

Work Life Balance: Qualitative Study on the Dual Role of Working Graduate Student

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KEYWORDS

Master's Students, Working While Studying, Stress, Academic Achievement, Time Management

ABSTRACT

This research aims to determine the extent of stress experienced by graduate students while working, spending time with family, and attending classes, as well as to explore various strategies to cope with the stress they face in managing multiple roles. A qualitative research method was used for this study. Data were collected through interviews and observations. The participants in this study were graduate students who were employed. The collected data were analyzed and conclusions were drawn. The research findings on stress related to the dual roles of work, family, and academic studies experienced by graduate students include academic pressures such as course materials, assignments, class schedules, time allocated for assignments, tuition fees, missed class information, forgetting to complete assignments, and knowledge-related issues. Meanwhile, pressures in the workplace include a high volume of work, complex tasks requiring extra mental effort, short deadlines, inadequate facilities and infrastructure, unsuitable leadership, and difficult coworkers. Additionally, simultaneously juggling multiple roles creates its own pressures, such as the need to complete work and academic tasks at the same time. Various strategies employed by graduate students in managing dual roles aim to minimize stress, resolve conflicts, and help students achieve their desired goals. These strategies are tailored to the type of stress present. Furthermore, each issue requires its own unique resolution, as no two problems are the same.

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INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of students working while pursuing their studies is not new (Mesra et al., 2021). Students are often forced to find a balance between work and study due to financial constraints, including rising education costs and daily needs that must be met (Francis et al., 2025). In addition, there is a strong desire to improve their standard of living. The increase in the number of students taking on this dual role reflects changes in the dynamics of higher education in the modern era. According to data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS), in 2019, approximately 2.2 million students were attending college while working, although the latest BPS data from 2020 shows that around 6.98% of students aged 10–24 face a similar situation.

The demand to meet better living standards can be fulfilled through good qualifications and competencies. Thus, this demand has become one of the triggers for individuals to take on dual roles. Dual roles can be defined as two or more roles performed by an individual at the same time (Hackett et al., 2016). Dual roles are certainly played by many graduate students. Balancing academic, work, and family responsibilities is undoubtedly a challenge. However,

many students have successfully graduated while juggling multiple roles. On the other hand, some students have complained about conflicts between work and academic responsibilities. This has prompted researchers to conduct in-depth studies. In fact, dual roles sometimes lead to increased demands and create many problems. An individual's ability or inability to perform dual roles can affect outcomes such as satisfaction. An imbalance between an individual's work and family roles can trigger conflict (Safrizal et al., 2020). Additionally, dual roles are related to psychological well-being and have a positive correlation with work-related stress.

Balancing college and work is no easy feat, and there are certainly limitations. Students often feel overwhelmed by the demands of college, such as heavy coursework. This situation undoubtedly puts pressure on students who choose to study while working. Studying while working also requires students to manage their responsibilities effectively, from balancing their time between class hours and work hours to handling other responsibilities such as academic assignments and work-related tasks (Subandy & Jatmika, 2020).

Stress among college students has become a serious concern in the context of mental health in higher education settings. Research Cahyadi (2020) reveals that Indonesian college students experience varying levels of stress stemming from academic workload, social pressure, and concerns about the future. When work-related factors are added to the equation, the dynamics of stress become more complex and multidimensional. The dual burden of academic and professional demands has the potential to create significant psychological strain if not managed properly. Part-time work has its own characteristics that can influence students' psychological well-being. Factors such as working hours, work environment, type of work, and relationships with supervisors and colleagues all play a role in shaping work experiences that can impact stress levels (Puspita, 2023). This phenomenon must also be viewed in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has fundamentally altered the landscape of education and employment. The shift to online learning and changes in work patterns have created new adaptive challenges for working students (Besser et al., 2022).

