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**An evaluation of the coping mechanisms of working students at the University of  
the Western Cape**

by

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**Date:** August 2021

**Declaration**

I declare that “***An evaluation of the coping mechanisms of working students at the University of the Western Cape***” is my own work. All the sources used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

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**Date:** August 2021



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**Table of Contents**

Abstract ..... vii

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY ..... 1

1.1. Introduction..... 1

1.2. Statement of the research problem ..... 3

1.3. Significance of the research ..... 4

1.4. Aims of the research..... 4

    1.4.1. Research question and sub-questions ..... 4

    1.4.2. Primary research objective ..... 5

    1.4.3. Secondary research objectives ..... 5

1.5. Background to the research..... 5

1.6. Research assumptions ..... 6

1.7. Structure ..... 7

1.8. Glossary of terms ..... 8

1.9. Chapter summary ..... 9

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK..... 10

2.1. Introduction..... 10

2.2. Theoretical framework ..... 10

    2.2.1. Spillover theory..... 10

    2.2.2. Enrichment theory ..... 11

2.3. Conceptual literature review ..... 12

    2.3.1. Work-life balance..... 12

    2.3.2. Strengths of a healthy work-life balance..... 13

    2.3.3. Problems associated with a poor work-life balance..... 14

    2.3.4. Coping mechanisms ..... 15

    2.3.5. Working students' well-being..... 17

    2.3.6. Effects of studying on work performance..... 18

    2.3.7. Financial situation in South Africa ..... 20

2.4. Empirical literature review ..... 21

    2.4.1. Sub-research question 1: What are postgraduate students' perceptions of working while studying? ..... 21

## Coping Mechanisms of Working Students

2.4.2.	Sub-research question 2: What are the challenges faced by working students when working while studying and how do they overcome these problems?	21
2.4.3.	Sub-research question 3: What are the positive and negative effects of working while studying?	22
2.4.4.	Sub-research question 4: What are some suggestions and recommendations for students who are working while studying?	23
2.5.	Assessment of the reviewed empirical literature	24
2.6.	Chapter summary	25
CHAPTER 3 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY		26
3.1.	Introduction	26
3.2.	The qualitative research paradigm	26
3.3.	The interpretive approach	28
3.4.	Research design	29
3.5.	Study participants and location	30
3.6.	Sampling Technique	31
3.7.	Data collection method	32
3.7.1.	Before the interview	33
3.7.2.	During the interview	33
3.7.3.	After the interview	34
3.7.4.	Recording of data	34
3.8.	Data analysis and coding	34
3.9.	Establishing trustworthiness and creditability	36
3.10.	Ethics and confidentiality	38
3.11.	Chapter summary	39
CHAPTER 4 DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION		40
4.1.	Introduction	40
4.2.	Data presentation	40
4.3.	Results of data coding	41
4.4.	Data analysis and interpretation	42
4.4.1.	Development and growth	42
4.4.2.	Applicability of knowledge across school and work	43
4.4.3.	Time management and planning	44
4.4.4.	Individual drive and ambition	45

Coping Mechanisms of Working Students

4.4.5. Struggles and sacrifices ..... 47

4.4.6. Support system/services ..... 47

4.4.7. Work-life balance..... 48

4.5. Chapter summary ..... 49

CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, SUGGESTIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS ..... 50

5.1. Introduction..... 50

5.2. Discussion of findings ..... 50

5.3. Proposed coping mechanism model..... 53

5.4. Recommendations..... 54

5.5. Suggestions for further research ..... 55

5.6. Limitations ..... 56

5.7. Conclusions of the investigation ..... 57

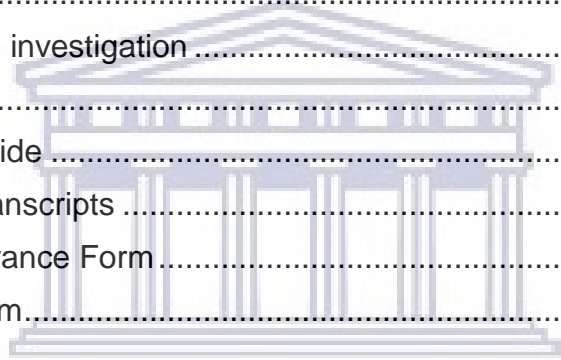
References..... 58

Appendix 1: Interview Guide ..... 68

Appendix 2: Interview Transcripts ..... 70

Appendix 3: Ethical Clearance Form ..... 86

Appendix 4: Consent Form..... 87



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**List of Tables and Figures**

Table 2.1: Work-life balance resources	13
Table 2.2: Strategies that fall under the banner of emotion-focused coping	16
Table 2.3: Most common coping strategies used by students	16
Table 2.4: Work-life balance outcomes	17
Table 3.1: Biographical information of participants	31
Table 3.2: Criteria of achieving trustworthiness	36
Table 4.1: Emerging themes	40
Table 4.2: Coding framework	41
Figure 5.1: Proposed coping mechanism model	53



