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BETWEEN RESPONSIBILITIES AND DREAMS: THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF OFFICE-WORKING PROFESSIONALS PURSUING A MASTER'S IN INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY WHILE SUPPORTING THEIR FAMILIES

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Abstract

This study, titled "Between Responsibilities and Dreams: The Lived Experiences of Office-Working Professionals Pursuing a Master's in Information Technology While Supporting Their Families," explores the experiences and strategies employed by 12 focus group discussion (FGD) participants from MIT 2, S.Y. 2024-2025. Utilizing a qualitative research methodology, the study gathered data through FGDs, questionnaires, and observations to analyze how working professionals navigate the challenges of balancing work, studies, and personal responsibilities while pursuing higher education.

The findings reveal that office-working professionals perceive balancing academic responsibilities and financial obligations as both a challenge and an opportunity, requiring sacrifices in personal time, finances, and well-being but fostering career advancement and long-term growth. These students face significant challenges, including time constraints, stress, financial burdens, and difficulty in maintaining work-life balance, which impact their overall performance and well-being. However, the pursuit of an MIT degree enhances essential skills such as time management, resilience, and problem-solving, despite the stress and fatigue involved. While full-time employment alongside graduate studies provides career growth and financial stability, it also results in exhaustion and reduced personal time. To mitigate these challenges, professionals employ various strategies, including effective time management, workplace flexibility, financial planning, and strong support systems.

Based on the findings, the study concludes that office-working professionals pursuing an MIT degree experience both obstacles and opportunities, as their sacrifices contribute to long-term professional and personal development. The difficulties they encounter significantly impact their well-being, yet they develop

skills that are essential for career progression. While balancing multiple responsibilities remains challenging, the adoption of effective strategies enables working professionals to navigate their academic and professional commitments successfully.

The study recommends that office-working MIT students implement structured time management and stress reduction strategies to maintain productivity and well-being. Educational institutions and employers may consider offering flexible learning options, financial assistance, and wellness programs to support students. Additionally, universities may provide scholarships and stress management workshops to alleviate financial and emotional burdens. Finally, working professionals should establish realistic career goals and leverage networking opportunities to maximize professional growth while ensuring a sustainable work-study-life balance.

Keywords: Academic Journey, Adult Learners, Aemilianum College Inc., Career and Education, Challenges in Higher Education, Motivation and Perseverance, Office-Working Professionals, Personal and Professional Growth, Professional Development, Time Management, Work-Life Balance

Introduction

Balancing professional responsibilities with academic pursuits is a common challenge faced by students globally. Studies have shown that working more than twenty hours per week can negatively impact academic performance and retention rates (American Association of University Professors, 2023). This issue is particularly pronounced among students pursuing advanced degrees, such as a Master of Information Technology (MIT), due to the demanding nature of the curriculum and the rapid evolution of technology (College of Business and Technology, 2023).

In the Philippines, the prevalence of working students is significant, with many individuals striving to support their families while pursuing higher education. A 2022 survey by the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) revealed that approximately 216,000 students, or 8% of the total college population, are engaged in employment alongside their studies (RepublicAsia, 2024). This dual responsibility often leads to challenges such as time management issues, decreased motivation, and potential impacts on mental well-being (UNITAR International University, 2023). Additionally, the rise of digital transformation in workplaces has increased the demand for IT professionals to upskill, making it even more essential for working MIT students to balance their education with their careers (Ramirez, 2023).

Focusing on the Bicol Region (Region V), there is a notable presence of working students. Recent data indicates that out of approximately 2.08 million children aged 5 to 17 in 2021, around 117.8 thousand (5.7%) were working (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2023). While this statistic pertains to a younger demographic, it underscores a regional culture of balancing work and education, a trend likely extending into

higher education. However, specific studies focusing on office-working MIT students in this region remain limited, highlighting a gap in localized research.

