



# Navigating Work and Graduate Studies: A Phenomenological Inquiry into Time Management and Workload Management among Graduate School Students

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## Abstract

Balancing employment and graduate education has become increasingly challenging as many students pursue advanced degrees while maintaining full-time professional responsibilities. Effective time management and workload management are essential for sustaining academic performance, professional productivity, and personal well-being. This qualitative study explored the lived experiences of working graduate school students in navigating the demands of work and graduate studies at Northeastern College, Santiago City, Philippines. Specifically, it examined how graduate students manage competing responsibilities, cope with academic and workplace demands, overcome challenges, and develop strategies to achieve academic success while maintaining professional commitments. Guided by Schlossberg's Transition Theory and Self-Regulated Learning Theory, the study employed a phenomenological research design. Twelve working graduate students enrolled in various graduate programs were purposively selected as participants. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and document analysis and analyzed using Braun and Clarke's six-phase thematic analysis. The findings revealed four major themes: prioritizing responsibilities through effective time management, adapting workload management strategies across professional and academic roles, utilizing support systems and personal resilience to overcome challenges, and fostering personal and professional growth through reflective learning experiences. Participants emphasized that balancing work and graduate studies requires discipline, flexibility, careful planning, and continuous self-regulation. Despite experiencing role conflicts, time constraints, work-related stress, and academic pressures, participants demonstrated resilience by establishing priorities, seeking social support, and maintaining commitment to their educational goals. The study highlights the importance of institutional support, flexible learning environments, and effective self-management in promoting graduate student success. The findings provide valuable insights for higher education institutions, graduate school administrators, employers, and future researchers in developing policies and programs that support working graduate students.

**Keywords:** graduate students, time management, workload management, work-life balance, phenomenology, higher education, working professionals, graduate education

## Introduction

The pursuit of graduate education has become increasingly important for professionals seeking career advancement, leadership opportunities, and lifelong learning. In today's competitive professional landscape, many employees enroll in graduate programs to enhance their knowledge, develop specialized competencies, and improve their qualifications while continuing to fulfill full-time work responsibilities. Although pursuing graduate studies offers numerous personal and professional benefits, balancing academic requirements with workplace obligations presents

significant challenges. Working graduate students must simultaneously meet professional expectations, complete academic tasks, fulfill family responsibilities, and maintain personal well-being, making effective time and workload management essential for academic persistence and success.



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Time management has consistently been recognized as one of the most critical determinants of graduate student success. It involves planning, organizing, prioritizing, and allocating available time efficiently across multiple responsibilities. Graduate students who effectively manage their time are more likely to complete academic requirements, reduce stress, maintain work performance, and achieve a healthier balance between personal and professional commitments. Conversely, ineffective time management often leads to missed deadlines, decreased productivity, emotional exhaustion, and increased academic attrition. As graduate programs require extensive reading, research, writing, and independent learning, students must continuously make decisions regarding how to allocate limited time among competing responsibilities.

Closely associated with time management is workload management, which refers to the ability to organize, prioritize, and balance academic, professional, and personal tasks without compromising performance in any area. Working graduate students frequently experience overlapping deadlines, workplace demands, examinations, research requirements, and family obligations. Managing these responsibilities requires strategic planning, adaptability, resilience, and effective decision-making. Successful workload management enables students to maintain productivity while minimizing stress and preventing burnout. The growing population of working graduate students has prompted higher education institutions to recognize the unique needs of adult learners. Flexible class schedules, blended and online learning modalities, academic advising, and learner-centered support services have become increasingly important in helping students balance employment and graduate education. Despite these institutional initiatives, many students continue to encounter difficulties in sustaining academic engagement while fulfilling workplace responsibilities. Long working hours, organizational commitments, financial obligations, and unexpected professional demands often compete with academic requirements, requiring students to constantly adjust their priorities and learning strategies.

Previous studies have reported that working graduate students experience challenges related to time constraints, workload overload, stress, fatigue, role conflict, and limited opportunities for rest and recreation. Nevertheless, many successfully persist through effective planning, self-discipline, social support, motivation, and adaptive coping strategies. These experiences demonstrate that graduate education extends beyond academic achievement and contributes to personal resilience, professional identity, leadership development, and lifelong learning. Understanding how students navigate these experiences provides valuable insights into designing responsive graduate education programs that support student persistence and well-being.