### **Abstract**

This study investigated the work-life balance phenomenon by closely focusing on the individual coping mechanisms that working students adopt during their academic journey. The research was motivated by the serious financial, student burnout, psychological well-being and other obstacles that working students face, which often result in poor academic performance among this group. Exploratory survey research design was adopted in the study, while the qualitative data collection approach was employed using a structured interview as an instrument to elicit information from five research participants (postgraduate students at the University of the Western Cape). Content analysis was run to identify key themes within the data which pointed strongly towards time management as a coping strategy. The investigation found that effective time management is the most important skill needed when simultaneously working and studying, while motivation plays an equally crucial role by fuelling students' commitment to achieving academic and professional success. Overall, the findings from the study suggest that motivation and time management might be positively related or correlated among working students. Based on the study's findings, a coping mechanism model that combines effective time management with strong motivation and goal setting is recommended for further studies empirically. The model may be relevant in counselling working class students as they navigate their competing work and school demands.

**Keywords:** Burnout; coping mechanisms; psychological well-being; student motivation, time management, working students, work-life balance



## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

### 1.1. Introduction

The life of students embarking on tertiary education can be simultaneously exhilarating and daunting. “Student life” is a phrase employed by many millennials to describe the highs and lows that students will necessarily experience during their brief time at a tertiary institution (Mitchell, 2013). Inevitably, juggling the commitments of full-time employment, debt repayments, and studying can be detrimental to the mental and physical health of a significant number of university students (Ang, 2008).

The experience of undergraduate life prepares many students for the postgraduate journey ahead. In some cases, however, the postgraduate phase of study comes with new added demands. These demands might consist of full-time employment (for the purpose of funding their tuition), parenting commitments (due to having started a family), or other social and religious responsibilities associated with more advanced age. These demands can create a problematic imbalance in students’ lives if not properly managed. Indeed, the major contributing factor that leads to postgraduate burnout is stress, resulting largely from the need to simultaneously study and earn an income (Johnson et al., 2009). Stress refers to mental, physical, and emotional strain and the perception that the individual cannot meet the demand with the current social resources. Lumley and Provenzano (2003) indicated that poor student performance or learning stems directly from extreme stress levels. Freire et al. (2016) stated that stress is an interface between the individual and the surrounding environment. Stress underpins the cognitive appraisal – how the individual contextualises and perceives the stressor, and the coping process – the ability to use various resources to cope with the demand (Freire et al., 2016).

Agyapong and Owusu-Ansah (2012) reported that pursuing tertiary studies while working full-time can be overwhelming for students, some of whom experience a range of negative symptoms, including burnout, substance misuse, and mental health issues such as depression and anxiety. Burnout is described as the state of continued stress and fatigue which leads to complete exhaustion (Abbas et al., 2013). Burnout has three dimensions;

## Coping Mechanisms of Working Students

the first dimension is when the individual has depleted all emotional resources and feels completely drained/worn out. This is called emotional exhaustion. The second dimension is depersonalisation which refers to dehumanised and cynical attitudes towards recipients of one's service. The third dimension is reduced personal achievements which leads to a poor goal attainment and feeling incompetent in achieving the optimum results or performance at work/home (Abbas, 2013). It appears that job dissatisfaction contributes towards feeling burnout on all three dimensions (Vercambre et al., 2009).

Job satisfaction is commonly referred to or known to be when the individual excels within their current occupation, resulting from liking their job and excelling to the degree that they feel valued, appreciated and with the freedom to contribute their views (Gragano et al., 2020). Positive psychological health and well-being could be related to high job satisfaction. Job satisfaction displays encouraging behaviour, which is positive to the organisation, whereas when job satisfaction is low this is known to be a vital indicator of workplace complications. Despite high job satisfaction of the individual being a positive for the organisation, it is closely linked to burn-out, stress, self-esteem, and emotional and physical ailment (Gragano et al., 2020).

Freire et al. (2016) stated that several investigations have studied the role of psychological well-being; however, this seems to be a global construct; from a personal perspective, psychological well-being could greatly assist students' coping behaviour with rigorous academic demands. González et al. (2002) and Figueroa et al. (2005) observed various coping strategies in adolescent students based on their psychological well-being and reported significant differences among to students' levels. Various scholars indicated that reduced psychological well-being is rooted by an imbalance between work and family life activities (Poulose & Sudarsan, 2014).

There are multiple reasons behind young adults deciding to undertake the intense task of balancing working and studying. Two commonly cited reasons are the need for students to fund their education and, relatedly, the need to gain first-hand industry experience while studying. Govender and Wait (2017) mentioned that Work Integrated Learning (WIL) is slowly gaining traction in South Africa due to the perceptions that classroom learning

alone does not produce graduates with technical skills to be future-fit. Govender and Wait's (2017) various studies report that when students undertake WIL this is significantly good for personal development as WIL focuses specifically on student competencies.