Several studies have examined the phenomenon of students working while studying from various perspectives. Asbari et al. (2020), in an ethnographic study, found that the main motivation of students to work is to gain work experience, learn independently, meet financial needs, and help their families, emphasizing the importance of self-management, while Subandy and Jatmika (2020) found that psychological capital plays an important role in stress management strategies for working students. Hakim and Hasmira (2022) identified time management and prioritization strategies used by working students, Putro et al. (2020) emphasized the role of intrinsic motivation in learning success, and Fiorini et al. (2022) found academic resilience to be a key factor in the success of working students during the pandemic. Ni Wayan Lasmi et al. (2024) defined academic stress as pressure due to the inability to adapt to high academic demands, Pratiwi (2024) added that academic stress has a negative effect on concentration, memory, and problem-solving ability, while Wahyuni et al. (2025) emphasized that educational stress can reduce students' self-efficacy. Research on stress and role conflicts was also conducted by Maharani (2024), who examined the relationship between stress and work motivation; Maharani et al. (2024), who analyzed the influence of work motivation, time management, and work stress on the performance of working students in Bandar Lampung; and Puspita (2023), who emphasized the influence of time management on academic achievement. In the context of health, Verulava and Jorbenadze (2022) examined the impact of part-time

work on student health in Georgia, Zahra et al. (2024) described burnout in student workers in Banda Aceh, Hibatulloh et al. (2025) analyzed work stress in adolescent part-time workers, and Putri & Nurmina (2024) examined differences in self-regulated learning in working students reviewed by gender and academic achievement.

The theory of work-life balance has also been developed by various experts. Dunn (2025) introduced Work/Family Border Theory, which explains how individuals negotiate the boundaries between the work and family domains. Askari (2021) defined the relationship between work-family balance and quality of life. Chaudhuri (2020) highlighted the gap between policy and practice in work-life balance. Pratiwi (2021) specifically researched work-life balance in career women who have families in Indonesia. Although these studies have made significant contributions to understanding the phenomenon of student workers, there is still a research gap, especially in the context of postgraduate students who carry out dual roles in Indonesia. Previous research has tended to focus on undergraduate students or has not specifically addressed the coping strategies used by graduate students in managing role conflicts. Graduate students face more complex challenges due to higher academic demands and, in many cases, greater professional responsibilities.

The purpose of this study is to identify the work, family, and academic conflicts experienced by postgraduate students and to explore the various strategies used to overcome these conflicts. The importance of a study can be seen in the benefits of its findings, which not only contribute to academic knowledge but also improve the quality of life and help anticipate future challenges. The urgency of this research lies in obtaining data and information on various conflicts related to work-life balance in fulfilling dual roles — work, studies, and family — as well as the various strategies employed to address conflicts in fulfilling these dual roles. Given the large number of postgraduate students juggling multiple roles, the findings of this research can serve as a contribution to the thinking of both current and prospective students who are balancing multiple roles during their studies. It is hoped that students will be able to adapt well to their social environment, work, studies, and family, and that they will be able to anticipate various consequences and possibilities that may arise when juggling multiple roles and be prepared with beneficial solutions.

METHOD

This study used a qualitative approach. Creswell (2017) states that qualitative research collects data independently through documentation, behavioral observation, interviews, and audiovisual media. This study focused on the conditions of natural subjects and objects, with the researcher as the key instrument and research results that prioritize depth of understanding over generalization.

The unit of analysis in this study consisted of five postgraduate students who were working while pursuing their studies, with data collection conducted in June 2025. The sampling technique was based on the criteria of individuals who were working while continuing their studies as postgraduate students. The data collection technique used in this study was interviews with the subjects to obtain direct information through conversation and question-and-answer sessions.

In addition to primary data collection through interviews, this study also used a literature review method to examine in depth the academic stress experienced by graduate students who

