

Navigating Beyond Work–Study Balance: Challenges and Strategies among Higher Education Students

Chhayna Cheng^{1*}, Borey Ngoeurn²

^{1,2} Faculty of Business Administration, BELTEI International University, Phnom Penh, Cambodia

* Corresponding author: chhaynacheng@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

Although a growing body of literature investigates work–study balance, studies integrating both challenges and strategies within a unified framework for higher education students remain limited. This study addresses this gap by synthesizing evidence from diverse geographical contexts to develop a cohesive paradigm of students’ work–study balance across varied higher education environments. Using a systematic literature review and document analysis approach with defined inclusion and exclusion criteria, 51 scholarly articles published between 2020 and 2025 were systematically examined to establish novel insights. The review identifies key student challenges, including mental health issues, reduced physical activity, lower academic performance, increased stress, and sleep disturbance, all of which have detrimental effects on students’ psychological and physical well-being. These challenges highlight the complex demands of balancing work and study, underscoring the importance of effective coping strategies to help students manage their academic and employment responsibilities successfully. However, the study also indicates effective strategies that help students manage these challenges across diverse contexts and domains of higher education, including time management, maintaining a healthy work–study balance, peer support, goal orientation, self-regulation, and self-motivation. These crucial strategies enable employed students to enhance academic performance, maintain well-being, and achieve both academic and career objectives, showing their practical value in supporting a successful work–study balance. Overall, the study outlines directions for future research to rigorously examine work–study balance across diverse institutional, cultural, geographical, and environmental contexts, emphasizing the need for comparative and context-sensitive methods to advance theory and inform practice in higher education.

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INTRODUCTION

The transition from high school to higher education represents more than a routine milestone; it demands that students cultivate self-reliance in managing multiple responsibilities, including academic performance (Lei et al., 2020) and, for those balancing dual roles, participation in the workforce (Orbilla & Paglinawan, 2025). In the United States, evidence indicates that a significant number of university students are engaged in at least part-time employment (El Dine & Kaoud, 2023). Furthermore, data from the National Center for Education Statistics show that in 2017, 81% of part-time students and 43% of full-time students, specifically those in their second and fourth years at public institutions, were employed (El Dine & Kaoud, 2023). According to Pološki Vokić et al. (2021), the EUROSTUDENT project revealed that a majority of students in the European Higher Education Area, 69%, participate in paid work at least occasionally, both during lecture periods and lecture-free periods. The study also highlighted that particularly high proportions of working students were found in Estonia, the Czech Republic, Iceland, Norway, and Slovakia, while approximately 66% of students in Croatia were employed (Pološki Vokić et al., 2021).

This relationship between working and studying during higher education presents both positive and negative aspects for students who enter working life at an early age (Orbilla & Paglinawan, 2025). For instance, Remenick and Bergman (2020) found that students who work during their academic progression experience multiple benefits, including enhanced professional development, stronger social networks, improved workplace relationships, and greater learning success through the integration of theory and practice. Conversely, a study by Orbilla and Paglinawan (2025) found that students who combine work and study face significant challenges. These findings include physical and mental exhaustion, self-care practices, high responsibility and hard work, academic struggles, such as OGA or examination, and ineffective time management (Orbilla & Paglinawan, 2025). Earning while studying often becomes a necessity due to financial

pressures, personal ambitions, and family responsibilities, making it important to understand the constraints students face and the strategies they use to cope (Orbilla & Paglinawan, 2025).

Therefore, Pološki Vokić et al. (2021) identified effective strategies for managing the challenges of working while studying. These findings highlighted key coping strategies, including finding a balance between work and study, scheduling time for relaxation to reduce stress, and maintaining emotional resilience to better accept the situation (Pološki Vokić et al., 2021). Although existing literature has explored the challenges and strategies associated with balancing work and study, these aspects are often examined separately and within restricted contexts. As a result, there is an insufficient insightful analysis that combines both challenges and strategies within a unified framework. This gap highlights the need for a more comprehensive investigation that synthesizes empirical findings across diverse contexts, providing a rigorous understanding of how students can be effectively supported in managing both academic and employment responsibilities.

Thus, this study addresses this gap by scrutinizing existing research on work–study balance into a cohesive analytical paradigm that incorporates both challenges and strategies among higher education students. It aims to contribute conceptually by integrating structural, academic, and psychosocial factors within a unified perspective; contextually by drawing on evidence from diverse educational settings across both developed and developing systems; and methodologically through a systematic review of empirical studies. By synthesizing previously scattered findings, the study illustrates how these interrelated factors shape students' ability to balance academic and work dedications, while also extending current theoretical understanding of student engagement and well-being in higher education. Overall, the review begins by outlining the methodology, followed by a discussion of the challenges encountered by working students, a synthesis of effective strategies to address these challenges, and concludes with recommendations for future research.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employs a systematic review research design to identify, evaluate, and synthesize empirical evidence relevant to the research questions. A systematic review provides a rigorous and transparent approach to collecting and analyzing secondary data through predefined procedures for searching, screening, assessing, and synthesizing relevant studies (Nunn & Chang, 2020; Randles & Finnegan, 2023). Additionally, document analysis is used to systematically examine selected research articles as documentary sources. Bowen (2009) describes document analysis as a structured method for reviewing and evaluating documents to extract relevant information and develop meaningful interpretations. In this study, document analysis facilitates the systematic extraction, organization, and synthesis of evidence from selected empirical studies. Overall, integrating systematic review and document analysis ensures a clear and transparent process for synthesizing existing literature to address the research questions.

Systematic Review Procedure

Systematic reviews commonly follow the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) framework to ensure transparency, rigor, and methodological robustness in the study selection process (Page et al., 2021). This method minimizes bias, ensures reliability, and helps address gaps in the existing literature (Randles & Finnegan, 2023). Thus, this study adopts the PRISMA-guided approach to ensure a transparent and rigorous study selection process. The selected articles were organized using manually developed paper roadmaps, collaboratively designed by the authors to categorize articles by research structure (introduction, methodology, results, discussion, implications, conclusion) and themes related to work–study balance. All articles were saved in Microsoft Word folders, with a communication platform, namely Telegram, used to manage links. Additionally, the PRISMA framework was integrated and modified in this study, comprising four key stages: identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and inclusion, as shown in Figure 1.

Only open-access articles were included in this review to ensure full accessibility of the selected studies. In the identification stage, the search strategy was based on predefined keywords, including “Work–Study Balance,” “Challenges,” “Strategies,” “Higher Education,” “University,” and “2020-2025,” applied across multiple databases to ensure comprehensive literature retrieval. Between 4 and 10 February 2026,

113 articles were initially identified using relevant search terms, with inclusion criteria restricted to studies published between 2020 and 2025 and available in open-access format. On 11 February 2026, the authors conducted a preliminary screening and organized the retrieved articles, focusing on file management, alignment with the research roadmap, and refinement of inclusion criteria. This was followed by a second search conducted from February 12 to 16, 2026, during which an additional 56 articles were identified, bringing the total to 169 articles.

