, since academic tasks were often completed late at night after work, reducing opportunities for physical recovery and rest, which studies have linked to poorer academic functioning and reduced well-being among working learners (Hershner & O'Brien, 2021).

Alongside these experiences, academic pressure emerged strongly, particularly when examinations, deadlines, and school requirements coincided with long shifts or sudden changes in work schedules. Schedule instability made this burden more difficult, as irregular, unpredictable work hours disrupted routines and prevented students from maintaining a consistent pattern of studying and self-care, a challenge widely reported among employed college

students (Tumin & Sprague, 2022). Yet despite these strains, the participants did not remain passive in the face of difficulty. They developed time discipline by carefully planning their routines, practiced role balancing by consciously prioritizing urgent school or work demands, strengthened self-management through task organization and emotional control, and developed time efficiency by maximizing even short breaks or fragmented periods for reviewing lessons and completing academic tasks. Such adaptive coping strategies reflect students' resilience and self-regulation skills, which recent research identifies as essential mechanisms enabling working students to persist academically despite competing demands (Credé & Niehorster, 2023). In this way, their divided life was marked not only by struggle but also by adaptive efforts to endure and function under the pressures of overlapping responsibilities.

At the same time, the participants' accounts show that their engagement in work while studying was not merely a matter of circumstance but was deeply rooted in working out of necessity and hope. Their narratives reveal that employment was largely driven by financial survival, as many students worked to cover tuition, transportation, school supplies, and daily living expenses. Work was not described as optional but as a necessary means of continuing their studies in the midst of limited financial resources, a reality widely documented among working college students facing economic constraints (Perna, 2020). Beyond immediate economic needs, educational pressure also motivated them, as they remained strongly committed to completing their degrees and graduating despite the hardships of their condition, reflecting findings that financial hardship often strengthens academic persistence and goal commitment among students (Soria & Horgos, 2021).

Their persistence was closely tied to family responsibilities, with many participants expressing a desire to help their parents, meet household needs, and improve their family's situation. This sense of obligation was closely connected to parental aspirations, as participants were motivated by parents' dreams and expectations that their children would complete the education they themselves were unable to finish, consistent with research emphasizing the influence of family expectations on student motivation and educational attainment (Gonzales, 2022). In turn, the desire to bring family pride emerged as another powerful force, with students striving to make their sacrifices meaningful by succeeding academically and becoming a source of honor for their loved ones. These motivations were strengthened by family support, as encouragement,

understanding, and emotional reassurance from parents and relatives helped participants endure stress and continue striving, aligning with studies identifying social and familial support as protective factors for student resilience and persistence (Wilcox, Winn, & Fyvie-Gauld, 2020).

For several participants, spiritual reliance also became a vital source of strength. Prayer, faith, and trust in God provided emotional comfort, inner calm, and renewed motivation whenever exhaustion, uncertainty, or discouragement threatened to overwhelm them, a coping mechanism supported by research showing that spirituality and religious coping enhance psychological resilience among students under stress (Counted, Possamai, & Meade, 2021). Together, these sub-themes reveal that the participants' work was sustained not only by necessity but by hope: hope for graduation, hope for family upliftment, hope for a better future, and hope grounded in both relational and spiritual support. Their employment thus became an expression of sacrifice, obligation, and aspiration, giving deeper meaning to their daily struggle.

Beyond hardship and necessity, the participants' lived experiences also reveal a profound process of becoming through hardship, wherein struggle functioned as a formative space for personal growth and transformation. Balancing work and studies cultivated responsibility, as students became more accountable for fulfilling obligations, meeting deadlines, and managing expectations in both academic and employment settings. Their narratives also demonstrate resilience, since they continued pursuing their goals despite fatigue, pressure, financial hardship, and emotional stress. Rather than withdrawing from adversity, they developed the capacity to endure, adapt, and keep moving forward (Hartly, 2020)

Through these experiences, many participants also became more independent, learning to make decisions, manage their schedules, solve problems, and take on responsibilities on their own. Hardship further strengthened their character strengths by enhancing patience, discipline, perseverance, and emotional toughness (Aristovnik, Keržič, Ravšelj, Tomažević, & Umek, 2020). Several participants expressed gratitude not only for the opportunity to continue studying but also for their parents' sacrifices and the lessons learned from difficult experiences. This gratitude was closely related to meaning-making, as students came to interpret their sacrifices and struggles as purposeful rather than merely painful (Park, 2021). Their hardships were seen as part of a

meaningful journey toward self-improvement, family upliftment, and future success.

At the same time, their dual life promoted competence growth. Employment exposed them to practical demands that improved communication skills, professionalism, time management, problem-solving, adaptability, and confidence in dealing with diverse people and situations (Jackson & Tomlinson, 2020). Thus, the experience of being an off-campus working student was not only burdensome but developmental. The participants' accounts suggest that hardship did not simply test them; it also transformed them. Through the constant negotiation between academic commitment and economic necessity, they emerged as more disciplined, capable, self-aware, and purpose-driven individuals. Their lived experience therefore reflects not only survival under pressure but also the gradual formation of identity, values, and competencies that prepare them for future personal and professional life (Mezirow, 2021).

Taken together, the three cluster themes present the lived experience of off-campus working students as a complex human reality marked by burden, motivation, and transformation. Their lives are shaped by the strain of divided responsibilities, sustained by necessity and hope, and ultimately reshaped by hardship into a source of growth and self-development. The participants' narratives show that balancing work and education is not simply a logistical challenge but an existential experience that affects their well-being, relationships, motivations, values, and future orientation. Their dual life demands sacrifice, discipline, and endurance, yet it also fosters resilience, meaning, and competence. In this sense, the phenomenon of being an off-campus working student is best understood as both a struggle for survival and a journey of becoming.

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