Although numerous studies have examined time management, work-life balance, and graduate student success using quantitative approaches, relatively few qualitative investigations have explored the lived experiences of working graduate students within the Philippine higher education context. Existing research often emphasizes measurable outcomes such as academic performance or stress levels while providing limited understanding of how students interpret, negotiate, and make meaning of their experiences in balancing work and graduate studies. A

phenomenological approach allows for a deeper exploration of these lived realities by capturing participants' personal narratives, coping mechanisms, and reflections.

Northeastern College in Santiago City provides an appropriate context for investigating this phenomenon because a substantial proportion of its graduate students are employed professionals from various sectors, including education, government, healthcare, business, and private organizations. These students pursue graduate education while fulfilling demanding occupational responsibilities, making their experiences valuable in understanding the complexities of balancing work and academic life. Exploring their lived experiences offers meaningful insights into effective time management, workload management, and adaptive strategies that can inform institutional policies, student support services, and graduate education practices.

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This study therefore sought to explore the lived experiences of working graduate students at Northeastern College in navigating time management and workload management while pursuing graduate education. Specifically, it examined how they organize competing responsibilities, overcome challenges, utilize support systems, and sustain their academic and professional commitments. The findings are expected to contribute to the growing body of qualitative research on graduate education and provide practical implications for higher education institutions, graduate school administrators, employers, and future researchers in developing programs and policies that promote student success, well-being, and lifelong learning.

## Review of Related Literature

### Time Management among Graduate Students

Time management is widely recognized as one of the most significant predictors of academic success among graduate students, particularly those balancing professional employment and advanced education. It involves planning, prioritizing, scheduling, and allocating time efficiently to accomplish multiple academic and occupational responsibilities. Effective time management enables graduate students to complete coursework, conduct research, meet professional obligations, and maintain personal well-being. Studies have consistently shown that students with strong time management skills demonstrate higher academic achievement, lower stress levels, and greater persistence in completing graduate programs. Conversely, ineffective time management often results in missed deadlines, academic burnout, role conflict, and reduced work performance.

### Workload Management in Graduate Education

Workload management refers to the ability to organize, prioritize, and balance multiple responsibilities while maintaining productivity and minimizing stress. Working graduate students frequently encounter overlapping deadlines involving coursework, research, employment, and family commitments. Successfully managing these responsibilities requires strategic planning, adaptability, self-discipline, and resilience. Research indicates that effective workload management contributes to increased academic engagement, reduced emotional exhaustion, improved work performance, and greater satisfaction in both professional and academic roles. Institutions that provide flexible learning opportunities and supportive academic environments further enhance students' ability to manage competing responsibilities.

### Work-Study Balance and Role Conflict

Balancing employment and graduate studies often creates role conflict as students simultaneously fulfill the expectations of employees, learners, family members, and community participants. These multiple roles may compete for limited time and energy, resulting in stress, fatigue, and work-life imbalance. Studies reveal that working graduate students commonly experience challenges such as extended working hours, assignment deadlines, financial responsibilities, and limited opportunities for rest. However, successful students frequently employ adaptive coping strategies, including effective scheduling, goal setting, prioritization, and seeking support from employers, family members, classmates, and faculty mentors. These strategies help reduce role conflict and strengthen persistence in graduate education.

### Self-Regulated Learning in Graduate Studies

Self-regulated learning refers to learners' ability to actively plan, monitor, evaluate, and regulate their own learning processes to achieve academic goals. Graduate students who exhibit strong self-regulation establish realistic goals, monitor their progress, manage distractions, evaluate learning outcomes, and modify study strategies when necessary. Self-regulated learners demonstrate greater independence, motivation, perseverance, and confidence in managing demanding academic requirements. Research consistently associates self-regulation with improved academic performance, effective time management,

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and successful completion of graduate programs, particularly among adult learners balancing multiple responsibilities.

### **Social Support and Graduate Student Success**

Social support plays an essential role in helping working graduate students cope with academic and occupational demands. Family members, employers, classmates, faculty advisers, and peers provide emotional encouragement, practical assistance, academic guidance, and motivational support that strengthen students' resilience and persistence. Positive workplace policies, understanding supervisors, flexible schedules, collaborative learning environments, and accessible faculty members contribute to graduate students' capacity to navigate competing responsibilities successfully. Studies indicate that strong social support systems significantly reduce stress, improve well-being, and enhance academic persistence.