During this identification stage, six additional articles identified through reference list searching were incorporated into the respective database totals. In total, 169 articles were identified: 71 from Google Scholar (67 direct search and four from reference lists), 42 from ResearchGate (41 direct search and one from reference lists), 24 from ScienceDirect, and 31 from PubMed (31 direct search and one from reference lists). No additional articles were identified from other sources during this stage of the review process. In the screening stage, a total of 169 articles were assessed based on their titles and abstracts. Of these, 71 articles were excluded: 48 due to lack of relevance to the research objectives, 16 as duplicate records, and seven due to non-English language. Subsequently, full-text screening was performed on the remaining 98 articles during the eligibility stage.

At this point, 47 articles were further excluded because they did not meet the review criteria, including 34 that lacked relevance to the research objectives, five identified as duplicates, six irrelevant to the context, and two non-English articles. A total of 51 articles, including 23 from Google Scholar, 13 from ResearchGate, 5 from ScienceDirect, and 10 from PubMed, satisfied the inclusion criteria and were analyzed to address the research questions. Overall, articles were excluded based on predefined criteria through rigorous screening and researchers' consensus. The retained studies were sourced from Google Scholar, ResearchGate, ScienceDirect, and PubMed to ensure comprehensive coverage of empirical literature. These databases were chosen for their accessibility, reliability, and transparency, supporting a systematic and replicable search process.

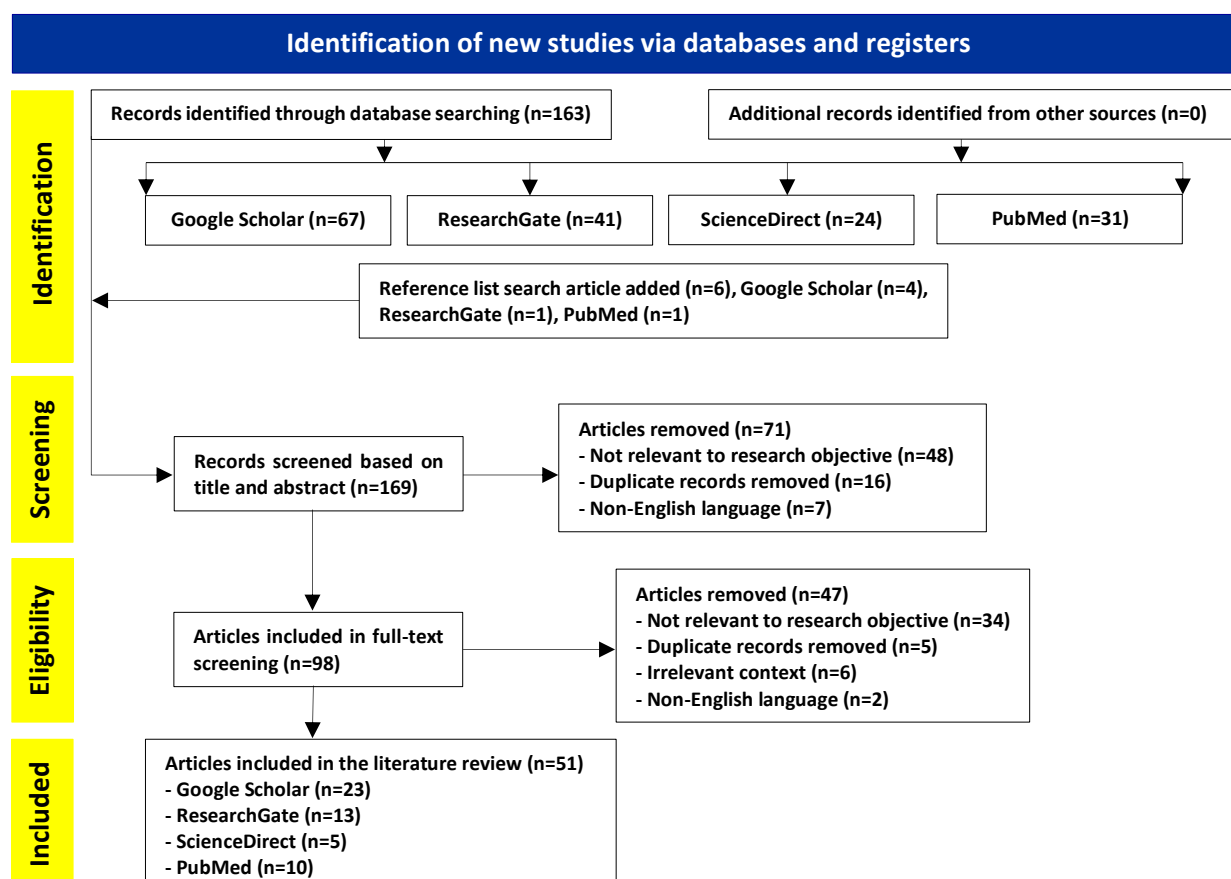


Figure 1. PRISMA flow diagram of the study selection process

Inclusion and exclusion criteria

According to Patino and Ferreira (2018), inclusion criteria specify the characteristics of articles that make them relevant for addressing the research question, while exclusion criteria identify studies that, despite meeting inclusion requirements, could compromise the quality of the review, introduce bias, or provide insufficient or irrelevant data. To ensure the quality, consistency, and relevance of the selected literature, this study applied clearly defined inclusion and exclusion criteria. The inclusion criteria were: (1) scholarly publications, including academic journals, conference proceedings, and institutional documents; (2) studies focused on work–study contents, higher education, and educational contexts; (3) publications written in English; (4) studies published between 2020 and 2025; and (5) sources indexed in Google Scholar, ResearchGate, ScienceDirect, and PubMed.

The exclusion criteria included: (1) non-scholarly sources such as books, book reviews, blogs, newspapers, magazines, or social media posts; (2) studies unrelated to work–study students, higher education, and educational contexts; (3) publications in languages other than English; (4) studies published before 2020; and (5) sources not considered accessible through Google Scholar, ResearchGate, ScienceDirect, and PubMed, as shown in Table 1. This study includes only articles published between 2020 and 2025 to capture the most recent and relevant empirical research, excluding older publications, books, book reviews, and other documents that do not meet the inclusion criteria, while reflecting the evolving educational context during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, influencing how students balance work and study.

Table 1. Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
Scholarly publications, including academic journals, conference proceedings, and institutional documents	Non-scholarly sources (e.g., books, book reviews, blogs, newspapers, magazines, social media posts)
Studies related to working and study contents, higher education, or related educational contexts	Studies unrelated to work–study students, higher education, and educational contexts.
Studies in English	Studies published in languages other than English
Studies published between 2020 and 2025	Studies published before 2020 or after 2025
Studies from Google Scholar, ResearchGate, ScienceDirect, and PubMed	Studies from Google Scholar, ResearchGate, ScienceDirect, and PubMed

Source: Authors' design (2026)

Data extraction and analysis

Data were systematically extracted from the selected studies to ensure consistency, accuracy, and comparability across the reviewed literature. A structured data extraction form was developed to record key information from each article, including main findings, author(s), and publication year, research methodology, study context, sample characteristics, and data collection method. This process enabled the organization of relevant information clearly and consistently. Additionally, thematic analysis is a systematic method used to identify, interpret, and organize patterns or themes within data (Sandhiya, 2024). It enables scholars to understand key ideas, interpret their meanings, and connect related concepts across studies, offering a concise approach to synthesizing complex information from multiple sources into a coherent framework (Sandhiya, 2024).