Changes in the funding model of tertiary education have resulted in more students partaking in part-time work during their academic journey (Tumin & Faizuddin, 2017). Chinyakata et al. (2018) reported that many students do not leave university after completing their undergraduate degree, but rather make the decision to work and study simultaneously, in an effort to decrease their student debt. Due to the lack of research on working students in South Africa, it is difficult to find statistical data on the number of working students in the country. While the recent students' protests about high tuition fees in South Africa brought about a wave of much-needed reforms, these changes appear to only benefit undergraduate students (Chinyakata et al., 2018).

### **1.2. Statement of the research problem**

Recent data revealed that the number of students who are combining school and work is rapidly increasing due to rising living and tuition costs and the need for students to financially support themselves while also gaining valuable industry experience (Ang, 2018). Simultaneously, however, the business landscape is changing, with performance benchmarks and high employer expectations requiring maximum efficiency from workers (Chaitra et al., 2016). Moreover, companies encounter challenges when implementing policies geared at better school–work–life balance for working students. As a result, working students tend to encounter significant challenges throughout. Working students do not necessarily have a healthy coping style; rather, they often “go with the flow”, focusing on whatever is most urgent. Baca (2017) mentioned that university students under significant stress express that they need more time to meet their deadlines, but having time is not always the solution. The key seems to lie in time management. Working students find it very challenging to balance multiple tasks with competing demands of equal importance within the limited time they have. Thus, the present investigation sought to better understand the coping mechanisms that students in this situation use. The

## Coping Mechanisms of Working Students

ultimate focus is on how organisations and universities can assist working students in finding balance between their work and study commitments.

### **1.3. Significance of the research**

Researchers have placed considerable emphasis on work-life balance throughout the years, but school-work-life balance among students has been largely overlooked. This investigation focused specifically on three viewpoints: the experiences, coping mechanisms, and problems of working students while navigating work and student life. This includes how time-conscious and time-efficient students are. This investigation can assist tertiary institutions in the Western Cape to grasp the different school-work-life ordeals from working students and to reflect on how they can better accommodate students who bear such burdens. The research has the potential to contribute to the growing body of knowledge on working students and, ultimately, provide university programme directors with a broad view of why some students prematurely terminate their educational journey.

### **1.4. Aims of the research**

#### **1.4.1. Research question and sub-questions**

The following is the main research question of the investigation:

- What are working students' experiences, problems, and coping mechanism as they navigate work and student life?

This main research question was investigated through four sub-questions:

- Sub-research question 1: What are postgraduate students' perceptions of working while studying?
- Sub-research question 2: What are the challenges faced by working students when working while studying and how do they overcome these problems?
- Sub-research question 3: What are the positive and negative effects of working while studying?

## Coping Mechanisms of Working Students

- Sub-research question 4: What are some suggestions and recommendations for students who are working while studying?

### 1.4.2. Primary research objective

The main objective of this investigation was to understand working students' experiences and challenges, as well as the coping mechanisms that they use to navigate their competing work and school demands. It further aimed to introduce a positive coping mechanism model for working students in relation to time management.

### 1.4.3. Secondary research objectives

The investigation had the following secondary research objectives:

- a. Focusing on working students' perceptions of working while studying;
- b. Examining the challenges faced by working students and how they overcome these problems;
- c. Identifying the positive and negative effects of working while studying; and
- d. Reviewing suggestions and recommendations for students who are working while studying.

## 1.5. Background to the research

The socio-economic circumstances and political landscape of South Africa greatly affect the work-life balance of employees when compared to employee experiences in developed countries (Brink & de la Rey, 2001). The Employment Equity Act of 1998 was a significant piece of legislation that aimed to address the imbalances of the apartheid system, specifically for disadvantaged groups who were historically excluded from employment opportunities. The purposes of the act are:

- promoting equal opportunity and fair treatment in employment through the elimination of unfair discrimination; and
- implementing affirmative action measures to redress the disadvantages in employment experienced by designated groups, in order to ensure their equitable representation in all occupational levels in the workforce.

## Coping Mechanisms of Working Students

This act revolutionised the South African workplace by introducing improved employment opportunities and fairness. Despite these policy and legislature developments, gender inequality remains a pressing issue across South African society, including in the workplace (Hofmeyr & Mzobe, 2012). The legacy of apartheid still lingers in the country's social and gender structures (Hofmeyr & Mzobe, 2012).