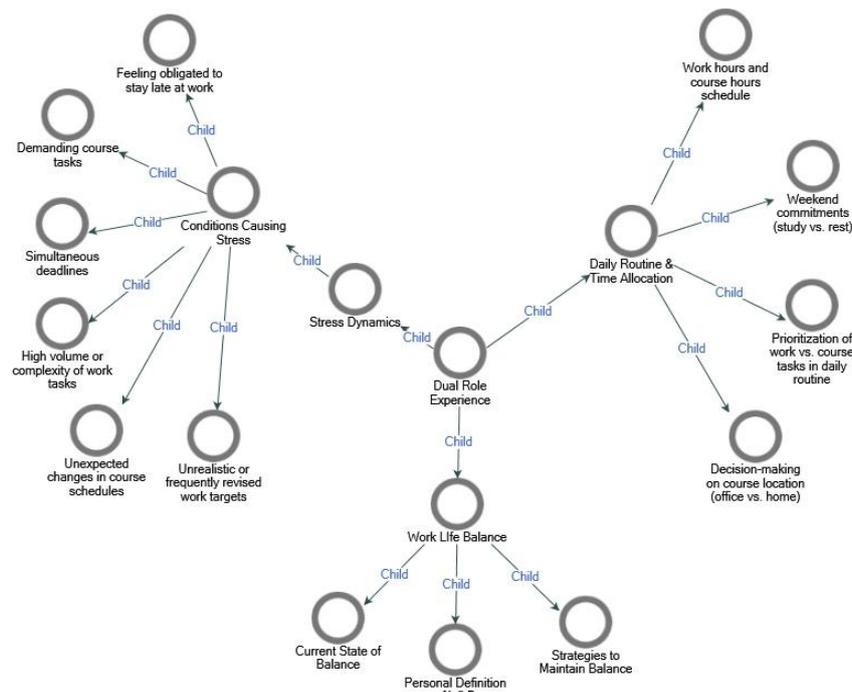


Figure 2. Project Map

Source: Results of research data analysis using NVivo15 (2025)

There are many factors that cause stress due to the inability to manage time, resulting in an inability to achieve work-life balance. Stress can arise and occur due to problems or pressure, whether from oneself or from others. These problems or pressures often cause or trigger stress, including:

1. Issues in the world of higher education

The problems that simultaneously become burdens and cause stress for graduate students in college can be identified as follows:

- a. Problems in the form of lecture materials. These lecture materials are study materials from lecturers to students that are specially packaged and come in various sources and forms with the aim of improving student competence. However, students consider some lecture materials to be difficult to understand and heavy, especially courses in the form of calculations. Difficulties in understanding lecture materials can also be caused by other things. This aligns with the findings of a study conducted on Participant 3 (P3), who stated, “I pursued an undergraduate degree in Industrial Engineering and am now continuing my graduate studies in the Master of Management program. I feel that the course material provided during my undergraduate studies was easier to digest than what is being taught in this graduate program. There are many new things I need to learn, so I often feel challenged. Additionally, the professors expect us to be more critical of the course material provided.”
- b. Problems in the form of coursework. This coursework is part of graduate student learning and is usually done in groups or individually. This coursework is part of the lecturer's assessment of students so that they can be more critical, able to provide solutions to problems that are considered difficult, and able to provide broader arguments. However, a lack of understanding of the material, tight deadlines, an accumulation of assignments, and unstable discussion groups can lead to problems in completing assignments. This aligns

with the results of the study conducted on Participant 2 (P2), who stated, "Sometimes lecturers give assignments with limited deadlines, such as assigning them today and requiring them to be submitted tomorrow. Yet the professor knows that we, who are pursuing a master's degree program, are all working professionals. And if the assignment is not submitted by the specified deadline, the grade we receive will not be optimal." Additionally, Participant 5 (P5) mentioned that "I once received an assignment to create a journal that had to be published on Sinta. It wasn't just one assignment but three identical assignments to create journals for different courses. I felt like getting angry but didn't know where to direct my anger."

- c. Issues related to class schedules. The COVID-19 pandemic has transformed the world of education, forcing it to adapt more deeply to technology. The consequences within higher education, which initially began with in-person classes, then shifted to blended learning, and eventually became fully online learning. There are several consequences of the full online learning model due to the time required to complete course materials and assignments. While in-person classes have materials delivered by instructors according to scheduled days and times, online learning can take three days or even a week to complete. For students, the scheduling of classes is often perceived as inconsistent with the initial scenario when they enrolled, as it may conflict with their work schedules. This aligns with the statement from Participant 1 (P1): "I am pursuing a graduate program at a state university, and initially, I thought the scheduling of classes was better organized. However, what actually happens is that we often have to follow the professors' schedules. Often, the scheduled times differ from what was originally planned, for example: today's class was supposed to be offline, but one hour before the lecture, it was changed to online. If we were informed a few hours beforehand or the day before, it wouldn't be too much of an issue, but it ends up disrupting our schedules."
- d. Problems within peer groups. In postgraduate programs, lecturers usually form Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) as a method that involves guided discussions among a group of people to explore in-depth understanding of a particular topic. FGDs usually involve a small group of participants (4–15 people) who share similar characteristics or experiences related to the research topic. However, issues often arise within these FGD groups due to lack of cohesion. This aligns with the statement from Participant 4 (P4) that "Group assignments often cause conflicts among classmates. Because there are always students who refuse to contribute to group tasks, without any clear reason they choose to be passive, so we get frustrated because the grades in the group will be averaged, even though the passive classmates didn't do any work at all."

