

# Steadfastly Dauntless: Excellent Students in the Midst of Challenging Working Environment

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**Abstract**—This phenomenological research was conducted to investigate the experiences of working college students that helped them greatly achieve excellence in school as well as in their workplaces. Participants of this study were honor students who are currently working in part-time basis. Results revealed that there are six major themes with corresponding sub-themes in analyzing the life of working student achievers. These are: a.Eco-Social Condition (education support, number of family members and family income); b.Fortitude (nature and hours of work); c.Motivations (family-financial status and personal growth); d. Difficulties (student roles and rest and leisure time); e. Fruits of Labor (academic achievement and work incentives and promotions); and f.Virtues Developed (perseverance and determination).  
**Keywords**—working student, achiever, motivation, fruits of labor

## I. INTRODUCTION

Working is now a fundamental responsibility for many college students. But understanding how employment affects students' educational experiences is complicated by why students work [1]. Currently, many college students face economic hardships that previous generations did not experience because basic financial requirements of receiving a college education, including tuition fees, room and board, text books, and meals continue to rise. Financial aid and parental assistance is not always enough to cover these expenses for the average student (Orszeg, Orszeg & Whitmore, 2001) as cited by the author in [2]. Labor market studies in the Philippines regularly call on the government to improve the overall state of employment in the country and specifically for policies that are geared towards addressing the employment situation of the youth. This proposition is grounded on the fact that the youth comprises nearly two-thirds of the total unemployed and represent a vast underutilized resource in the country [3]. This manifests that youth-employment phenomenon is

existing in the Philippines and mostly, this youth refers to students who are working while studying, most commonly to suffice their education.

According to Furr and Elling (2000), as quoted in [4], as more students are employed, they face having to balance their academic requirements, extracurricular activities, and employment responsibilities to maintain their lifestyles. Because of these multiple responsibilities, their time is limited and must be effectively and efficiently managed. The self-perception of having good time management skills is considered to have a direct correlation to performance levels. Students who perceive themselves as having good time management skills are usually the students who are more involved and have a high desire to achieve, resulting in a higher level of performance [5].

In Cabanatuan City, Nueva Ecija, there are several cases of working college students and there are times that working students engaged in different works outside the campus graduated in college with Latin honors. This is the phenomenon that the researchers want to investigate and is the focus of this research. They want to learn the experiences of the working students who excels in their studies so that they can have a picture of what the achievers are doing despite of busy schedules. Findings of this research can add to a dearth of knowledge regarding the phenomenon of working student achievers that is happening in schools today and can serve as tool for teachers and other school personnel to help and understand them.

## II. MATERIALS & METHODS

This study is a descriptive-phenomenological type of qualitative research design. Descriptive phenomenology was introduced in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century by Edmund Husserl and Alfred Schutz as a major orientation to social science [6] and this is popular nowadays, especially in the field of education. The participants of the study who were chosen purposively are 6 working students who are academic scholars in their respective institutions. They

were coded as P1 for participant 1; P2 for participant 2; up to P6 for participant 6. After getting the permission of the participants and securing the informed consent, the researchers used an interview method in collecting data. Semi-structured questionnaires were used in the interview. All interviews were voice-recorded and transcribed. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data in this study. This is utilized to construct and illustrate thematic networks which is a simple way of organizing thematic analysis in qualitative data [7].

### III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The emerging themes and their corresponding sub-themes that emerged in the narration of the participants were as follows:

#### Theme No.1.Eco-Social Condition

The economic status and family background of the participants could be understood in terms of their educational support, number of family members, and family income. Here are the statements of some participants:

##### 1.1. Educational Support

*P2: My allowance comes from my elder brother, but I am the one who pays for my tuition fee.*

*P3: I do pay for my tuition, allowance and projects since the money that is being given to me by my mommy is not enough. However, sometimes my salary is not enough for all of my expenses, so I need to look for another job.*

*P4: I am receiving money from our town which I am using to pay a portion of my tuition.*

*P5: My parents are not paying a single centavo. Our church is the one paying for my whole tuition fee.*

*P6: During elementary and high school, my parents were supporting me, but now in college, I am the one who is supporting myself.*