### **Resilience and Adaptive Coping**

Resilience enables graduate students to respond positively to challenges, setbacks, and stressful situations encountered throughout their educational journey. Working professionals pursuing graduate education frequently experience emotional exhaustion, competing priorities, and uncertainty. Adaptive coping strategies such as positive thinking, reflective practice, stress management, effective communication, and continuous self-improvement enable students to maintain motivation and academic commitment. Research highlights resilience as a critical characteristic that supports persistence, personal growth, leadership development, and lifelong learning among adult learners.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is anchored on Schlossberg's Transition Theory (1981), Zimmerman's Self-Regulated Learning Theory (2002), and Role Theory by Kahn et al. (1964).

Schlossberg's Transition Theory explains how individuals successfully adapt to significant life transitions by utilizing available resources, coping strategies, and support systems. Pursuing graduate education while maintaining full-time employment represents a major life transition requiring students to continuously adjust to changing academic, professional, and personal responsibilities. The theory emphasizes that successful adaptation depends on four interrelated factors known as the 4 S System: Situation, Self, Support, and Strategies. These dimensions provide a useful lens for understanding how graduate students navigate work and academic demands.

Zimmerman's Self-Regulated Learning Theory emphasizes learners' capacity to actively manage their own learning through goal setting, planning, self-monitoring, self-evaluation, and self-reflection. Working graduate students employ self-regulation by organizing study schedules, managing deadlines, monitoring academic progress, and adjusting learning strategies in response to changing responsibilities. Effective self-regulation enables students to balance professional obligations with graduate school requirements while maintaining academic performance.

Role Theory explains that individuals simultaneously perform multiple social roles, each associated with distinct expectations and responsibilities. Working graduate students assume overlapping roles as employees, students, family members, and community participants. Conflicting expectations among these roles may create role conflict, role overload, and stress. However, effective time management, workload prioritization, institutional support, and adaptive coping strategies enable individuals to successfully integrate these multiple responsibilities.

Collectively, these theories explain that successful management of work and graduate studies depends on students' ability to regulate their learning, adapt to transitions, balance multiple roles, and utilize available support systems. These theoretical perspectives provide a comprehensive framework for understanding

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the lived experiences of working graduate students in managing time, workload, and competing responsibilities.

### Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework illustrates the dynamic relationship between work responsibilities, graduate academic demands, self-management strategies, and student outcomes.

Working graduate students encounter multiple responsibilities arising from employment, academic requirements, family obligations, and personal commitments. To address these competing demands, students employ self-management strategies including effective time management, workload prioritization, self-regulated learning, adaptive coping, resilience, and utilization of institutional and social support systems. These strategies influence their ability to balance competing roles and successfully navigate graduate education.

Effective management of work and academic responsibilities results in positive outcomes such as improved academic performance, reduced stress, enhanced professional competence, increased resilience, successful graduate program completion, and continuous personal and career development.

### Research Objectives

This study explored the lived experiences of working graduate school students in navigating time management and workload management while pursuing graduate education at Northeastern College, Santiago City, Philippines. Specifically, it sought to:

1. describe the lived experiences of working graduate students in balancing employment and graduate studies;
2. examine the time management practices employed by graduate students in managing academic and professional responsibilities;
3. identify the workload management strategies used to address competing work and academic demands;
4. determine the challenges encountered by graduate students in balancing multiple roles and responsibilities; and
5. explore the implications of these experiences for improving graduate education programs and student support services.