This study, titled "Between Responsibilities and Dreams: The Lived Experiences of Office-Working MIT Students Supporting Their Families," aims to explore the unique challenges and coping mechanisms of these individuals in the Bicol Region. By understanding their experiences, the research seeks to inform educational institutions and policymakers, facilitating the development of support systems tailored to the needs of working students. Ultimately, this study aspires to contribute to improved academic outcomes and well-being for this demographic, fostering a more supportive educational environment. Emphasizing social equity and inclusivity, as demonstrated by institutions like Murdoch University, can lead to better learning outcomes and career success for students from diverse backgrounds (The Guardian, 2024).

Statement of the Problem

Specifically, this study sought to answer the following questions:

1. How do office-working professionals pursuing a Master's in Information Technology (MIT) perceive the impact of balancing academic responsibilities and financial obligations on their personal and professional growth?
2. What challenges do office-working MIT students face in managing their studies while fulfilling their professional duties and providing financial support to their families?
3. How does being an office-working professional enrolled in a Master's in Information Technology (MIT) program influence academic performance, motivation, and overall well-being?
4. What are the benefits and drawbacks of working full-time while pursuing a Master's in Information Technology (MIT) on Saturdays, as experienced by professionals supporting their families?
5. What strategies do office-working professionals use to effectively balance their academic responsibilities, career demands, and family obligations while pursuing a Master's in Information Technology (MIT)?

Gap Bridged by the Study

Several of the reviewed studies shared common themes regarding work-life balance, career identity, and the evolving nature of work. Singh and Ojala explored how work environments and career priorities had shifted, with Singh focusing on organizational culture and leadership in response to workplace transformations, while Ojala examined how students prioritized meaningful work over traditional career models. Meanwhile, Bayucot & Grana, Cada, and Abadie & Apolibnario analyzed work-life balance challenges, with Bayucot & Grana identifying generational differences among teachers, Cada investigating how graduate students managed their multiple roles, and Abadie & Apolibnario highlighting the psychological resources that mitigated stress. Additionally, Kolegraff and Milieu Insight both addressed the unique struggles

faced by working mothers, emphasizing the need for supportive workplace policies to help women navigate career and family responsibilities. These studies collectively emphasized the importance of flexibility, institutional support, and well-being in balancing work and personal life.

Despite these similarities, the present study differed by integrating multiple dimensions of work-life balance, career decision-making, and organizational policies, particularly within a specific professional or academic context. Unlike Singh, who focused on leadership strategies in a changing work landscape, or Ojala, who examined students' career aspirations, this research explored how individuals actively managed their professional and personal commitments while addressing institutional and employer-driven interventions. Additionally, while studies like Bayucot & Grana and Cada examined specific demographics (teachers and graduate students), this study aimed to provide a broader perspective that considered different career stages and work settings. By bridging these gaps, the researcher sought to contribute a more comprehensive understanding of work-life balance strategies, career development, and institutional policies that supported professionals in managing their evolving roles - this was the gap the researcher was trying to bridge.

Research Focus

The research focused on understanding the lived experiences of office-working professionals pursuing a Master's in Information Technology (MIT) while supporting their families. It examined how they balanced academic responsibilities, career growth, and financial obligations, as well as the challenges they encountered in managing multiple roles. The study explored the impact of time constraints, workload pressures, and financial demands on their academic performance, motivation, and overall well-being. Additionally, it investigated both the benefits and drawbacks of working full-time while studying on weekends, highlighting the effects on stress levels, productivity, and career progression. Through qualitative methods such as surveys, focus group discussions, and observations, the research identified strategies that professionals used to maintain work-study-life balance and proposed a framework for enhancing their academic and professional success.

Theoretical Framework

Balancing Act Theory (Samiento & Selencio, 2025). The Balancing Act Theory recommends that office professionals pursuing a Master's in IT while supporting their families must navigate a delicate equilibrium between career growth, academic responsibilities, and family obligations. This theory highlights the important role of time management, resilience, and institutional or social support in enabling individuals to sustain their multiple commitments without experiencing burnout. Unlike traditional work-life balance models that often focus on either work or family, the Balancing Act Theory highlights the dynamic interplay between these domains, emphasizing adaptability and prioritization as key success factors. Professionals in this situation must continuously reassess their priorities, allocate resources efficiently, and develop coping

mechanisms to manage stress and maintain performance across all aspects of their lives. The theory further suggests that achieving this balance is not a static process but rather an ongoing negotiation, influenced by external factors such as workplace flexibility, academic support systems, and familial expectations. By integrating concepts from boundary management, self-determination, and work-family conflict theories, the Balancing Act Theory provides a holistic framework for understanding how individuals juggle professional aspirations, educational advancement, and personal responsibilities while striving for overall well-being and fulfillment.