Therefore, this study employs thematic analysis to systematically examine the selected literature and derive key findings that address the research questions. The extracted data were organized in tabular form and categorized by methodological approach and thematic focus on work–study balance among higher education students. The data were then analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and key themes, including mental health and physical challenges, academic performance, stress, and coping strategies. Finally, two researchers independently screened the articles, with any discrepancies systematically resolved through discussion to ensure a rigorous and reliable selection process.

VOSviewer analysis

The VOSviewer represents the visualization of similarities that support and provide crucial research insights into identifying critical touchpoints in the existing literature, tracing relevant key terms, and illustrating associations between studies within a concise topic of study (Van Eck & Waltman, 2011). In this

Publication year distribution of included studies

RQ1. What key challenges do students face when balancing work and study in higher education?

This study concludes by addressing these research questions and providing insights based on the

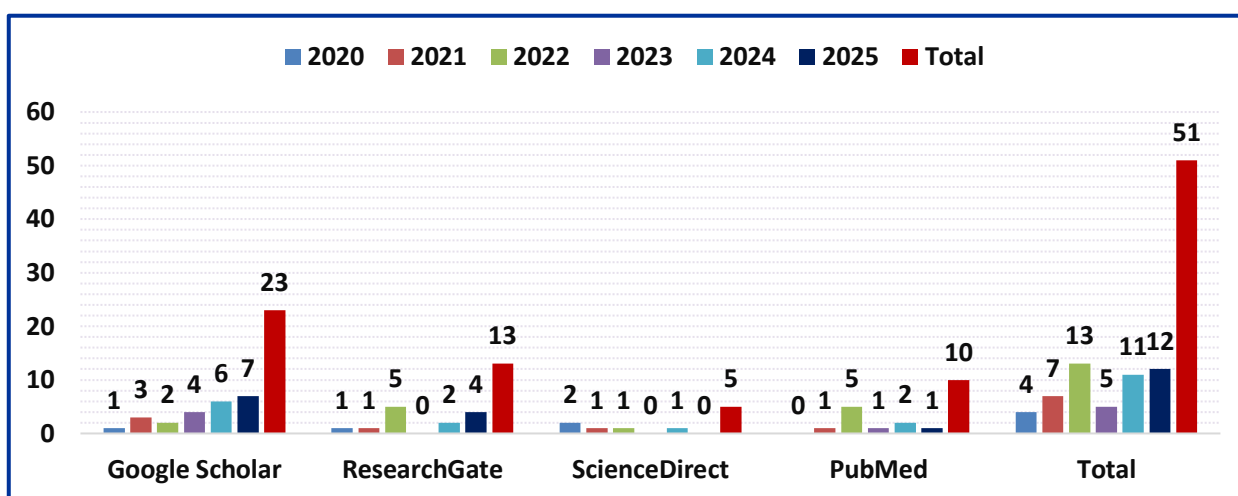


Figure 3: Studies by database and publication year (2020–2025)
Source: Authors' design using Microsoft Excel (version 2015)

Geographical Distribution of Studies

The study included 51 relevant empirical studies from Asia, Europe, North America, Africa, South America, and Australia (Oceania) to provide a comprehensive overview. These studies reflect the geographical distribution of the literature included in this review and contribute to addressing the two research questions. Out of the 51 studies, 26 were conducted in Asia, followed by 14 in Europe and five in North America. A smaller number of studies originated from Africa and South America (two each), while only one study was identified from Australia (Oceania). These 51 empirical articles directly addressed the research questions and were analyzed to synthesize the key findings, as shown in Figure 4. Overall, this brief overview provides the foundation for the subsequent PRISMA flow and the detailed analysis of the studies that inform the review's key findings.

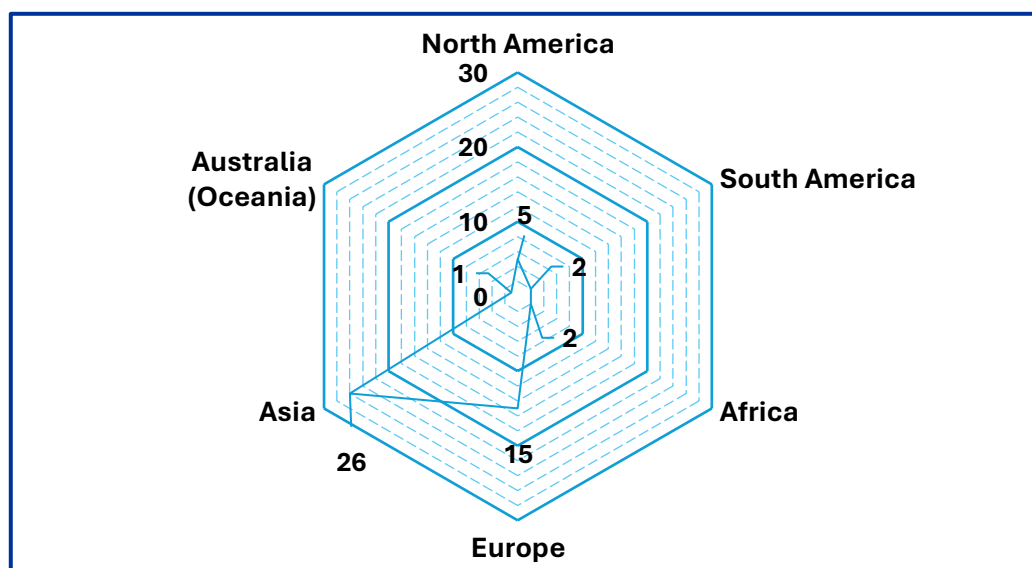


Figure 4. Geographical distribution of reviewed studies across continents
Source: Authors' design using Microsoft Excel (version 2015)

Publication sources and types of included studies

In view of the diversity of the selected articles, studies were drawn from a wide range of journals to synthesize and advance knowledge on the challenges and strategies of students balancing work and study in

higher education. Most articles were sourced from major academic databases and published in scientific journals, ensuring rigorous, evidence-based findings, with a smaller proportion from conference proceedings or institutional documents. The highest number of articles appeared in *Frontiers in Psychology* and the *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* (three articles each), followed by the *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science* (two articles). The remaining studies were distributed across other journals, conferences, and institutional sources. Geographically, most articles originated from Indonesia (nine articles), followed by the United States (eight) and the United Kingdom (seven). India and Switzerland each contributed four articles, while one or two articles represented the remaining countries. Overall, 49 articles were sourced from journals, while one article each was obtained from conference proceedings and institutional documents, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Publication types included in this study