### Methodology

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological research design to explore and understand the lived experiences of working graduate students in managing time and workload while pursuing graduate education at Northeastern College, Santiago City, Philippines. Phenomenology was deemed appropriate because it focuses on capturing the meanings, perceptions, and essence of participants' experiences as they balance the demands of employment, academic responsibilities, and personal life. The study was conducted among twelve (12) purposively selected working graduate students who were currently enrolled in a graduate program, employed on a full-time or regular basis, had completed at least one academic semester, and were willing to share their experiences. Purposive sampling was utilized to ensure that participants possessed rich and relevant insights into the phenomenon under investigation, and data collection continued until data saturation was achieved. Data were gathered using a researcher-developed, expert-validated semi-structured interview guide, which contained open-ended questions on work-study balance, time management, workload management, coping strategies, institutional support, and personal and professional growth. Document analysis of relevant academic schedules and institutional policies was

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also conducted to triangulate the interview data. Prior to data collection, approval was secured from the Graduate School Dean, and informed consent was obtained from all participants. Individual face-to-face interviews, lasting approximately 45 to 60 minutes, were audio-recorded with permission, transcribed verbatim, and verified through member checking to ensure the accuracy of participants' responses. The collected data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis, involving data familiarization, coding, theme generation, theme review, theme definition, and report writing to identify recurring patterns and meaningful themes. To ensure the rigor and trustworthiness of the findings, the study adhered to Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability through prolonged engagement, triangulation, peer debriefing, audit trails, reflexive journaling, and rich contextual descriptions. Ethical standards were likewise strictly observed by ensuring voluntary participation, informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity through the use of pseudonyms, secure storage of research data, and adherence to the principles of respect for persons, beneficence, justice, confidentiality, and research integrity throughout the conduct of the study.

## Results and Discussion

The analysis of the interview transcripts revealed four overarching themes that describe the lived experiences of working graduate students in balancing employment and graduate studies. This section presents the first two themes that emerged from the thematic analysis.

### Theme 1: Prioritizing Responsibilities through Effective Time Management

One of the most prominent themes that emerged from the participants' narratives was the deliberate prioritization of responsibilities through effective time management. Participants consistently emphasized that balancing graduate studies with full-time employment required careful planning, scheduling, and disciplined use of time. Rather than treating work and school as separate responsibilities, they viewed both as interconnected commitments that required daily organization and thoughtful decision-making. Most participants shared that they relied on planners, digital calendars, to-do lists, and weekly schedules to organize academic deadlines alongside workplace responsibilities. They intentionally allocated specific hours for studying, completing assignments, reading scholarly articles, and conducting research without compromising their professional duties.

One participant shared:

*"I learned to schedule everything. After office hours, I immediately dedicate two to three hours for reading and writing assignments. During weekends, I focus on major academic requirements."* (Participant 2)

Another participant explained:

*"Time became my most valuable resource. If I wasted even an hour, I felt that both my work and studies would be affected. Planning every day helped me stay on track."* (Participant 6)

Similarly, another participant remarked:

*"I prioritize tasks based on urgency and importance. Sometimes I need to postpone social activities because my responsibilities as an employee and a graduate student come first."* (Participant 9)

Participants recognized that effective time management was not merely about following schedules but also about making intentional decisions regarding priorities. They learned to distinguish urgent from non-essential tasks and became more disciplined in managing distractions. Several participants noted that they developed routines that enabled them to maximize productive hours without sacrificing the quality of their work or academic outputs.

The findings suggest that successful work-study balance begins with purposeful planning and disciplined time allocation. Effective time management allowed participants to minimize procrastination, reduce stress, and maintain consistent progress toward completing graduate requirements.

## Discussion

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This finding supports Zimmerman's Self-Regulated Learning Theory (2002), which posits that successful learners actively regulate their learning through goal setting, planning, self-monitoring, and self-reflection. Participants demonstrated self-regulated behaviors by establishing study schedules, monitoring deadlines, and evaluating their progress throughout the semester. Their

experiences illustrate how self-regulation enables working professionals to balance multiple responsibilities while sustaining academic engagement.

The findings likewise align with previous studies indicating that graduate students who practice structured time management exhibit greater academic persistence, lower stress levels, and improved work performance. Effective scheduling, prioritization, and planning enable adult learners to manage competing demands while maintaining productivity across professional and academic settings.

### Theme 2: Managing Multiple Roles through Adaptive Workload Management

The second major theme illustrates how participants continuously adjusted their workload to accommodate overlapping professional, academic, family, and personal responsibilities. Participants described workload management as a dynamic process requiring flexibility, adaptability, and constant evaluation of priorities. Rather than attempting to accomplish every task simultaneously, they learned to redistribute responsibilities based on workload intensity and available resources.