Conceptual Framework

The Conceptual Framework of this study provides a structured approach to examining how office-working professionals pursuing a Master's in Information Technology (MIT) navigate the challenges of balancing academic responsibilities, career demands, and family obligations. This framework ensures a comprehensive analysis of their experiences, strategies, and the impact of their dual roles on personal and professional growth.

The Input phase focuses on key research questions regarding the perceptions of MIT students working full-time. It examines how they balance academic responsibilities and financial obligations and how this balance affects their professional development. Additionally, it explores the challenges they face in managing their studies while fulfilling professional duties and supporting their families. The framework also considers the influence of being an office-working professional on academic performance, motivation, and well-being, as well as the benefits and drawbacks of working full-time while studying. Moreover, it highlights the strategies professionals employ—such as time management, prioritization, workplace flexibility, financial planning, and support systems—to effectively manage their responsibilities and reduce stress.

The Process phase involves data collection and analysis to gain insights into these experiences. Questionnaires are distributed to gather quantitative and qualitative data from participants, while focus group discussions provide a platform for deeper exploration of shared experiences and coping mechanisms. Observations further enhance the understanding of how professionals manage their transitions between work, study, and family life. The collected data undergoes thorough analysis and interpretation, identifying recurring themes, challenges, and strategies.

The Output of the study is the Framework for Career and Academic Growth: A Model for Balancing Work, Study, and Family, which presents best practices for managing multiple responsibilities effectively. This model provides strategies to help professionals optimize their productivity in both academic and professional settings while minimizing stress and improving overall well-being.

The Outcome emphasizes achieving a sustainable balance between career growth, academic commitments, and family responsibilities. By implementing effective strategies, office-working MIT students enhance their productivity, maintain personal

well-being, and achieve long-term success in both their professional and academic pursuits. The Feedback phase involves assessing the effectiveness of the proposed framework in real-world applications. Participants provide insights on how well the strategies helped them manage their responsibilities and offer recommendations for further improvements. Their feedback ensures continuous refinement of work-study integration approaches, supporting future professionals in achieving academic and career success while maintaining a balanced life.

Framework for Career and Academic Growth: A Model for Balancing Work, Study, and Family

Introduction

Balancing career growth, academic commitment, and family responsibilities is a significant challenge for professionals pursuing higher education. The demands of full-time work, rigorous academic requirements, and personal obligations often create stress and time constraints, making it essential to develop effective strategies for managing multiple roles. This framework provides best practices and strategic approaches that empower working students to optimize their time, energy, and priorities, ensuring a harmonious integration of their professional, academic, and personal lives. By adopting structured planning, resilience-building techniques, and support systems, professionals can enhance their productivity, maintain well-being, and achieve long-term success in both their careers and education.

Core Components of the Framework

1. **Time Management and Prioritization**
   - Develop a structured schedule that allocates time for work, studies, and family.
   - Use productivity tools such as digital calendars, task managers, and reminders.
   - Set realistic goals and deadlines to ensure steady progress.

2. **Flexible Learning and Career Integration**
   - Choose academic programs that offer flexible schedules, such as weekend or online classes.
   - Align coursework with career objectives to maximize professional benefits.
   - Apply newly acquired knowledge and skills to workplace challenges for practical learning.

3. **Support System and Collaboration**
   - Seek support from family, employers, and academic mentors to create a balanced routine.

- Join study groups, professional networks, and peer-support communities for academic and emotional support.
- Communicate openly with employers about academic commitments and explore workplace support options.