2. Issues in the world of work

This was triggered by problems caused by:

- a. The problem of lack of support from immediate superiors and coworkers. Lack of support from superiors can cause employees who are pursuing postgraduate programs to feel isolated, unappreciated, and demotivated. This can also trigger conflict and reduce overall performance. This aligns with the statement from Participant 1 (P1) that "Actually, the working hours at my company are from 8:30 AM to 5:30 PM. Meanwhile, my classes start at 7:00 PM, which is sufficient time to travel from the office to campus. However, what often happens is that after working hours have ended, I feel uncomfortable leaving early,

seeing that my supervisor is still working, and sometimes I am asked to help with tasks that are actually within the scope of my direct supervisor's responsibilities." Participant 4 (P4) revealed that "Whether out of jealousy or something else, my coworkers don't like it when I continue my graduate program, so they often make sarcastic remarks."

- b. Problems with work targets. Problems with work targets can vary, ranging from unrealistic targets, lack of resources, to lack of employee motivation and skills. Participant 3 (P3) said, "I am a salesperson, and my KPI for sales targets has been determined. However, what often happens is that my targets are revised every month without any clear reason. This is very stressful for me because I cannot focus on my work with these constant changes to the targets."

Conflicts experienced by graduate students who perform dual roles, according to the results of the researcher's study, are classified as follows:

1. Personal conflict

The dual role conflict experienced by students, based on the researcher's identification, can be categorized as a personal conflict. This conflict occurs within students as individuals who must choose between various available alternatives. For example, students are often faced with dilemmas in completing academic assignments—with a large number of assignments, they must determine priorities, choose which assignments to complete first, and ensure when the assignments can be completed. On the other hand, work commitments also pose a challenge, making optimal time management essential to complete academic tasks without sacrificing work. This conflict arises due to various pressures, both internal and external, such as academic demands and professional obligations. The difficulty in balancing both reflects the complexity of the personal conflicts experienced by students.

2. Interpersonal conflict

In addition to personal conflicts, students who also work often face interpersonal conflicts. These conflicts can occur in the workplace, both with supervisors and with fellow coworkers. Interactions in the workplace can trigger various forms of conflict, such as between employees and supervisors or between fellow employees.

3. Conflict of interest

Based on research and studies, the dual roles played by students can lead to conflicts of interest. These conflicts arise when students fulfill their roles as students while also working as company employees or heads of households.

As students, they have academic obligations that must be fulfilled, while as an employee, they are also responsible for carrying out tasks assigned by their superiors at work. When faced with high-pressure situations, such as having to complete academic assignments and work tasks simultaneously, students must establish priorities. They must decide which tasks to prioritize, which can be postponed, and the appropriate strategies to manage their time and responsibilities effectively.

4. Realistic conflict

The dual roles played by students can also be identified and categorized as realistic conflicts. These conflicts arise due to differences and misunderstandings regarding how to achieve goals or what goals to achieve.

5. Constructive conflict and destructive conflict

There is something interesting about the conflicts experienced by students when performing dual roles. Based on the statements given, most of these conflicts are classified as constructive conflicts, where the pressure that arises actually encourages efforts to find solutions.

These constructive conflicts can help students build better relationships with the parties involved and provide benefits in the problem-solving process. However, differences in opinion that are not handled wisely have the potential to cause negative impacts, thereby turning into destructive conflicts that are detrimental.

The impact of the dual role of studying while working on graduate students, according to the results of the study, is as follows:

1. The difficulty of time management

Difficulties in balancing time between studies and work are the main challenges faced by graduate students who juggle multiple roles. At moderate work intensities (less than 15 hours per week), some graduate students actually show improved academic performance. This can be explained by the transfer of skills from the workplace to the academic environment, such as discipline, responsibility, and time management skills honed through work experience. However, this positive trend tends to decline when work hours exceed a certain threshold. At this point, physical and mental fatigue, along with reduced study time, begin to negatively impact academic achievements. Therefore, it is important for students to plan their activities carefully, set priorities, and maintain a professional attitude. It is not advisable to bring work-related issues into the campus environment, as this can disrupt focus on studies. Some participants, such as Participants 2, 3, and 5 (P2, P3, and P5), emphasized the importance of professionalism to maintain optimal performance in both areas. Additionally, many workers or employees pursue further education as graduate students to gain experience that will be useful in their current workplace or to seek better job opportunities elsewhere.