Recent studies have predominately explored work-life balance from a gender viewpoint (Patel et al., 2006). The phenomenon has also been examined from the perspective of parental responsibilities and age or stage of life (Eikhof et al., 2007). According to Crooker et al. (2002), poor work-life balance can have negative effects on an individual's mental health, stress levels, and overall life satisfaction. The degree to which organisations, companies, and institutions support work-life balance remains a central human resources and management issue. Chaitra et al. (2016) indicated that a healthy work-life balance consists of managing the pressures of personal life and work life by establishing a supportive environment and adopting systems that enable one to operate within a sustainable equilibrium of working demands and personal responsibilities. Lowe and Gayle (2007) relate directly to work-life balance and distinguished between two types of students: Student A (a young full-time student who may be working part-time) and Student B (an older employee who is studying part-time). Lowe and Gayle (2007) proved that Student B is more likely than Student A to be successful in establishing a healthy work-life balance.

As a fellow postgraduate student, the researcher would like to review the challenges and experiences of other working students. My experience of a working student relates directly to poor time management, insufficient resources to be efficient, and multiple responsibilities as a young adult, all of which have negatively impacted my academic journey thus far. My experiences have fuelled the intensity of this research and the motivation in researching this topic.

### **1.6. Research assumptions**

This investigation proceeded on the basis of the following assumptions:

## Coping Mechanisms of Working Students

- One of the main assumptions of this investigation was that working students do not have adequate time-management skills. The common perception in society is that working students struggle with prioritising their resources (time) accordingly. These poor time management skills can be detrimental in balancing work and school demands and achieving set goals.
- Working students struggle with personal care and well-being, with a great deal of their time and energy spent juggling their competing work and school demands. Working students tend to focus less on their personal needs and more on meeting professional and academic deadlines. This can lead to burnout, anxiety, depression, and substance abuse.
- A final assumption was that working students work and study simultaneously in an effort to improve their lives. As working students obtain the necessary theoretical and practical experience from school and work, they often become more employable. Joint working and studying has the potential to result in higher remuneration packages and increased overall knowledge, expertise, and skills.

### 1.7. Structure

The remainder of this mini thesis will be structured as follows:

**Chapter 2** consists of the literature review and theoretical framework. The purpose of this review is to engage with past research that highlights the challenges of working students and the benefits of different coping mechanism strategies. The chapter also looks at the current economic situation in South Africa, psychological well-being of working students, the effect of work-life balance on academic performance and attempts to understand the reasons behind working students' decision to juggle these two strenuous tasks simultaneously. Lastly, the chapter reviews current literature from the last ten years under the headings empirical and conceptual literature. The review highlights the lack of research with a South African focus.

**Chapter 3** outlines the researcher's methodological approach in meeting the research objectives. It covers the biographical information of the participants, sampling techniques,

## Coping Mechanisms of Working Students

sample size, data collection methods, and data analysis methods of the investigation, as well as the investigation's ethical considerations.

**Chapter 4** presents the research findings, highlighting the main themes that emerged during context analysis of the interview data. Each theme is explained and triangulated through extracts from the participants' responses with reference to the relevant literature.

**Chapter 5** presents a holistic overview of the findings of this research conducted and proposes a coping mechanism model to assist working students. The chapter also highlights the limitations of the investigation, makes recommendations for working students, and identifies areas for future research.

### 1.8. Glossary of terms

#### **Burnout**

Burnout is described as the state of continued stress and fatigue which leads to complete exhaustion (Abbas et al., 2013).

#### **Coping**

Coping is defined as an individual's cognitive and behavioural strategies for managing and reducing the internal and external demands arising from challenging situations (Ashford & Lawrence, 2006).

#### **Job satisfaction**

Referred to or known to be when the individual excels within their current occupation, resulting from liking their job and excelling to the degree that they feel valued, appreciated and with the freedom to contribute their views (Gagnano et al., 2020).

#### **Psychological well-being**

Psychological well-being refers to positive psychological traits, such as self-acceptance, satisfaction, hope or optimism (Ryff & Singer, 1996).

#### **Time management**

Time management skills are defined as planning in advance, prioritising work, test preparation, and following schedules performed by students (Kirschenbaum & Perri, 1982).

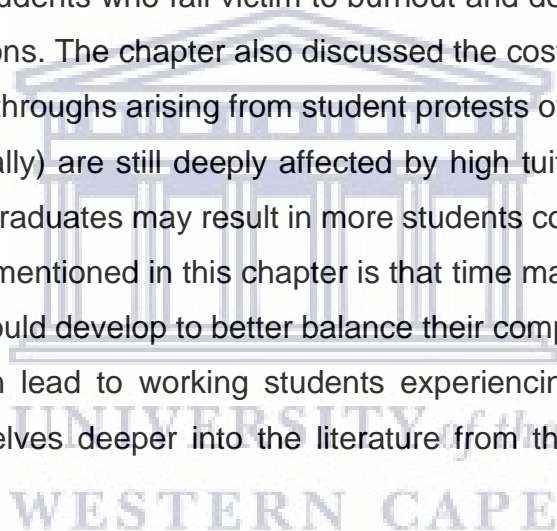


### **Work-life balance**

Work-life balance refers to an individual finding a balance between their professional and personal life by means of various coping strategies (Bansal & Kathuria, 2016).