##### 1.2 Number of Family Members

*P2: Including my parents, we are eight. I am the third child.*

*P3: I am the third child. We are many, I guess seven, excluding the children of my siblings.*

*P4: We are nine in the family and I am the eldest, and it is really difficult.*

*P6: Six, but including my parents, we are eight. I am the third child.*

##### 1.3 Family Income

*P2: Our highest income from bananas would be P4,000.*

*P3: According to my mother it is around five thousand pesos per month. I am still earning more than her.*

*Personally, every month it is estimated P3,500 up to P10,000 depending on the number of my work hours.*

*P4: If it were just my mother she would not reach P20,000 maybe just around P10,000 to P15,000.*

*P5: Around P10,000 but we do not have our own house. We only live in an apartment.*

*P6: Maybe around P15,000 below, monthly. My father only works as a caretaker of the farm he tills.*

#### Theme No.2. Fortitude

The responses of the participants below pertain to the mental courage they possess in relation to what and how they do in their work. It comprises the nature of their work and the hours they spend in working.

##### 2.1 Nature of Work

*P1: I work as a service crew at Jollibee. I am stationed at the smart counter but sometimes in the kitchen. I was promoted as a team leader that is why I have to know every station. It is really a struggle because I have to be responsible inside the store and not to screw around.*

*P2: I work as an online English teacher/tutor. I teach through skype or AC – that is their own application which is just like a classroom. You always have to correct their pronunciation and grammar because that is the focus. My students' ages range from 4 to 50 or 60 years old.*

*P3: In my two years at McDo, I can be placed at any station. Whenever they lack a crew may it be at the drive-thru then I would go to the delivery station, then to the kitchen and also at the counter.*

*P4: I do multi-tasking. I take every available task (as a house maid); I do not choose – buying groceries, cooking, printing, ironing the clothes – I do it all; but I do not have to worry about the laundry because they have laundry service.*

*P5: I am a cashier at McDonald's. Sometimes, I am sent to other branches to serve as a mascot.*

*P6: First would be being a student assistant. Second would be being a service provider/cashier at Burger King. Third, if I still have available time, I would sell 'puto' to my friends and our neighbors.*

##### 2.2 Hours of Work

*P1: In one day, I usually start from 5pm to 11pm. Maybe 5 to 6 hours every day. During weekends, I have a fixed 8-hour schedule. I have been working there for 10 months.*

*P2: I have been working there for 8 months. I started in August at 5 hours per day which is equivalent to 35 hours per week. I start from 7pm until 12 am. That will be 10 students without any breaks. I will just stand up when I am done.*

P3: I work for a minimum of 6 to 8 hours, but sometimes, I do work for 12 hours.

P4: I currently work from 6pm to 2am. I work for 8 hours at night then I would work from 5 to 8am. That would be 11 hours per day equivalent to 77 hours per week. I can manage it because I live with them. But there is also time to rest.

P5: Usually, when I have classes, my shift would be 4 to 5 hours per day at McDonald's. I will work from 4 to 9pm, so around 10pm will be my free time which will serve as my cleaning time.

P6: From 7 am to 12 noon I work as a student assistant. 1pm to 4pm will be my time for academics. Then from 5 to 10 pm will be my work hours at Burger King. That will be 5 hours every duty. During Saturdays and Sundays, I would go to work at 7am to 9pm for a 10-hour work. I have been working for two years now at Burger King since I started.

### Theme No.3. Motivations

This is about the participants' reasons why they are working while studying. These are classified into family financial status and personal growth. Here are some of the responses of the participants:

#### 3.1 Family Financial Status

P1: The primary reason is that we do not have a source of income. My father does not have a permanent job and just work whenever there is any work offered.

P3: I know that my family cannot support my studies financially that is why I was encouraged to work for myself.

P4: Poverty is the number one reason. I went to Manila and was fortunate enough to find a kind boss.

#### 3.2 Personal Growth

P1: I just really wanted to be independent and not to rely on them. I pushed myself so that I would be prepared for the future.

P5: My number one reason is really to be self-reliant. I just wanted to experience being a working student. I can also relate my current job to my future career because it requires communication skills.