2. Academic grades that may not meet expectations

The dual role of being a graduate student and working can affect academic grades in the form of a cumulative grade point average (GPA), especially in courses that require high cognitive abilities and substantial preparation time. Courses such as advanced mathematics, theoretical physics, or philosophy are more susceptible to this impact than courses based on memorization or procedures. Due to the dual role of being a student and a worker, many experience a decline in academic performance due to insufficient rest time and loss of sleep. Participants stated that if graduate students are working, they must be able to manage their time effectively and complete assignments on time. Time constraints also hinder graduate students' participation in collaborative learning activities such as group discussions, team projects, and extracurricular activities, which play a crucial role in developing soft skills. The social dimension of the learning process often takes a backseat as the primary focus shifts to work and academics. Some efforts made by graduate students include more efficient time management and sharing tasks with peers who have higher academic competencies. Participants also mentioned that delaying academic tasks would disrupt other schedules, so completing tasks becomes a priority. For this reason, some graduate students choose to reduce their working hours to focus more on their studies. Based on the research findings, several key points were identified:

- a. The academic performance of working graduate students is not significant. Most students lack leisure time and experience sleep disturbances, which affect their concentration in class.
- b. Balancing time between studying, resting, and working is the main challenge.
- c. Graduate students address these challenges by creating plans, motivating themselves, and maintaining professionalism.
- d. The reasons graduate students work include self-development, expanding their knowledge, and building their social networks.

Academic stress is pressure that arises due to students' inability to adapt to high academic demands, causing discomfort and affecting physical and psychological tension, as well as behavioral changes (Ni Wayan Lasmi et al., 2024). Some sources of academic stress include an unproductive learning environment (noisy or boring), a heavy workload with tight deadlines, unrealistic expectations, loss of control or opportunities, and conflicting demands.

According to Pratiwi (2024), academic stress has a negative effect on students' learning abilities, causing concentration disorders, decreased memory, and difficulties in solving academic problems. Wahyuni et al. (2025) also added that stress due to education can decrease students' self-efficacy, which is their confidence in completing academic tasks effectively.

The phenomenon of students working while studying is not new in Indonesia (Hakim & Hasmira, 2022). Common reasons behind this decision include the desire to gain work experience, learn independently, meet personal financial needs, or even help their families (Asbari et al., 2020). However, students who juggle these dual roles often experience fatigue, lack of rest time, and difficulty balancing work and study (Subandy & Jatmika, 2020).

Students who only attend classes generally have more time to focus on their studies compared to those who also work. Therefore, the success of working students heavily depends on their ability to manage their time and set priorities. According to Putro et al. (2020), learning activities will be successful if supported by intrinsic motivation.

Interestingly, some students feel that work experience makes them more disciplined and responsible. Some even manage to maintain or improve their GPA through good time management and a professional attitude. This reflects academic resilience—the ability to continue performing well despite high pressure (Fiorini et al., 2022). Factors such as self-regulation skills, social support, and long-term orientation are key elements in building this resilience.

Support from family, friends, and the work environment has also proven to be a reinforcing factor. When students feel emotionally and practically supported, they are better prepared to face challenges. This indicates that academic success is not solely determined by individual ability but also by a supportive social environment.

CONCLUSION

This study found that the stress experienced by graduate students who take on dual roles stems primarily from academic pressures — including assignments, lecture schedules, and complex material — as well as workplace demands such as high workloads, limited working hours, and unsupportive work environments. When left unmanaged, this stress impedes work-life balance and negatively affects academic performance. Nevertheless, the decision to pursue postgraduate study while working was generally driven by the desire to enhance skills, expand

career opportunities, broaden professional networks, and achieve personal goals. Despite the challenges of fatigue, time constraints, and psychological pressure arising from managing academic and professional responsibilities simultaneously, many graduate students reported growing more disciplined, resilient, and self-aware through the experience, with support from family, peers, and the workplace proving instrumental in sustaining their motivation. Various coping strategies were employed depending on the nature of the conflict, including setting clear work-time boundaries, prioritizing tasks, managing time efficiently, and safeguarding personal and family time. These findings underscore that dual-role students benefit greatly from encouragement and institutional understanding. For future research, it is recommended that studies employ larger and more diverse samples across different institutions and regions to allow for broader generalization of findings, and that longitudinal designs be used to track how stress levels, coping strategies, and work-life balance evolve across different stages of a graduate program.

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