### **1.9. Chapter summary**

This chapter briefly presented the background to the investigation by alluding to the challenges faced by working students. The concept of work-life balance reveals how the specific characteristics of working students can affect their coping abilities and workload. Older students who study part-time may cope better than young adults who study full-time. A lack of adequate organisational involvement and support can also contribute to the number of working students who fall victim to burnout and depression or who do not complete their qualifications. The chapter also discussed the cost of tuition fees in South Africa. Despite the breakthroughs arising from student protests over fees, postgraduates (from rural areas especially) are still deeply affected by high tuition fees. Reducing the financial burden on postgraduates may result in more students completing their degrees. One of the assumptions mentioned in this chapter is that time management is a soft skill that working students should develop to better balance their competing demands. Lastly, inadequate self-care can lead to working students experiencing a range of negative symptoms. Chapter 2 delves deeper into the literature from the last two decades on working students.



## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

#### **2.1. Introduction**

The previous chapter introduced the concept of work-life balance and referred to the rapid rise in working students throughout the world. The dilemmas confronting working students, regardless of where they reside, are broadly similar. These dilemmas arise out of the inevitable tension between the need to study and the necessity to work. This chapter presents a review of the literature surrounding work-life balance in general and explores work-life balance theories contained therein. By integrating and sharing some of the commonalities of similar studies, the chapter then seeks to apply the work-life balance lens to the lives of students. This exploration is supplemented by a consideration of the literature regarding coping strategies, well-being, academic and work performance specifically, and the chapter closes by seeking to extend the existing literature in the direction of work-life balance for working students in South Africa.

#### **2.2. Theoretical framework**

The theories that have been used in this research in understanding the work-life balance phenomenon are the spillover theory and the enrichment theory. These theories were deemed suitable for this investigation based on the research objectives.

##### **2.2.1. Spillover theory**

The spillover model suggests that the events that occur at or during work correspond to what transpires in life which is outside of work (Radó et al., 2015). From a well-being perspective, Radó et al. (2015) indicated “an individual’s life domains are integrated, meaning that well-being can be transmitted between life domains”. Spillover can positively or negatively affect an individual’s life (Grzywacz et al., 2002). Positive spillover is when enrichments that occur at work positively affect the individual’s life outside of work, for example positive spillover can be conceptualised when an individual enjoys job satisfaction and is appreciated at work and such positive emotions and feelings then resonate at home. Negative spillover occurs when friction occurs between work and life

outside work. When an individual expresses monotony or lack of creativity at work, it may lead to the individual being complacent at home or uninterested in family activities (Zedeck, 1992). Various investigations have studied spillover in relation to mood, principles, expertise, and behaviours stemming from one role to another (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000).

The primary research objective of a study undertaken by Edralin (2013) was how balancing work demands and personal/family needs by Filipina entrepreneurs, and how to sustain their business while simultaneously living a significant and meaningful life. The research found both positive and negative spillover. Positive spillover revealed a positive outlook on life and life satisfaction and negative spillover was the associated stress amongst the participants. The research revealed numerous strategies to balance both non-work life and work through proper time management planning, adopting a flexible working approach and the reliance on spousal support (Poulose & Sudarsan, 2014). Fisher (2001) amalgamated the model of conservation of personal resources and recommended including vitality for inter-role conflict sources. This model suggested that stress is a response to any perceived environment that contributes to the loss of personal resources and experiences, or the failure to secure anticipated resources (Hobfoll, 1988). According to Fisher and Hemingway (2000), resources can be conceptualised into four divergent categories which are energies, time, knowledge, and physical energy. The latter category includes significant resources to aid an individual in meeting work and life demands (Hseih et al., 2004).

### **2.2.2. Enrichment theory**

Enrichment theory denotes the degree to which experiences from instrumental sources (expertise, aptitude, and principles) or affective sources (mood) supplement the worth of other domains. In essence, the experiences from one domain complement the eminence of life in the other domain (Rincy & Panchanatham, 2014). The enrichment theory borrows its premise from the role accumulation theory presented by Seiber (1974). The role accumulation theory assumes that an individual with multiple roles can lead to be psychologically enriching; however, this perspective only works when the individual has

high identity with those roles and sees an opportunity to reap rewards from. Zedeck and Mosier (1990) introduced a term called instrumental to distinguish this phenomenon, which states that positive work results often lead to positive family outcomes and relations and vice versa. To further conceptualise and understand how work-family and family-work enrichment works, a scale was developed and endorsed by Carlson et al. (2006). Carlson et al. (2006) addressed two ways how work-family enrichment works. Firstly, when resources are secured from one role which directly progresses to the performance in another, this is called instrumental. Flexibility, psychological, physical, social capital and material resources are seen as other instrumental factors (Kirchmeyer, 1993). Secondly, when work-family enrichment occurs incidentally from a positive effect, this is called affective. To further elaborate on the affective path, this is when an individual's well-being, mood and emotions from one role interject and leave a positive functioning in the other role. For example, should an individual experience a rewarding day filled with positive affirmation and recognition, they will be able to share that energy and positive emotions with family. Should an individual possess a wonderful and collaborative family life, they will be able to share these emotions towards their work life.