No	Source title	Types	Country	Total articles
1	Sains Humanika	Journal	Malaysia	1
2	Interdisciplinary Conference of Psychology, Health, and Social Science (ICPHS 2021)	Conference proceeding	Indonesia	1
3	International Journal of Novel Research and Development	Journal	India	1
4	Global Scientific Journal (GSJ)	Journal	India	1
5	Economic and Business Review	Journal	Slovenia	1
6	Current Psychology	Journal	United States	1
7	Journal of Education and Learning (EduLearn)	Journal	Indonesia	1
8	International Journal of Higher Education	Journal	Canada	1
9	Frontiers in Psychology	Journal	Switzerland	3
10	International Journal of Educational Research Open	Journal	United Kingdom	1
11	Bellarmine University ScholarWorks	Institutional documents	United States	1
12	BMC Psychology	Journal	United Kingdom	1
13	Journal of Information Systems Engineering and Management	Journal	Portugal	1
14	International Multidisciplinary Journal of Research for Innovation, Sustainability, and Excellence (IMJRISE)	Journal	Philippines	1
15	Clinical Epidemiology and Global Health	Journal	Philippines	1
16	Japanese Psychological Research	Journal	Japan	1
17	Behavioral Sleep Medicine	Journal	United States	1
18	Journal of Humanities and Social Science	Journal	Indonesia	1
19	Education Sciences	Journal	Switzerland	1
20	Jurnal Bimbingan dan Konseling Terapan	Journal	Indonesia	1
21	European Journal of Higher Education	Journal	United Kingdom	1
22	Jurnal Rekayasa Sistem Industri	Journal	Indonesia	1
23	Journal of King Saud University-Science	Journal	Saudi Arabia	1
24	Health SA Gesondheid	Journal	South Africa	1
25	Jurnal Psikologi Pendidikan & Konseling: Jurnal Kajian Psikologi Pendidikan dan Bimbingan Konseling,	Journal	Indonesia	1
26	American Journal of Education and Learning	Journal	United Arab Emirates	1
27	The Qualitative Report	Journal	United States	1
28	International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science	Journal	India	2
29	International Journal of Economics and Management Research	Journal	Indonesia	1

30	International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health	Journal	Switzerland	3
31	Educación Médica	Journal	Spain	1
32	Zagreb International Review of Economics & Business	Journal	Croatia	1
33	European Journal of Psychological Research	Journal	United Kingdom	1
34	Contemporary Educational Psychology	Journal	United States	1
35	British Journal of Educational Psychology	Journal	United States	1
36	Applied Psychology: Health and Well-Being	Journal	United Kingdom	1
37	Sustainability	Journal	Switzerland	1
38	Pakistan Journal of Linguistics and Human Resource	Journal	Pakistan	1
39	International Journal of Professional Business Review	Journal	Brazil	1
40	Mental Health and Social Inclusion	Journal	United Kingdom	1
41	International Journal of Scientific Research and Archives	Journal	India	1
42	Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice	Journal	United States	1
43	Higher Education	Journal	United States	1
44	BMC Public Health	Journal	United Kingdom.	1
45	Journal of Islamic Education	Journal	Indonesia	1
46	Modern Medical Journal	Journal	China	1

Source: Authors' design (2026)

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

The results of this review are organized into two main categories: challenges and strategies. This structure offers a comprehensive synthesis of how working students balance academic and employment responsibilities. The following sections present a detailed discussion of each category.

Key challenges in the work–study balance among higher education students

Based on the literature review findings, the table below provides a concise overview of the challenges faced by higher education students balancing work and study:

Table 3. Key challenges in the work–study balance among higher education students

Key challenges	Author (s) (year)	Methodology	Study Context	Sample characteristics	Data collection method
Mental health issues	Balacuit and Lopio (2022)	Mixed methods	Philippines	79 working students	Focus group discussion and Questionnaire
	Verulava and Jorbenadze (2022)	Quantitative	Georgia	700 undergraduates	Online survey
	Nouri et al. (2022)	Qualitative	Iran	24 undergraduates	Semi-structured faced-to-faced interviews
	Patwary et al. (2022)	Quantitative	Bangladesh	744 (554 students and 200 working students)	Online survey
	Summer et al. (2025)	Mixed method	United States	214 (163 working students and 51	Online survey

Low physical activity	Lukacs (2021)	Quantitative	Hungary	non-working students) 2,779 university students	Online survey
	Silva et al. (2022)	Mixed methods	Brazil	119 students	Online survey and semi-structured interviews
	Soelistiyono and Chen (2023)	Qualitative	Indonesia	15 working students	Face-to-face in-depth interviews
	Rodríguez-Romo et al. (2023)	Quantitative	Spanish	847 undergraduates	Online survey
	Teuber et al. (2024)	Quantitative	Germany	57 undergraduates	Longitudinal daily survey
Academic performance	Exposito Nuñez (2025)	Quantitative	United States	125 undergraduates	Online survey
	Bartolj and Polanec (2021)	Quantitative	Slovakia	4,963 students	Archival data
	Thies (2022)	Quantitative	Germany	1,625 students	Longitudinal online survey
	Lessky and Unger (2023)	Quantitative	Austria	47,228 students	Cross-sectional survey
	Kocsis and Pusztai (2024)	Quantitative	Hungary	538 working students	Primary survey
Increased stress	Tecson et al. (2025)	Quantitative	Philippines	103 working students	Online survey
	Draghici and Cazan (2022)	Quantitative	Romania	151 students	Online survey
	Lestari and Putri (2024)	Quantitative	Indonesia	100 postgraduate students	Online survey
	Pérez and Urrejola-Contreras (2024)	Quantitative	Chile	220 students	Self-report survey
	Abdilah et al. (2025)	Quantitative	Malaysia	4,861 students	Survey
Sleep disturbance	Chiang et al. (2020)	Quantitative	United States	736 students	Online survey
	Isac and Abraham (2020)	Quantitative	Oman	157 undergraduates	Survey
	Jansen et al. (2021)	Quantitative	United States	656 university students	Online survey
	Shimamoto et al. (2021)	Quantitative	Japan	85 undergraduates	Survey
	Manyeneng et al. (2021)	Quantitative	South Africa	375 students	Survey

Source: Authors' design (2026)

Table 3 above highlights various challenges students face when balancing work and study in higher education. One significant challenge is mental health issues, including cognitive and emotional problems, as reported in several studies. Low physical activity is another significant concern, as students often struggle to balance their work and study schedules with maintaining their physical and mental well-being. Academic

performance is also affected, with workloads and deadlines negatively impacting students' results. Increased stress is a further concern, leading to forgetfulness, fatigue, and reduced energy. Finally, sleep disturbance poses a significant challenge, resulting in low concentration and irregular habits as students navigate their dual responsibilities.