4. **Financial Planning and Resource Management**
   - Budget for educational expenses and explore scholarships, grants, or employer-sponsored tuition assistance.
   - Reduce unnecessary expenditures and invest in essential academic tools and resources.
   - Consider part-time work or side opportunities that align with career and academic goals.
5. **Well-Being and Stress Management**
   - Prioritize self-care, including proper nutrition, exercise, and sufficient rest.
   - Practice stress-reduction techniques such as mindfulness, meditation, and recreational activities.
   - Set boundaries to prevent burnout and maintain a sustainable work-life balance.

Conclusion

Successfully balancing career growth, academic commitment, and family responsibilities demands strategic planning, a strong support network, and effective time management. This framework equips professionals with practical strategies to navigate these challenges, enabling them to pursue their educational and career aspirations without compromising their well-being or personal obligations. By implementing structured planning, resilience-building techniques, and workplace-academic synergy, individuals can maintain productivity, reduce stress, and achieve long-term success in both their professional and personal lives.

Findings

During the development and after testing and evaluation of the developed system the following findings have been established:

1. Office-working professionals pursuing a Master's in Information Technology (MIT) perceive balancing academic responsibilities and financial obligations as both a challenge and an opportunity, as it demands significant sacrifices in personal time, finances, and well-being while simultaneously fostering career advancement, skill development, and long-term professional and personal growth.
2. Office-working MIT students face challenges such as time constraints, stress, exhaustion, reduced personal and social time, financial sacrifices,

and difficulties in balancing academic responsibilities with professional duties and family support, impacting their well-being and overall performance.

3. Being an office-working professional enrolled in a Master's in Information Technology (MIT) program influences academic performance, motivation, and overall well-being by enhancing skills such as time management and resilience while also causing stress, fatigue, and challenges in maintaining a work-life balance.

4. The benefits of working full-time while pursuing a Master's in Information Technology (MIT) on Saturdays include career advancement, skill development, and financial stability, while the drawbacks involve stress, exhaustion, reduced personal time, and challenges in balancing academic, professional, and family responsibilities.

5. Office-working professionals pursuing a Master's in Information Technology (MIT) effectively balance their academic responsibilities, career demands, and family obligations by employing strategies such as time management, prioritization, workplace flexibility, financial planning, and strong support systems to minimize stress and maintain overall well-being.

Conclusions

Based on the findings of this study the following conclusions were formulated:

1. Office-working professionals pursuing a Master's in Information Technology (MIT) experience both challenges and opportunities, as the sacrifices they make in personal time, finances, and well-being contribute to long-term career and personal growth.

2. The various challenges faced by office-working MIT students, including time constraints, stress, and financial sacrifices, significantly impact their well-being and overall academic and professional performance.

3. While being an office-working professional enrolled in an MIT program enhances skills like time management and resilience, it also brings stress and fatigue, making it difficult to maintain a healthy work-life balance.

4. Working full-time while pursuing an MIT degree on Saturdays presents both benefits, such as career advancement and financial stability and drawbacks, such as stress and difficulty in balancing multiple responsibilities.

5. Office-working professionals pursuing a Master's in Information Technology

(MIT) may successfully navigate the demands of academics, career, and family by implementing effective strategies that enhance productivity, reduce stress, and promote overall well-being.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusions drawn from this study, the following recommendations were formulated:

1. Office-working professionals pursuing an MIT degree may implement effective time management strategies to balance academic, work, and personal responsibilities efficiently.
2. Educational institutions and employers may provide flexible learning options, study leave, and financial support to help working professionals manage their academic and professional commitments.
3. Universities and workplaces may promote mental health and well-being initiatives, including stress management workshops and counseling services, to support students facing stress and fatigue.
4. MIT students may explore scholarships, tuition reimbursement programs, and budgeting strategies to alleviate financial burdens while completing their degrees.
5. Office-working professionals pursuing a Master's in Information Technology (MIT) may implement structured time management, workplace flexibility, and strong support systems to enhance productivity, reduce stress, and maintain a healthy work-study-life balance.
6. Working professionals may set realistic career goals, leverage networking opportunities, and apply newly acquired skills to their jobs to maximize career growth while maintaining work-life balance.

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