### **2.3. Conceptual literature review**

#### **2.3.1. Work-life balance**

Greenblatt (2002) defined work-life balance as the absence of unacceptable levels of conflict between work and non-work demands. According to Baca (2017), who follows the logic of this definition, individuals with a positive work-life balance are more prone to enjoying a healthy state of mind and getting satisfaction from both their work and non-work responsibilities. Greenblatt's definition of a successful work-life balance (2002) is contingent on how an individual attains and manages their resources. Dhas (2015), however, noted that the term "work-life balance" can also be usefully understood in its metaphorical sense. Figuratively, he asks us to consider the question of what "balance" means within the work-life framework. In literal terms, "balance" is suggestive of an equal distribution of mass or weight on both ends of a scale, and therefore, Dhas (2015) raised the important point that in the working lives of individuals there are also certain invisible

## Coping Mechanisms of Working Students

characteristics at play, such as the physical and psychological costs and benefits involved.

According to Segal (2013), there are four kinds of resources that are primarily discussed in the literature relating to work-life balance. These resources as defined by Segal are listed in Table 2.1.

**Table 2.1: Work-life balance resources**

<b>Concept</b>	<b>Explanation</b>
<b>Temporal resources</b>	the time that an individual has available to commit to work and leisure
<b>Financial resources</b>	the amount of money that an individual has available to procure the goods and services necessary to sustain a satisfactory standard of life
<b>Control</b>	the ability to control outcomes
<b>Personal resources</b>	consisting of one's individual capabilities to achieve certain outcomes and results

Segal (2013) considers it to be most challenging for an individual to proliferate resources such as money, time, and control, because these all depend on negotiations that must occur within some form of external organisation. However, increasing these resources is not impossible. By investing more time in one's work, one can increase one's remuneration. Similarly, one might be able to increase one's level of control by increasing one's social position. Despite the difficulties of navigating external organisations, therefore, there are ways to increase one's resources by managing one's time carefully. Resources aside, research from Baca (2017) has shown that many employers offer services to assist their employees with achieving a healthy work-life balance.

### **2.3.2. Strengths of a healthy work-life balance**

Downes and Koekemoer (2011) stated that a healthy work-life balance can increase a worker's autonomy. Greenhaus, Collins and Shaw (2003) questioned the conjecture that

## Coping Mechanisms of Working Students

having a good work-life (or “work-family”) balance leads to promising outcomes. For Greenhaus et al. (2003) this assumption remains unproven due to empirical ambiguities and a lack of consensus surrounding the definition of “work-family” balance.

Due to the difficulty many employees have in achieving a healthy work-life balance, it is imperative that certain organisations seek remedial initiatives to support their workforce (Cooke et al., 2009). The reason for employers to support their employees in this manner is not simply to benefit the employee, but also to benefit the employer, as a happy worker is more likely to contribute to an organisation’s competitive advantage (Essay, 2018).

Dhas (2015) stated that one in four working individuals experiences a tension between work and family life, emanating primarily from the pressure of “caregiver strain”. Dhas (2015) further stated that if role overload is taken into account, it is likely that almost 60% of participants experienced some form of work-family conflict. Based on this research, it is therefore evident that only a minority of people have the ability to manage their careers and maintain a positive life without strain.

In a different national context to the Canadian example, Ang (2008) indicated how organisations might be able to assist their employees with achieving a good work-life balance. In New Zealand, organisations are encouraged by the Equal Employment Opportunities (EEO) Trust to help employees integrate their working and private lives (EEO Trust, 2003). By giving annual awards to organisations that take their employees’ work-life balance seriously, the EEO Trust does not simply celebrate progressive organisations, but also sets a benchmark for other organisations to follow (Ang, 2008).

### **2.3.3. Problems associated with a poor work-life balance**

It is inevitable that without a healthy work-life balance there will be a detrimental impact on an individual’s organisational and personal commitments. This impact will manifest in a range of ways, including but not limited to poor psychological well-being, burnout, decreased organisational commitments, high levels of personal and work-related stress, decreased ambition, and absenteeism (Barnes & van Dyne, 2009). The problem of how to mitigate physical and emotional fatigue among employees is an issue that preoccupies

## Coping Mechanisms of Working Students

managers and industrial psychologists alike, but it is something for which no grand unifying theory appears to exist. Work-life conflict among students and working adults have been linked to various health illnesses, which contributes to poor physical health and psychological distress (Mensah & Adjei, 2020). According to Lunau (2014) working adults who experienced high blood pressure, high heart rate and cortisol level were the results of a poor work-life balance which is seen as a work-related stressor, previous examinations showed a relationship between a work-life imbalance and the individual's response to stress.