Several participants explained that there were periods when academic requirements became particularly demanding, especially during examinations, thesis writing, or major research presentations. During these times, they communicated with supervisors, delegated workplace responsibilities when appropriate, or adjusted personal commitments to accommodate academic obligations.

One participant shared:

*"When major school requirements coincide with office deadlines, I communicate with my supervisor in advance. Fortunately, our workplace understands employees who are pursuing graduate studies."* (Participant 4)

Another participant stated:

*"There were weeks when I felt overwhelmed because work and school deadlines happened simultaneously. I learned to accomplish smaller tasks first before focusing on larger academic requirements."* (Participant 8)

Another participant reflected:

*"I realized that I cannot do everything perfectly every day. Sometimes I need to adjust expectations, ask for assistance, and accept that balancing responsibilities requires flexibility."* (Participant 11)

Participants also acknowledged that workload management involved recognizing personal limitations and avoiding unnecessary commitments. Many intentionally declined additional workplace assignments, minimized social engagements, and reduced non-essential activities during academically demanding periods. They viewed flexibility not as a weakness but as an adaptive strategy that enabled them to maintain productivity without experiencing severe burnout.

Several participants further emphasized that effective workload management required continuous reassessment of priorities. Unexpected work assignments, family emergencies, and changes in academic schedules often required immediate adjustments to carefully planned routines. Despite these challenges, participants demonstrated resilience by modifying schedules while remaining committed to both professional and academic responsibilities.

### Discussion

The findings support Role Theory (Kahn et al., 1964), which explains that individuals occupying multiple social roles often experience role conflict and role overload due to competing expectations. Participants simultaneously fulfilled the roles of employee, graduate student, family member, and community

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participant. Effective workload management enabled them to negotiate these overlapping responsibilities by prioritizing tasks, communicating with stakeholders, and making adaptive decisions.

The findings are likewise consistent with Schlossberg's Transition Theory (1981), which emphasizes that successful adaptation to life transitions depends on available support systems, coping strategies, and personal resources. Participants demonstrated adaptive strategies by seeking workplace flexibility, adjusting schedules, and utilizing available support to successfully navigate the transition between professional and academic responsibilities.

Overall, the findings indicate that workload management extends beyond simply completing numerous tasks. Rather, it involves strategic prioritization, flexibility, effective communication, and adaptive decision-making that enable working graduate students to sustain both academic success and professional effectiveness despite competing demands.

The thematic analysis further generated two additional themes that describe how working graduate students navigated the challenges of balancing employment and graduate education.

### Theme 3: Building Resilience through Support Systems and Adaptive Coping Strategies

Another significant theme that emerged from the participants' narratives was the importance of resilience supported by family, employers, classmates, faculty members, and peers. Participants emphasized that balancing work and graduate studies would have been far more difficult without emotional encouragement, practical assistance, and understanding from the people around them. These support systems enabled them to cope with academic pressure, workplace demands, and personal responsibilities. Most participants acknowledged that pursuing graduate education required sacrifices and emotional endurance. During periods of overlapping deadlines, workplace obligations, and family commitments, they relied heavily on encouragement from loved ones and colleagues to remain motivated.

One participant shared:

*"Whenever I became exhausted, my family reminded me why I started my graduate studies. Their encouragement helped me continue even when I wanted to give up."* (Participant 3)

Another participant expressed:

*"My classmates became my support system. We shared notes, reminded each other of deadlines, and encouraged one another during stressful weeks."* (Participant 7)

Similarly, another participant explained:

*"Our professors understood that many of us were working professionals. They guided us without lowering academic standards, which motivated us to do better."* (Participant 10)

Several participants also described resilience as an internal process developed through repeated exposure to challenges. They explained that every difficult semester strengthened their confidence, patience, perseverance, and ability to solve problems. Instead of viewing challenges as obstacles, they gradually perceived them as opportunities for growth.

Others reported practicing adaptive coping strategies such as maintaining a positive mindset, engaging in prayer or spiritual reflection, exercising, taking short breaks, and rewarding themselves after completing major academic requirements. These practices helped reduce stress and restore emotional well-being while maintaining productivity.

