

The Role of Working Time Flexibility in Shaping Working Students' Strategies Towards an Optimal Balance between Study and Work: A Phenomenological

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the influence of flexible working hours on the development of working students' strategies for achieving an optimal balance between academic and work responsibilities. Using an interpretive phenomenological approach, this research explores the subjective experiences of working students in managing their dual roles. The findings reveal that flexible working hours serve as an essential factor that allows students to develop adaptive strategies such as effective time management, prioritization, and negotiation skills. These strategies help reduce stress, enhance self-efficacy, and improve overall satisfaction. The study emphasizes the need for universities and employers to implement flexible policies that support students' well-being and academic achievement.

Keywords: working students, time flexibility, study work balance, adaptive strategies, phenomenology

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INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of student workers is becoming increasingly widespread in various countries, including Indonesia, as a consequence of economic dynamics and the demands of modern life. Students play a role not only as learners but also as workers contributing to the economy. This situation presents a dual challenge as they must balance academic responsibilities with work demands (Allen et al., 2021).

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Maintaining a balance between study and work is vital for ensuring academic success and psychological well-being. Without balance, students risk experiencing fatigue, burnout, and reduced learning motivation. Flexible working hours are therefore considered a key factor in helping working students manage these challenges effectively.

Despite its importance, few studies have investigated how work-time flexibility influences students' adaptive strategies, especially within the Indonesian higher education context. Therefore, this study aims to explore the role of work-time flexibility in shaping working students' adaptive strategies to achieve an optimal balance between study and work.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Work Time Flexibility

Work time flexibility refers to the ability of individuals or organizations to adjust work schedules to accommodate both personal and professional needs without compromising productivity (Hill et al., 2010). Forms of flexibility include flexitime, teleworking, hybrid, and part-time work arrangements (Kossek & Michel, 2011). Empirical studies show that flexible working hours are positively associated with job satisfaction, well-being, and performance effectiveness (Baltes et al., 1999).

Working Students and the Challenges of Dual Roles

Working students must navigate dual roles—student and employee—which often lead to time and energy conflicts (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Curtis and Shani (2002) highlight that this group faces a high risk of academic burnout and decreased performance. Conversely, work experience can enhance skills, independence, and responsibility (Moreau & Leathwood, 2006).

Work–Study Balance

Work–study balance refers to a condition in which students can meet both academic and work demands effectively without excessive stress (Marks & MacDermid, 1996). The concept draws from work–life balance theory, emphasizing harmony between professional and personal roles (Greenhaus & Allen, 2011).

Adaptive Strategies

Based on Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) Coping Theory, individuals use problem-focused and emotion-focused coping strategies to manage stress. Working students commonly adopt adaptive strategies such as time

management, prioritization, negotiation with superiors and lecturers, and the use of technology (Broadbridge & Swanson, 2005).

Conceptual Framework

This study is guided by two primary theoretical frameworks: Work–Life Balance Theory (Greenhaus & Allen, 2011) and Coping Theory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Work-time flexibility is conceptualized as a moderating factor that enables students to employ adaptive coping strategies for achieving work–study balance.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative approach using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). This design allows for an in-depth exploration of how students experience and interpret work-time flexibility in relation to their academic and professional responsibilities.

Population and Sample

The population consisted of active undergraduate students in Indonesia who also worked part-time, full-time, or freelance. Using purposive sampling, ten participants were selected based on the following criteria: active students with at least six months of work experience under a flexible or hybrid schedule. The sample included five male and five female students from diverse professions such as cashiers, baristas, designers, and administrative staff.

Data Collection

Data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews conducted both face-to-face and online. Each session lasted 45–90 minutes. Interviews explored topics such as time management, perceptions of flexibility, and balancing strategies. All interviews were recorded, transcribed verbatim, and supplemented with field notes.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed thematically following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step process: familiarization, coding, theme identification, theme review, theme naming, and reporting. Triangulation and member checking ensured data credibility.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles of confidentiality, voluntary participation, and informed consent were upheld. Participants' names were anonymized using codes (P1–P10).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Participant Overview

This study involved 10 working students from various universities in Indonesia with characteristics as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. 10 working students from various universities in Indonesia with characteristic

Code	Gender	Age	Type of Work	Work System	Length of Employment (years)
P1	Woman	21	Retail Cashier	Fleksibel	1,5
P2	Man	23	Freelance designer	Remote	2
P3	Woman	22	Office Administrator	Part time	1
P4	Man	24	Online Courier	Flexible	2,5
P5	Woman	21	Photographer	Flexible	1
P6	Man	25	Barista	Shift	2
P7	Woman	23	Customer Service	Hybrid	1,5
P8	Man	22	Waiters	Freelance	3
P9	Woman	24	Admisnistrative Opetator	Part time	2
P10	Man	21	Office Boy	Part time	1