P6: My elder brother and sister served as my inspirations to do this. When they were in high school and college, they were the ones sending themselves to school. I am not being pressured because I also wanted this.

### Theme No.4. Difficulties

Every working student encounters challenges as s/he strives to study and earn an income at the same time. The following responses present the difficulties encountered by the participants in their work and studies. Their student

roles and, rest and leisure time elaborate these complications.

#### 4.1 Student Roles

P1: The usual problem is when there would be no one to be on duty, especially during parties. Sometimes during my class hours and they really cannot find someone to take that shift, my boss would ask me to take it and since it would just be for a day, I would accept it.

P2: That is what I usually fail to do: submit my assignments on time. That is my only problem and my biggest problem. I am also not able to review for our quizzes.

P4: There would be times that during quizzes they would call me, telling me that we no longer have gas and asking me to place an order. Or sometimes when they are in Manila and the maids also went home, they would ask me to go home because there would be a meeting and there is no one to serve.

#### 4.2 Rest and Leisure Time

P3: Time and sleep. I am really craving for sleep.

P4: I would usually go to school without sleep. But somehow, I get used to it. Even though they are not at home, I am still awake until 2 in the morning.

P5: There are times when I am really exhausted and does not have enough sleep. It also came to the point that my parents told me that I have no longer time for them. I do not also have time for my friends but somehow, they understand, even though there are important events that I am not able to attend to.

### Theme No.5. Fruits of Labor

This presents the participants' achievements/excellence both in work and studies which can be classified as academic achievements, and work incentives and promotions. Amidst the difficulties that they encounter, these outcomes show that working students can achieve good standings in school and in their workplaces.

#### 5.1 Academic Achievements

P2: In my studies, aside from being a dean's lister there is also leadership.

P3: When it comes to my studies, I am able to maintain being a dean's lister. At the same time, I am serving as a CLC officer for three years now.

P5: I am also an academic awardee. When I was in first year I was top 3 and now top 4.

P6: I am receiving high grades. I have not failed any subject and I am able to manage my school works even though I am working.

#### 5.2 Work Incentives and Promotions

P1: From a contractual crew, I became a team leader. Then of course, added responsibility and also added salary.

P2: I was given a 100% service score in my teaching. It is their way of giving score regarding your pronunciation, like that.

P3: I was promoted as a regular crew.

P4: My mother passes all the tuition of my siblings on me. So it is like an achievement that when it comes to my work, I can send my siblings to school. That is the achievement.

P5: sometimes my counter has the highest cash so sometimes I am being recognized. It also depends on how you approach the customers. Many queue at my counter because they say that I have the most energetic approach.

### Theme No.6. Virtues Developed

Virtues of perseverance and determination developed among the participants while doing work and schooling. Their perseverance shows their ways to achieve their excellence and that they do not cease to overcome challenges pose by their work and studies. Their determination to study hard made them to create study habits and learning styles that express their eagerness to overcome challenges pose by their work and academic expectations. These aspects of learning serve as their coping mechanisms on balancing their work and studies which helped them to become achievers. Here are some of their responses:

#### 6.1 Perseverance

P3: It is really time management only. I have a set plan for tomorrow. There are times that I set alarms.

P5: To me, it is time management. When I know there is an exam, I read ahead because I cannot review at night. I review at dawn. That became my routine.

P6: At night, I list all the tasks to be done on my small whiteboard at home. I do first the ones needed to prioritize. Time management is my greatest key how I can do tasks simultaneously.

#### 6.2 Determination

P1: I am not really a verbal learner but I like to speak and speak. I like having a partner in studying even if you do not speak to me. Then I walk and walk while reviewing. But I can say that I am a visual learner. I like having (textual) highlights also.

P4: To me, I think I am an audio-visual learner. Then I write it before I read it again.

P5: I am also an audio-visual learner. When it comes to implications, I write it then I make acronyms.

P6: When I am studying, I do not want to have a companion. I do not want noise. I like to make acronyms for memorization.

The emerged thematic network served as the conceptual framework of this study which explains the experiences of the working student achievers that shows that they are really an epitome of steadfast individuals who strive to be excellent amidst their challenging environment.