### **2.3.4. Coping mechanisms**

Ashford, Lawrence, and Dent (2006) stated that coping can be largely defined as the cognitive and behavioural strategies employed by an individual to manage and reduce the internal and external demands that pertain to a range of situations. Coping, then, is a process whereby an individual can minimise the effects of conflicting demands to create a manageable way of dealing with numerous responsibilities (Kwaah & Essilfie, 2017).

According to Calo et al. (2021), Lazarus and Folkman (1984) introduced the coping theory, and they extend the definition of coping further, providing a framework of eight types of coping styles that can be grouped into two broad categories: namely, "problem-focused" and "emotion-focused". Problem-focused coping addresses the causes of stress, whereas emotion-focused coping looks to adjust the feelings and emotions of the individual without purposely addressing the difficulty or problem itself (Brown et al., 2005). Chao (2012) identified social support and dysfunctional strategies as two methods of handling stress. Problem-focused coping mechanisms are often used when the individual believes that the demand or stressor can be changed (Calo et al., 2021; Chao, 2012). Soliman (2014) mentioned that social support is related to problem-solving. Table 2.2 displays strategies that fall under the emotional focused banner. In addition, table 2.3 tabulates common strategies that student usually use when they are under immense stress and academic pressure.

**Table 2.2: Strategies that fall under the banner of emotion-focused coping**

Avoidance, loss of hope, minimisation, distancing, selective attention, and positive comparisons
Positive reappraisals and rationalisation
Smoking, substance abuse, oversleeping, and overeating
Ambitious thinking and blameworthiness
Repudiation, social extraction, and avoidance

Source: Kasayira et al. (2007)

**Table 2.3: Common coping strategies used by students**

Browsing the internet
Watching movies and television
Using instant messaging
Excessive sleeping

Source: Sideridis (2008)

The capability of a student to harmonise the stresses of work and school can be affected by a series of factors, including their extramural activities, their schooling provision, and their personal development. Many researchers have studied the concept of work-life balance. However, a new phenomenon has arisen in more recent years that can be termed the “school–work–life” balance. According to this variation of the work-life balance concept, school (comprised of academics and extra-curricular activities) forms another responsibility that individuals must learn to juggle, in addition to their work and personal responsibilities (Baca, 2017). A study undertaken by the Australian House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training (2009) showed that students who worked more than 25 hours a week reported a negative effect on their educational activities. One participant from the study revealed that they work five days a week from 4 pm until 11 pm to generate income to pay for their tuition fees and to support themselves through university. This participant expressed that their work arrangement impacted their schoolwork negatively, not least because they would wake up at 5 am to



complete their academic tasks. Although this participant reported that they were coping, they were unsure if it was sustainable to continue under such circumstances (Australian House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training, 2009).

### 2.3.5. Working students' well-being

Miner (2010) pointed out that studies on the work-life balance of university students have shown beyond doubt that when students neglect self-care, they are more likely to experience higher levels of burnout compared to students who prioritise it. University students often refer to poor time management strategies as the reason for their high stress levels (Baca, 2017). However, it may not simply be a question of poor time management that explains high student stress levels. Evidently, university students also struggle with balancing the demands placed upon them. Nonetheless, Baca (2017) concluded that students with good time management skills are better able to complete their work tasks timeously and thereby achieve an optimum level of life satisfaction. Allen et al. (2000) explained that any work-life balance will produce three categories of outcome. Table 2.4 briefly itemize these outcomes.

**Table 2.4: Work-life balance outcomes**

<b>Work-related outcomes</b>	work outputs, work obligation, job satisfaction, and absenteeism
<b>Non work-related outcomes</b>	family involvement, social interactions, leisure, and pleasures
<b>Stress-related outcomes</b>	psychological strain, mental health issues, work, and family stress factors

When one critically examines student well-being, overall happiness is a fundamental element that cannot be overlooked. Happiness is a state in which an individual maximises their positive emotional and physiological experiences and minimises their experience of possible pain (Coetzee & Bergh, 2009). Happiness is also closely linked to leisure activities, as well as having stable mental health, positive emotions, good health

## Coping Mechanisms of Working Students

conditions, and frequent social interactions (Diener & Seligman, 2002, 2004). From a well-being perspective, students who display high levels of psychological well-being will result in the adoption of positive adaptive coping strategies, commitment, emotional and family support and positive reappraisal. However, students usually employ dysfunctional coping strategies such as avoidance, self-blame, and wishful thinking because of lower levels of psychological well-being (Freire et al., 2016).