Key strategies for work–study balance among higher education students

Based on the results of the literature review screening, the following effective strategies for balancing work and study among higher education students are summarized in the table below:

Table 4. Key strategies for work–study balance among higher education students

Key strategies	Author (s) (year)	Methodology	Study Context	Sample characteristics	Data collection method
Time management	Bangquiao et al. (2023)	Quantitative	Philippines	60 working students	Survey
	Mohira (2025)	Quantitative	Uzbekistan	20 undergraduates	Survey
	Galaviz et al. (2025)	Quantitative	Mexico	46 undergraduates	Online survey
	Fu et al. (2025)	Quantitative	China	1,016 university students	Web-based survey
Healthy work–study balance	Pološki Vokić et al. (2021)	Quantitative	Croatia	235 working and non-working students	Web-based survey
	Eastgate et al. (2022)	Qualitative	Australia	20 working undergraduates	Semi-structured interview
	Suminguit et al. (2025)	Qualitative	Philippines	10 working students	Face-to-face in-depth interviews
	Kanu et al. (2025)	Quantitative	Nigeria	930 working students	Online survey and focus group discussion
	Patria et al. (2025)	Quantitative	Indonesia	97 undergraduates	Online survey
Peer support	Lase and Wibowo (2024)	Quantitative	Indonesia	120 undergraduates	Online survey
	Smith et al. (2024)	Qualitative	United Kingdom	69 university students	Focus group discussion
	Paik (2024)	Qualitative	Bangladesh	9 (three lecturers and six students)	Focus group discussions and In-depth interviews
	Schimmelpfennig (2025)	Quantitative	Germany	779 students	Web-based survey
	Binasari and Tentama (2025)	Quantitative	Indonesia	101 working students	Survey
Goal orientation	Schippers et al. (2020)	Quantitative	Netherlands	2,928 first-year students	Online survey
	Wang et al. (2022)	Quantitative	China	74 students	Survey
	Frumos et al. (2024)	Quantitative	Romania	274 students	Online survey
	Afandi et al. (2022)	Quantitative	Indonesia	96 working students	Self-administered

Self-regulation	Ito and Umemoto (2022)	Quantitative	Japan	777 (397 university students and 380 working adults)	questionnaire survey Self-administered questionnaire survey
	Schulte-Frankenfeld and Trautwein (2022)	Quantitative	Germany	64 working students	Web-based survey
	Mawardah and Kalsyum (2023)	Quantitative	Indonesia	500 working students	Online survey
	Rahayu et al. (2024)	Qualitative	Indonesia	12 university students	Semi-structured interviews and document analysis
Self-motivation	Tumin et al. (2020)	Qualitative	Malaysia	2 postgraduate students	Semi-structured interviews
	Li et al. (2022)	Quantitative	China	646 final-year students	Self-administered survey
	Siraj (2024)	Quantitative	Pakistan	636 students	Online survey
	Gutana et al. (2024)	Quantitative	Philippines	136 working students	Survey

Source: Authors' design (2026)

Table 4 highlights several strategies that help higher education students manage work and study responsibilities effectively. Time management enables students to allocate time appropriately between work, assignments, and academic tasks, while work–study balance promotes healthy routines that support mental and physical well-being. Peer support provides motivation, advice, and learning benefits. Additionally, goal orientation strengthens resilience and commitment, while self-regulation promotes discipline and consistency. Finally, self-motivation helps students remain focused, build self-confidence, achieve academic goals, and develop realistic career aspirations.

Discussion

Key challenges in the work–study balance among higher education students

This study aims to provide an insightful analysis of the key challenges that students face when balancing work and study in higher education, drawing on reliable and scholarly works from diverse contexts. These key challenges include mental health issues, low physical activity, academic performance, increased stress, and sleep disturbance.

Mental health issues

Work-study students in higher education increasingly face the risk of burnout when managing work and study simultaneously, which can significantly impact their academic programs, particularly their mental health (Abraham et al., 2025). Several studies have indicated that mental health issues are a significant concern affecting employed students in higher education (Balacuit & Lopio, 2022; Verulava & Jorbenadze, 2022; Nouri et al., 2022; Patwary et al., 2022; Summer et al., 2025). A study by Balacuit and Lopio (2022) was conducted among 79 students at North Eastern Mindanao State University (NEMSU) in the Philippines and found that most participants experienced mental health issues, including frequent headaches, heightened sensitivity, and increased negative overthinking. Similarly, evidence by Verulava and Jorbenadze (2022) was conducted among 700 students at Caucasus University in Georgia, and showed that students were more likely to face mental health issues, such as irritation and bad temper, decreased concentration, headache, and memory impairment.

An exploration by Nouri et al. (2022) was conducted with 24 students at Guilan University of Medical Sciences in Iran, confirming that mental health issues significantly affected employed students, such as high

levels of fear, heightened psychological pressure, and increased fainting. Patwary et al. (2022) conducted a study involving 744 students at the Institute of Disaster Management, Khulna University of Engineering & Technology, Bangladesh, and found that many students were significantly affected by managing work and study simultaneously, such as a high level of anxiety, increased worry, and mental illness.

Finally, a study by Summer et al. (2025), conducted among 214 students at a University Honors College in the United States, found that mental health challenges significantly affected employed students, leading to increased emotional pressure, cognitive strain, and heightened concern about both work and academic performance. Overall, the evidence consistently indicates that combining work and study is associated with substantial mental health challenges among higher education students, including anxiety, psychological pressure, emotional strain, and reduced concentration. These findings suggest that competing work and academic demands may increase students' psychological burden and negatively affect their overall well-being and academic functioning.

Low physical activity

According to Tao et al. (2025), physical activity significantly affects physical and mental health, particularly university students' health-related quality of life. Many studies show that balancing work and study often reduces students' activity levels, negatively impacting their health (Lukacs, 2021; Silva et al., 2022; Soelistiyono & Chen, 2023; Rodríguez-Romo et al., 2023; Teuber et al., 2024; Exposito Nuñez, 2025). A study by Lukacs (2021) was conducted among 2,779 students across four Hungarian universities in Hungary, showing that those balancing work and study exhibited lower levels of physical activity, such as cycling, walking, weightlifting, running, and aerobics, which may negatively affect their physical well-being.

Evidence by Silva et al. (2022), in a study of 119 students from the Goiano Federal Institute and the Federal University of Espírito Santo in Brazil, found that balancing work and study negatively affected physical activity levels, largely due to academic workload and time constraints. Similarly, Soelistiyono and Chen (2023) conducted a study involving 15 students at a public university in Taiwan and found that those balancing work and study reported lower levels of physical activity due to time constraints related to academic tasks and job responsibilities. Evidence by Rodríguez-Romo et al. (2023) involved 847 students from six public and seven private universities in Madrid, Spain, confirming that balancing work and study poses a low level of physical activity, including too much homework, insufficient time, and lack of motivation.

Another study by Teuber et al. (2024), conducted among 57 students at the University of Tübingen in Germany, found that balancing work and study significantly affects students' physical activity levels. Key contributing factors included work-study stress load and pressure related to academic performance. Similarly, an exploration by Exposito Nuñez (2025), involving 125 students at Bellarmine University in the United States of America, revealed that many students experienced a decline in physical activity while managing both employment and academic responsibilities. These included working conditions, long working hours, emotional strain, learning pressure, and the demands of completing academic tasks (Exposito Nuñez, 2025). The evidence shows that balancing work and study is associated with reduced physical activity among higher education students, largely due to limited time, academic workload, job responsibilities, and work-study stress. These constraints may reduce students' participation in activities such as walking, cycling, running, and exercise, potentially affecting their physical well-being and overall quality of life.

Academic performance

Employment can provide several benefits for students, including financial support for daily expenses and tuition fees, opportunities to expand social networks, the development of work experience, improvement in language proficiency, and the enhancement of overall soft skills (Al Azis et al., 2021). However, numerous studies have also identified significant challenges associated with combining work and study, particularly their negative impact on students' academic performance (Bartolj & Polanec, 2021; Thies, 2022; Lessky & Unger, 2023; Kocsis & Pusztai, 2024; Tecson et al., 2025). A study by Bartolj and Polanec (2021), involving 4,963 students from the School of Economics and Business at the University of Ljubljana, Slovakia, found that balancing work and study significantly affects students' academic performance, leading to reduced learning concentration, insufficient exam preparation, and lower overall academic achievement.