Source: Authors work (2025)

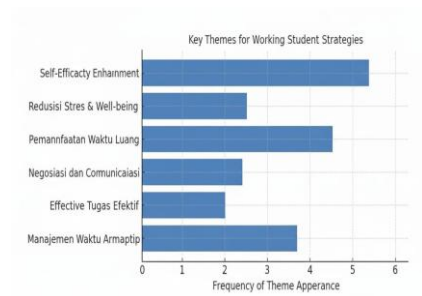
The majority of participants were aged between 21–25 years and worked in flexible or part-time work systems.

Key Research Findings

Data analysis yielded six main themes that explain the role of work time flexibility in shaping study–work balance strategies.

Figure 1.

Data analysis



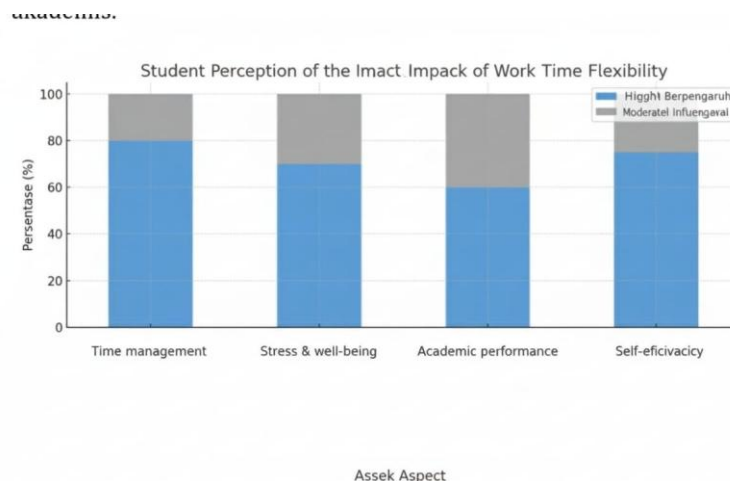
Source: Authors work (2025)

Distribution of Student Perceptions on the Impact of Flexibility

The following graph shows how students rated the impact of work time flexibility on work-life balance and academic performance.

Figure 2.

Data analysis



Source: Authors work (2025)

CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this study indicate that work time flexibility plays a major role in creating adaptive strategies for working students. This aligns with Greenhaus & Allen's (2011) Work-Life Balance theory, which emphasizes the importance of time autonomy in reducing role conflict.

1. Students with flexible schedules are able to structure their daily activities effectively. This finding supports a study by Becker & Schmid (2020), which showed that flexibility improves self-regulation and learning effectiveness.
2. Flexibility also fosters negotiation skills with superiors and lecturers, strengthening interpersonal communication, according to the findings of Alisic et al. (2019).

3. Students with high flexibility show stronger self-efficacy, in accordance with Bandura's (1997) theory which emphasizes the perception of self-control in facing pressure.
4. Although working can reduce study time, flexibility actually provides room for prioritization, supporting Smith & Kelloway's (2021) findings that temporal flexibility increases productivity.

LIMITATION & FURTHER RESEARCH

This study adopted a qualitative approach through Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) with a limited sample size of ten participants, selected using purposive sampling based on a minimum of six months of work experience with flexible or hybrid schedules. Therefore, the main limitation lies in generalizability, as the findings cannot be statistically extended to the broader population of working students, but rather provide an in-depth interpretation of subjective experiences. The study's reliance on participants' reports and interpretations of their experiences also raises the potential for perceptual bias, although data credibility was maintained through triangulation and member checking. Furthermore, the specific focus on the context of working students in Indonesia limits the applicability of the findings to different educational systems or cultures. To deepen understanding, further research is recommended, including quantitative studies with larger samples to test the statistical relationship between work time flexibility, academic performance, and time management. Comparative research between highly flexible work systems (e.g., remote or freelance) and structured work systems (shift or part-time) is also needed to identify different adaptive strategies. Future research could also investigate moderating or mediating variables, such as social support or job type, and analyze the long-term impact of work flexibility on post-campus careers and mental health. Finally, exploring university and employer perspectives on flexible policies that support working students is also recommended.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION

Author: Conceptualisation and Research Design, Data Collection, Methodology, Supervision, Writing Entire Paper, Conceptualisation, Data Collection and Analysis, Editing and Layouting. All Authors have read the final version of the paper.

Declaration of interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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