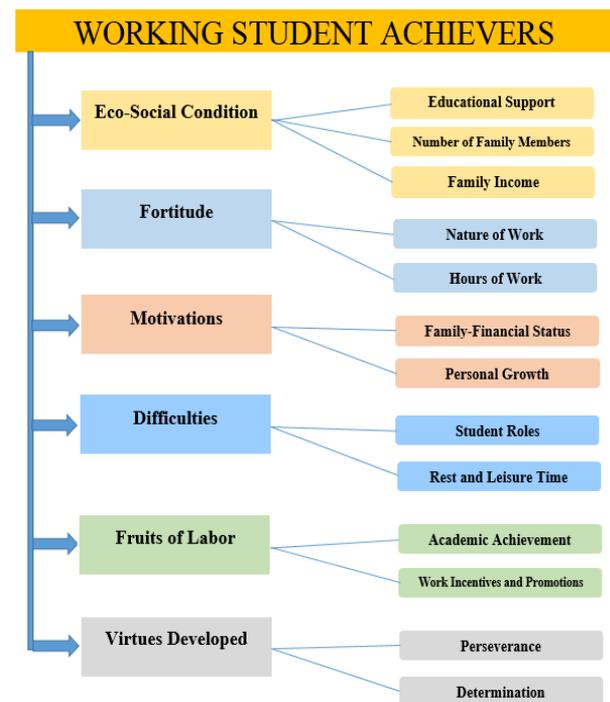


Fig.1: Emerged Thematic Network for Working Student Achievers

The figure presents the six major themes with their corresponding sub-themes in analysing the phenomenon of working student achievers. The eco-social condition is divided into educational support, number of family members and family income. These are primary factors that manifest and affect the economic condition as well as the social status of the working students. The virtue of fortitude which is described as the mental strength and courage of the students to face the challenges they encounter in the working context – what is/are their work and how many hours they consume in working. The motivations are the forces and influences that cause the participants to work while studying. The difficulties are the conflicts encountered by the participants as working students. The fruits of labor are the gains of the working students both in work and studies. The virtues of perseverance and determination indicate the ways which the working students do to achieve their goals and excel in both fields.

#### IV. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following conclusions are drawn in this study: a.) Scholarships and aid from other family members help the financial burden of working students especially in schooling; b.) In the family, the ones who are working are the first and third children. These birth orders of the participants show their willingness to help themselves and their families; c.) Their monthly family incomes are considered under the poverty level; d.) All the participants work for more than the minimum hours per week. This shows that they maximize their available time to work and earn more to support their studies and family as well; e.) The reasons of the participants for working while studying consist of both family and personal causes. But it has shown that all of them attest to financial inability of their parents to support their studies and other needs; f.) Time is the main element for having conflicts in work and studies. All the participants lack the time to rest well, to have time for family, friends and loved ones, and to do school requirements or study their lessons; g.) The participants have achievements both in work and studies. In work, salary increase and promotion are the common rewards for working excellently. In studies, having high grades and being dean's listers are outcomes of studying well; h.) All the participants of this study confirmed that the proper time management is the key to overcome difficulties and achieve excellence both in work and studies; i.) When it comes to study habits and learning styles of the participants, they have differences. They make their own ways to study effectively. But most of them are global learners and visual learners. All of them affirm to the principle of comprehension rather than memorization of academic materials for better learning.

Based from the conclusions, the researchers recommend the following: a.) Knowing that the working students are experiencing hardship in balancing their work and studies, it is advised that the family, friends and loved ones are to give generous support through encouragement and understanding to boost their morale; b.) As proof that poverty is not a hindrance to success, it is suggested that the youth are to make the working students' experiences as one of their inspirations to study hard; c.) To help the class including the working students, it is thought out that the teachers are to create new teaching techniques for better understanding of the lessons in a more effective and efficient manner; d.) For the welfare of the working students inside the school premises, it is proposed that the school administrators are to continue to formulate and implement guidelines and policies that will protect those students; e.) Because the youth are actively participating in the labor force, it is propounded that the lawmakers are to create new bills that will benefit the students especially the working students who excel both in work and studies;

f.) To establish continuity of the findings about working student achievers, it is recommended that future researchers are to conduct and publish further studies regarding this phenomenon either qualitative or quantitative in nature.

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