Likewise, Theies (2023), studying 1,625 students in German Studienkolleg courses, found that balancing work and study led to lower grades, delayed academic progress, and difficulty meeting the required semester GPA (OGA). Another study by Lessky and Unger (2023), involving 4,728 students from Public

Universities in Austria, found that balancing work and study significantly affects students' academic performance. These impacts include incomplete courses, lower OGA, increased academic stress, difficulties in allocating time between work and study, reduced academic concentration, and diminished overall learning success (Lessky & Unger, 2023).

Evidence by Kocsis and Pusztai (2024) was conducted among 538 students from higher education institutions across several majors in Hungary, showing that balancing work and study hurts students' academic performance. These issues are linked to elevated dropout rates, passive semesters, transfers to fee-based programs, and reduced motivation and increased frustration (Kocsis & Pusztai, 2024). Finally, a study by Tecson et al. (2025), involving 103 students at Bukidnon State University–Kadingilan in the Philippines, found that balancing work and study posed significant challenges to students' academic performance. These impacts included missed academic deadlines, difficulties in managing time and maintaining learning concentration, and a lower overall general weighted average (Tecson et al., 2025). Balancing work and study can negatively affect students' academic performance through reduced concentration, inadequate exam preparation, lower grades, delayed academic progress, and difficulties meeting academic requirements. These challenges are largely associated with limited time, academic stress, reduced motivation, and difficulties managing competing work and study responsibilities.

Increased stress

Working while studying poses a significant challenge, as students must manage high responsibilities in both work and academic demands, leading to several issues, including increased stress (Mesra et al., 2021). Several empirical studies indicated that working while studying significantly increases stress levels among students (Draghici & Cazan, 2022; Lestari & Putri, 2024; Pérez & Urrejola-Contreras, 2024; Abdilah et al., 2025). Research by Draghici and Cazan (2022), involving 151 students from Transilvania University of Braşov in Romania, found that most students experienced increased stress as a result of balancing work and study simultaneously. These issues include heightened anxiety, physical and emotional problems, mental exhaustion, reduced class engagement, and instances of academic dishonesty (Draghici & Cazan, 2022).

A study by Lestari and Putri (2024), involving 100 postgraduate students at Gunadarma University, Indonesia, found that combining work and study significantly increases stress levels, leading to heavy academic and job demands, limited free time, reduced mental resilience, hypertension, occupational stress, and depression, difficulty in academic concentration, and an uncomfortable learning environment. Similarly, Pérez and Urrejola-Contreras (2024), in a study of 220 students at Viña del Mar University, Chile, reported that most students experienced heightened stress due to balancing work and university studies. These issues included sleeping fewer than six hours per night and working long hours, which resulted in low energy levels and diminished concentration (Pérez & Urrejola-Contreras, 2024).

Research by Abdilah et al. (2025) was conducted among 4,816 students at Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, showing that working while studying significantly increases stress, such as higher levels of strain, burnout, and negative thinking. Overall, the evidence demonstrates that combining work and study significantly increases students' stress levels, often resulting in anxiety, mental exhaustion, burnout, sleep difficulties, and reduced concentration. These challenges are largely driven by heavy academic and work demands, limited free time, long working hours, and difficulties managing competing responsibilities.

Sleep disturbance

According to Khatoon et al. (2024), working while studying represents a substantial challenge for many higher education students, particularly as it contributes to sleep disturbances. Numerous studies have confirmed that balancing work and study adversely affects students' sleep disturbances (Chiang et al., 2020; Isac & Abraham, 2020; Jansen et al., 2020; Shimamoto et al., 2021; Manyeneng et al., 2021). A study by Chiang et al. (2020) was conducted among 375 students from College Programs in Hospitality, Tourism, & Culinary Arts in the United States, showing that working while studying negatively affects students' sleep disturbance. These consequences include reduced sleep duration, poorer health conditions, and diminished learning engagement, which ultimately lead to lower academic performance and weaker overall grade averages (Chiang et al., 2020).

Another study by Isac and Abraham (2020) involving 157 students from Sultanate University in Oman found that balancing work and study contributes to sleep disturbances, including reduced sleeping hours (less than four to six hours per day), limited time for exam preparation, and increased academic pressure.

Research by Jasen et al. (2021) was conducted among 656 students at New York University in the United States, showing that students' sleep disturbance is influenced by working while studying. These issues include mental workload, emotional pressure, intense work–study demands, increased complexity, and overconsumption of caffeinated beverages, driving to staying up overnight (Jasen et al., 2021).

Another study by Shimamoto et al. (2021) involving 85 students across five majors at Osaka University in Japan found that working while studying adversely affects sleep, leading to insufficient sleep, increased daytime sleepiness, and declining mental health. Finally, a study by Manyeneng et al. (2021) involving 375 students from a university in Gauteng Province, South Africa, found that working while studying contributes to sleep disturbances, including fatigue, high stress levels, sleep disorders, poor eating habits, and increased caffeine consumption, which lead to physical and mental health issues and poorer learning outcomes. The evidence shows that balancing work and study can disrupt students' sleep through reduced sleep duration, high academic and work demands, emotional pressure, and increased daytime fatigue. These sleep-related issues may negatively affect students' physical and mental well-being, learning engagement, concentration, and academic performance.

Key strategies for work–study balance among higher education students

This study aims to provide an in-depth analysis of effective strategies that help students address the challenge of balancing work and study in higher education, drawing on credible and scholarly documents from various contexts. These effective strategies include time management, healthy work-study balance, peer support, goal orientation, self-regulation, and self-motivation.

Time management

According to Sharma et al. (2025), time management represents systematic competencies, mechanisms, and approaches implemented to allocate, organize, and divide appropriate time to accomplish the directions individuals have determined and to achieve various tasks effectively, including balancing work and study. Several studies have shown that time management has a significant contribution to supporting the balancing of work and study among students in higher education (Bangquiao et al., 2023; Mohira, 2025; Galaviz et al., 2025; Fu et al., 2025). A study by Bangquiao et al. (2023) involved 60 students from Southern de Oro Philippines College, showing that time management significantly supports students in balancing work and study. These include managing tasks to be completed on time, improving work quality, enabling efficient work outcomes, allocating time to prioritize urgent tasks, scheduling time for assignments and reviewing lessons, and completing academic work on time (Bangquiao et al., 2023).

Another study by Mohira (2025) with 20 students from Uzbek State World Languages University, Uzbekistan, found that time management positively supports balancing work and study by helping prioritize assignments, achieve goals, improve grades, mitigate academic and work-related stress, and improve overall students' learning results. Evidence from Galaviz et al. (2025), involving 46 students from the Instituto Tecnológico de Sonora in Mexico, found that time management significantly aids students in balancing work and study. This includes completing high-priority tasks, maintaining a structured schedule, organizing work effectively, and breaking tasks into manageable portions (Galaviz et al., 2025).