The findings suggest that resilience is strengthened through the interaction of personal determination and supportive social environments. Emotional encouragement, academic guidance, workplace understanding, and collaborative relationships collectively enabled participants to navigate the complexities of balancing graduate studies with professional employment.

### Discussion

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The findings strongly support Schlossberg's Transition Theory (1981), which emphasizes that successful adaptation during major life transitions depends on the availability of support systems and effective coping strategies. Participants benefited from multiple forms of support, including family encouragement, workplace flexibility, faculty mentorship, and peer collaboration. These support mechanisms enhanced their ability to adjust to the demands of graduate education while maintaining professional responsibilities.

The findings also reinforce literature emphasizing the importance of social support and psychological resilience in promoting graduate student persistence. Previous studies have shown that emotional support, collaborative learning, and positive interpersonal relationships reduce stress, increase motivation, and strengthen commitment toward degree completion. The participants' experiences demonstrate that resilience is not solely an individual characteristic but is nurtured through meaningful relationships and supportive institutional environments.

#### Theme 4: Achieving Personal and Professional Growth through Graduate Education

The fourth theme illustrates that despite numerous challenges, participants viewed their graduate education as a transformative journey that contributed significantly to their personal, academic, and professional development. Rather than focusing solely on obtaining an advanced degree, participants described graduate school as an opportunity to improve leadership abilities, critical thinking, communication skills, research competence, and professional confidence.

Many participants reflected that balancing work and graduate studies enhanced their organizational skills, decision-making abilities, emotional maturity, and capacity to manage complex responsibilities. They believed that the difficulties they encountered ultimately prepared them for greater leadership roles within their respective professions.

One participant stated:

*"Graduate school changed the way I think and solve problems. I became more confident in making decisions at work because I learned to analyze situations more critically."* (Participant 1)

Another participant shared:

*"The experience taught me discipline and responsibility. I became more organized not only in school but also in managing my work and personal life."* (Participant 5)

Similarly, another participant reflected:

*"Every challenge became an opportunity to improve myself. I realized that graduate education is not only about earning a degree but also about becoming a better professional and a better person."* (Participant 12)

Participants consistently described graduate education as an investment in lifelong learning. Many believed that completing advanced studies would create opportunities for career advancement, promotion, expanded professional networks, and greater capacity to contribute to their organizations and communities. They also reported increased confidence in conducting research, engaging in scholarly discussions, and applying evidence-based practices in their workplaces.

Beyond professional advancement, participants emphasized personal fulfillment as one of the most meaningful outcomes of their graduate education. Successfully balancing work and academic responsibilities fostered a sense of accomplishment, strengthened self-confidence, and reinforced their commitment to continuous learning throughout their careers.

#### Discussion

The findings align with Zimmerman's Self-Regulated Learning Theory (2002), which highlights self-reflection as an essential component of successful learning. Participants continuously evaluated their progress, modified learning strategies, and reflected on their personal growth throughout their graduate education. These reflective practices strengthened their motivation, confidence, and academic persistence.

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The findings likewise support Transformative Learning Theory proposed by Mezirow (1991), which explains that adult learning often results in profound changes in perspectives, beliefs, and professional identity through critical reflection. Participants described graduate education as a transformative experience that reshaped their approaches to leadership, problem-solving, decision-making, and lifelong learning. Their narratives demonstrate that the value of graduate education extends beyond academic achievement, fostering holistic personal and professional development.

### Synthesis of the Findings

The lived experiences of working graduate students at Northeastern College reveal that successfully balancing employment and graduate education is a dynamic process requiring effective time management, adaptive workload management, resilience, and continuous personal growth. Participants consistently demonstrated disciplined planning, strategic prioritization, flexibility, and self-regulation in managing competing academic and professional responsibilities.

Furthermore, family members, employers, faculty, and peers served as vital support systems that strengthened participants' resilience during periods of stress and role conflict. While balancing work and graduate studies presented numerous challenges, these experiences ultimately fostered stronger leadership skills, enhanced professional competence, greater self-confidence, and a deeper commitment to lifelong learning.

Hence, the findings suggest that graduate student success is shaped not only by individual determination but also by supportive institutional environments, collaborative relationships, and opportunities for reflective learning. These experiences underscore the importance of developing graduate programs and student support services that recognize the unique realities of working professionals pursuing advanced education.