Finally, a study by Fu et al. (2025) involving 1,016 students from the School of Mental Health, Jining Medical University in China, demonstrated that time management has a positive influence on balancing work and study by enhancing academic engagement and fostering self-control in students' academic programs. Effective time management plays a crucial role in helping higher education students balance work and study by prioritizing tasks, organizing schedules, meeting deadlines, and managing competing responsibilities. It also supports academic engagement, self-control, learning outcomes, and stress reduction, enabling students to manage their work and academic demands more

Healthy work–study balance

According to Siem et al. (2025), maintaining a healthy work–study balance plays a crucial role in helping students manage employment and academic responsibilities, supporting balanced academic life, career development, and improved academic achievement. Several studies indicate that a healthy work–study balance positively enhances both academic and work outcomes for working students (Pološki Vokić et al., 2021; Eastgate et al., 2022; Suminguit et al., 2025; Kanu et al., 2025; Patria et al., 2025). A study by Pološki Vokić et al. (2021) involving 235 students from the University of Zagreb, Croatia, found that a healthy work–

study balance supports students in managing study and personal time, maintaining emotional stability, allowing time for recovery, and improving both work and academic performance.

Another study by Eastgate et al. (2022), conducted among 20 students from a university in Queensland, Australia, found that a healthy work–study balance improves both work and academic quality. This includes effectively managing urgent work demands, focusing on future goals, and prioritizing tasks and problems (Eastgate et al., 2022). Similarly, evidence by Suminguit et al. (2025), involving 10 students from Misamis University in the Philippines, found that a healthy work–study balance enhances both work and academic performance. This includes supporting academic and job responsibilities, prioritizing mental and physical health, improving flexible learning schedules, and managing study time effectively (Suminguit et al., 2025).

Additionally, Kanu et al. (2025), in a study of 930 students from four tertiary institutions in Imo State, Nigeria, found that a healthy work–study balance significantly improves work and academic outcomes by supporting self-care, prioritizing tasks, and managing flexible schedules. Another study by Patria et al. (2025), involving 110 students at Buana Perjuangan University Karawang in Indonesia, found that maintaining a healthy work–study balance positively impacts academic performance, including raising overall academic achievement, boosting self-confidence, ensuring timely task submission, enhancing self-motivation, and supporting the student's career and individual life. Overall, these findings may imply that a healthy work–study balance helps higher education students effectively manage academic and work responsibilities while maintaining time for personal well-being and recovery. It also contributes to improved academic and work performance, self-confidence, motivation, task completion, and career development.

Peer support

According to Parmar et al. (2025), peer support is an effective strategy among higher education students, promoting academic engagement, fostering socially supportive groups, and assisting students in balancing work and study. Numerous studies reported that peer support positively contributes to students' work–study balance (Lase & Wibowo, 2024; Smith et al., 2024; Paik, 2024; Schimmelpfennig, 2025; Binasari & Tentama, 2025). Research by Lase and Wibowo (2024), involving 120 part-time working students in Salatiga, Central Java, Indonesia, found that peer support significantly facilitates work–study students by enhancing academic success, psychological well-being, and overall life quality. Another study by Smith et al. (2024), conducted among 69 students from four universities in the United Kingdom, found that peer support substantially enhances students' work–study balance through shared experiences, a sense of belonging, improved physical and psychological well-being, and better understanding of different perspectives.

Similarly, Paik (2024), in a study of six students and three teachers from a Government College in Bangladesh, found that peer support enhances students' work–study balance by promoting learning engagement, constructive feedback, and motivation. Evidence by Schimmelpfennig (2025), involving 779 students from 13 urban and rural German universities, indicated that peer support positively supports students' work–study students by enhancing motivation, strengthening self-regulation, and promoting academic achievement and career development.

Finally, a study by Binasari and Tentama (2025), conducted among 110 employed students from STIE SBI in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, confirmed that peer support positively facilitates students' work–study balance by enhancing work experience, supporting career development strategies, understanding workplace trends, and fostering greater responsibility. Overall, the evidence suggests that peer support plays an important role in helping higher education students balance work and study by providing shared experiences, motivation, constructive feedback, and a sense of belonging. It also supports academic engagement, psychological well-being, self-regulation, career development, and overall academic achievement.

Goal orientation

According to Beik and Cho (2024), goal orientation is a stimulus factor that helps individuals concentrate on targeted directions and remain resilient in accomplishing their goals, including balancing work and study simultaneously. Several studies have indicated that goal orientation serves as a significant factor in supporting work–study balance among students in higher education (Schippers et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2022; Frumos et al., 2024). A study by Schippers et al. (2020), involving 2,928 Dutch Business Administration students in the Netherlands, found that goal orientation positively supports working students by helping them achieve their goals, maintain physical and mental well-being, and improve overall academic performance.

Another study by Wang et al. (2022), involving 296 Chinese college students, found that goal orientation significantly supports work–study students by improving academic planning, strengthening self-discipline, and enhancing academic performance and psychological well-being. Finally, research by Frumos et al. (2024), conducted among 274 students from the University of Iași in Romania, showed that goal orientation positively supports students in balancing work and study by enhancing motivation, promoting positive emotions, fostering hope, and increasing academic achievement. Overall, the results imply that goal orientation helps higher education students balance work and study by strengthening motivation, academic planning, self-discipline, and resilience. It also promotes positive emotions, psychological well-being, goal achievement, and improved academic performance.

Self-regulation

According to Khan et al. (2020), self-regulation refers to individuals' ability to control and monitor their energy, emotions, thoughts, and behaviors, which helps maintain life discipline and supports the achievement of educational and career goals in university. Several studies exhibit that self-regulation has a positive contribution to balancing work and study among students in higher education (Afandi et al., 2022; Ito & Umemoto, 2022; Schulte-Frankenfeld & Trautwein, 2022; Mawardah & Kalsyum, 2023; Rahayu et al., 2024). A study by Afandi et al. (2022), involving 96 students from Hasanuddin University, Indonesia, found that self-regulation significantly supports students' work–study balance by enhancing learning activities, goal setting, and planning to meet academic and work demands.

Another study by Ito and Umemoto (2022), involving 977 students from public universities in Japan, found that self-regulation positively supports work–study balance by enhancing motivation regulation, self-perception of previous performance, and learning activities. Research by Schulte-Frankenfeld and Trautwein (2022) involving 66 students from FOM University of Applied Sciences in Germany confirmed that self-regulation facilitates work–study balance by sustaining goal-directed behavior, improving concentration, and strengthening emotion regulation. Similarly, Mawardah and Kalsyum (2023), in a study of 500 students from Bina Darma University in Indonesia, found that self-regulation significantly enhances students' work–study balance by promoting learning motivation, improving academic outcomes, and helping students manage work and study demands.

Evidence by Rahayu et al. (2024), involving 12 students from Bangka Regency in Indonesia, indicated that self-regulation facilitates work–study balance by organizing work and study responsibilities effectively, strengthening self-motivation, increasing enthusiasm, maintaining work and study concentration, and sustaining prolonged engagement in tasks. Overall, the findings indicate that self-regulation helps higher education students balance work and study by strengthening planning, motivation, concentration, emotional control, and goal-directed behavior. It also enables students to manage competing responsibilities effectively, sustain engagement, and improve academic outcomes.

Self-motivation

Self-motivation is associated with several educational and psychological factors, such as interest, resilience, concentration, goal orientation, and persistence, and serves as an important indicator of students' academic success in balancing work and study (Raheem et al., 2024). Several studies exhibit that self-motivation has a significant contribution to supporting the balancing of work and study among students in higher education (Tumin et al., 2020; Li et al., 2022; Siraj, 2024; Gutana et al., 2024). Research by Tumin et al. (2020) involving two students from the International Islamic University Malaysia indicated that self-motivation facilitates work–study balance.

These significances include enhancing learning skills, improving concentration, and fostering self-discipline in both work and study (Tumin et al., 2020). Another study by Li et al. (2022), conducted among 646 students from nine universities across mainland China, confirmed that self-motivation has a positive influence on students' ability to balance work and study responsibilities. These include enhancing students' self-belief in both academic and work-related tasks, improving overall academic performance, and effectively fostering employability skills, which together help students manage their dual roles more successfully and prepare for future career challenges (Li et al., 2022).

Evidence by Siraj (2024) involving 636 students from various social sciences departments at Women's University of AJ&K Bagh in Pakistan showed that self-motivation has a positive impact on students' work and study balance in higher education. These include improving students' academic performance, promoting

learning success, and fostering intrinsic motivation (Siraj, 2024). Finally, a study by Gutana et al. (2024) involving 136 students from Mandaue City College in the Philippines showed that self-regulation facilitates work–study balance by enhancing academic outcomes, improving concentration, and strengthening intrinsic motivation to achieve desired goals. Overall, the evidence indicates that self-motivation helps higher education students balance work and study by strengthening concentration, self-discipline, self-belief, and persistence. It also supports academic performance, learning success, employability skills, and intrinsic motivation, enabling students to manage their dual responsibilities more effectively.

IMPLICATIONS AND CONTRIBUTIONS

Research implications

The findings of this study offer substantial practical implications for several stakeholders, including researchers, educational institutions, policymakers, and students. For researchers, this study provides a structured and cohesive framework that can guide future empirical studies on work–study balance, particularly in assessing the role of self-regulation, motivation, and institutional support in student outcomes. Future research may also investigate context-specific factors, such as cultural and economic influences, that impact students' competence to balance work and study. For higher education institutions, the findings indicate the need to enhance supportive learning environments that accommodate working students. Educational institutions are encouraged and supported to implement adaptable scheduling, hybrid learning options, and academic consulting services that fundamentally address the needs of employed students. In addition, institutions might consider designing workshops on time management, stress management, and self-regulation skills to strengthen and foster students' academic success and well-being. For policymakers, this study demonstrates the significance of establishing policies that support working students in higher education.

This may encompass financial aid programs, regulations on student working hours, and partnerships between educational institutions and employers to promote balanced work-study arrangements. Finally, for students, the findings emphasize the significance of improving effective coping strategies, such as time management, goal setting, and seeking peer support, to successfully manage the dual responsibilities of work and study. For employers, the findings highlight the importance of creating flexible and student-friendly working arrangements that recognize the academic responsibilities of employed students. Employers may consider offering flexible working hours, reasonable workloads, shift adjustments, and opportunities for leave during important academic periods. Such practices can reduce work–study conflicts, support students' well-being, and enable them to maintain satisfactory academic and work performance. Collaboration between employers and higher education institutions may further strengthen support systems for students who simultaneously undertake employment and academic responsibilities.

Research contributions

This review contributes an in-depth synthesis and analysis of the challenges and strategies involved in balancing work and study among university students. By reviewing a wide range of scholarly sources, it addresses a critical gap in the literature and provides a cohesive conceptual framework for understanding work–study balance in higher education. Major challenges identified include mental health issues, reduced physical activity, lower academic performance, increased stress, and sleep disturbances, all of which may have significant psychological and physical consequences. The study also highlights practical strategies to help students manage these challenges, including effective time management, maintaining a healthy work–study balance, peer support, goal orientation, self-regulation, and self-motivation. These findings offer actionable insights for multiple stakeholders: educators and higher education institutions can develop supportive learning environments and skill-building programs; policymakers can design policies to support working students, such as financial aid or employment regulations; and students themselves can adopt effective strategies to enhance academic success, personal well-being, and career development. Overall, this study provides both theoretical and practical contributions by offering a structured framework that informs future research, institutional practices, policy initiatives, and student strategies for achieving a successful work–study balance.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Research limitations

This study offers novel insights into balancing work and study among university students; however, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, this study relies entirely on secondary data from existing literature, which may introduce bias based on the scope and methodologies of the original studies. Second, this research only reviewed documents published between 2020 and 2025, which may overlook earlier relevant studies or emerging trends that could contribute to a deeper understanding of work–study balance among university students. Third, the inclusion criteria focused on English-language publications and specific academic databases, potentially excluding valuable research published in other languages or on non-academic platforms. Fourth, the study mainly examines work–study balance within particular organizational and geographical contexts, which may limit the generalizability of its findings across higher education systems globally. Finally, future research should incorporate a broader range of sources, contexts, and methodologies to provide a more comprehensive understanding of balancing work and study among students in higher education. Addressing these limitations would strengthen future studies and contribute to a more robust and inclusive understanding of work–study balance in higher education.

Recommendation for future research directions

Future research should further explore balancing work and study among university students across a wider range of institutional, geographical, and cultural settings to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges and strategies involved. It would also be valuable to examine diverse student profiles, such as employed students or those from underrepresented groups, to better understand how they navigate the demands of working while studying. Additionally, future studies could incorporate primary data collection through surveys, interviews, or case studies to provide deeper insights into work–study balance among university students. Research could also investigate the long-term impact of these challenges and strategies on students' experiences of working while studying, as well as on their physical and mental well-being. Finally, exploring the role of emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence or advanced platforms, in supporting work–study balance could provide valuable insights into how technology may help students cope with the challenges of balancing work and study in the future.

CONCLUSION

This study provides an insightful review of the challenges and strategies involved in balancing work and study among university students. Key challenges include mental health issues, reduced physical activity, lower academic performance, increased stress, and sleep disturbances, all of which can negatively impact psychological and physical well-being. Effective strategies identified include time management, maintaining a healthy work–study balance, peer support, goal orientation, self-regulation, and self-motivation. Time management allows efficient allocation of academic and work responsibilities, while a balanced schedule promotes well-being. Peer support enhances motivation and learning outcomes, goal orientation strengthens persistence, self-regulation fosters discipline, and self-motivation sustains focus and progress.

This study also offers practical implications. Researchers can build on this framework to examine work–study balance in diverse contexts. Higher education institutions are encouraged to implement flexible learning options, academic advising, and workshops on time management and stress management. Policymakers should consider supportive policies, such as financial aid and regulations on student working hours, to enable balanced work–study arrangements. Although limited by reliance on secondary data, this review highlights directions for future research. Mixed-methods and longitudinal studies are recommended to capture evolving experiences, integrate quantitative and qualitative insights, and examine strategies across cultural and institutional contexts. Overall, the study advances understanding of how students can manage work and study effectively and provides actionable guidance for improving student success and well-being in higher education.

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