### Conclusion

This phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of working graduate school students at Northeastern College, Santiago City, Philippines, in navigating time management and

workload management while pursuing graduate education. The findings revealed that balancing employment and graduate studies is a complex yet transformative experience that requires discipline, adaptability, resilience, and continuous self-regulation.

Four interrelated themes emerged from the analysis: (1) prioritizing responsibilities through effective time management, (2) managing multiple roles through adaptive workload management, (3) building resilience through support systems and adaptive coping strategies, and (4) achieving personal and professional growth through graduate education. Participants demonstrated that successful work-study balance is achieved through careful planning, prioritization of responsibilities, flexibility in responding to competing demands, and the effective use of support systems provided by family, employers, classmates, and faculty members.

The findings further revealed that although working graduate students frequently encounter role conflict, heavy workloads, time constraints, stress, and fatigue, these challenges become opportunities for developing resilience, leadership, self-discipline, and lifelong learning. Their lived experiences illustrate that graduate education extends beyond acquiring advanced academic qualifications; it also contributes to the holistic development of professionals capable of managing complex personal, academic, and occupational responsibilities.

Conclusively, the study concludes that institutional support, learner-centered graduate education, flexible academic policies, and strong social support systems play significant roles in promoting graduate student success. Higher education institutions should recognize the unique circumstances of working professionals and continue developing responsive programs that foster academic achievement, well-being, and professional growth.

## Implications of the Study

The findings of this study offer several important implications for graduate education, educational leadership, and institutional policy.

**For Graduate School Administrators**, the study highlights the importance of designing flexible academic policies that accommodate the needs of working professionals. Flexible class schedules, blended and online learning opportunities, accessible consultation hours, and responsive academic advising can significantly improve graduate student engagement and persistence.

**For Faculty Members**, the findings underscore the value of learner-centered instruction, timely feedback, and understanding the realities of adult learners without compromising academic standards. Faculty members play an essential role in creating supportive learning environments that encourage academic excellence while recognizing students' professional commitments.

**For Working Graduate Students**, the study reinforces the importance of developing effective time management, workload prioritization, self-regulated learning, and adaptive coping strategies. Continuous reflection, self-discipline, and proactive planning contribute significantly to balancing multiple responsibilities successfully.

**For Employers**, the findings suggest that workplace support through flexible scheduling, professional development opportunities, and understanding supervisory practices can positively influence employees' academic persistence and professional growth. Organizations benefit from supporting employees pursuing graduate education because advanced learning enhances leadership competencies, critical thinking, and organizational effectiveness.

**For Higher Education Institutions**, the study emphasizes the need to strengthen student support services, including academic advising, mentoring programs, mental health initiatives, wellness programs, and peer support networks specifically designed for working graduate students.

**For Future Researchers**, the findings contribute to the growing body of qualitative literature on adult learning, graduate education, work-study balance, and student resilience. Future investigations may further explore diverse graduate populations, disciplinary differences, and institutional contexts to deepen understanding of graduate student experiences.

## Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. **Graduate schools should strengthen flexible learning policies** by expanding blended, hybrid, and technology-supported instructional approaches that accommodate the schedules of working professionals.
2. **Institutions should establish comprehensive graduate student support programs**, including academic mentoring, wellness services, peer support groups, stress management seminars, and time management workshops.
3. **Faculty members should continue implementing learner-centered and flexible instructional practices** that promote meaningful learning while recognizing the unique experiences of adult learners balancing employment and graduate studies.
4. **Graduate students should continuously develop self-regulated learning competencies**, including effective scheduling, workload prioritization, reflective practice, and adaptive coping strategies to maintain academic success and personal well-being.



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5. **Employers are encouraged to provide supportive workplace policies**, such as flexible work arrangements, educational leave opportunities, and professional development incentives that enable employees to pursue graduate education successfully.
6. **Graduate schools should strengthen collaboration with employers** to establish partnerships that support employees pursuing advanced degrees through institutional policies and continuing professional development initiatives.
7. **Future researchers may employ longitudinal, comparative, or mixed-methods research designs** to examine changes in graduate students' experiences over time and across different higher education institutions. Comparative studies involving public and private universities, various academic disciplines, and doctoral students may further enrich the literature on work-study balance.

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