### **2.3.6. Effects of studying on work performance**

Since the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, various psychosocial factors such as employability, lifestyle, job satisfaction, mental health and well-being, and overall happiness have begun to take precedence in the minds of managers and industrial psychologists (Judge et al., 2005; van der Heijde & van der Heijden 2006). On this point, the psychosocial profiles of students who decide to study while working differ significantly from those who decide against it (Singh et al., 2007). Most researchers have a general understanding that students who work while they study have a lower academic performance. On the other hand, those students who can work and study simultaneously improve their employment potential further down the line (Di Paolo & Matano, 2016).

According to Downes and Koekemoer (2011), younger workers are conscious of the benefits of having a healthy work-life balance. In response, businesses with a keen interest in attracting and retaining young talent need to invest more resources to ensure that their workforce can have a healthy work-life balance. Hill et al. (2010) suggested that having flexible work and flexible work hours are two effective means of helping employees to manage their work and personal responsibilities. By ensuring that employees reduce their work-family conflict, employers can increase the chances of getting the most out of their employees.

A study undertaken by the Roffey Park Institute (2004) found that 38% of employee samples would rather terminate their current employment contract with their employer to achieve a better work-life balance, even at the risk of reduced remuneration. It therefore follows those organisations that invest significantly in understanding the dynamics of a healthy work-life balance will experience lower employee turnover. If working students

## Coping Mechanisms of Working Students

believe that their employers are genuinely invested in helping them to achieve a healthy work-life balance, the likely result is self-fulfilment and satisfaction for the employee. As implied above, the net result of higher employee satisfaction is improved performance outcomes for the employer (Auster, 2001).

Having the prospect of secure employment to look forward to can be a highly motivating factor for students engaged in work while they study. However, an early career qualification obtained while studying will probably only be beneficial to a student's career if their working experiences are related to their chosen field of study: for example, working in the hospitality sector while studying towards a degree in hospitality studies (Di Paolo & Matano, 2016). Nonetheless, non-career-orientated part-time work does furnish students with more benefits than simply providing them with additional income. The skills and knowledge obtained through being gainfully employed, such as time management skills, are broadly beneficial for enhancing their skills repertoire (Holloway, 2001). The extent to which students recognise the value of skills acquired through part-time work is subjective, but there is an objective value in students picking up time management and organisational skills that can be utilised not only in their future careers but also along their academic journeys (Watts & Pickering 2000). Overall, it is certainly not the case that part-time work undermines a student's commitment to completing their qualification (Vickers et al., 2003).

According to Thompson (2002), universities ought to discuss the intricacies of a healthy work-life balance in their curriculum and course outline. The course outline could, for example, state the number of hours required to complete a particular module, thereby empowering students to decide how best to manage their time. Given that organisations are beginning to promote work-life balance initiatives, it probably makes sense for universities to promote them too. If this were to occur, students learning to effectively implement a positive work-life balance during their university careers could easily transpose these skills to their working lives once their university tenures were over. Universities do not generally provide specific guidance as to the time needed to complete academic assignments, but the viewpoint from students is that there is a clear correlation

## Coping Mechanisms of Working Students

between grades awarded for assignments and the amount of time dedicated to completing the assignments (Elshiehk & Leney, 2002).

It should be clearly understood that the concept of working and studying simultaneously is not merely a western practice but is something very common the world over. For instance, the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2009) shows how the number of African students who are working and studying simultaneously has been increasing steadily since the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century due to the increased cost of tertiary education. Overall, the empirical evidence suggests that working and studying simultaneously does have a negative effect on student's academic success (Trombitas, 2012), pointing to the need for targeted interventions to assist working students.

### **2.3.7. Financial situation in South Africa**

In recent years, students in South Africa, just like students in Australia, Germany, and the United Kingdom, have demonstrated against high tuition fees. This situation reached a head with the Fees Must Falls protests of 2015. According to Statistics South Africa (2015), government expenditure on tertiary education declined from 4.9% to 4.7% in the 2014–2015 period. This decline appears to have arisen because priority was given in the post-apartheid era to primary and secondary education, leaving tertiary education with relatively less funding (Fourie & Calitz, 2016). The South African government has introduced a social grant system to assist academically deserving students whose parents or guardians are unable to afford their children's tuition fees. This social grant system is called the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS). This scheme has helped many students obtain their educational qualifications, but the most important drawback of the grant is the fact that it functions as a loan as opposed to a bursary.

According to Cloete (2016), although the NSFAS grants poor students the opportunity to enter tertiary institutions, if these students are unable to complete their studies, they can potentially find themselves in a very precarious financial position (as they are unqualified to earn highly enough to repay their debts). Nonetheless, students continue to rely heavily on government subsidies because undertaking employment while studying can leave students overburdened and overwrought.

## **2.4. Empirical literature review**

### **2.4.1. Sub-research question 1: What are postgraduate students' perceptions of working while studying?**

According to Tumin et al. (2020), students tend to spend less time on academic activities as they may frequently spend their time working instead. Working students' experiences of time are skewed as they do not possess adequate skill to prioritise both domains (Matheuws, 2018). However, the experiences and practical knowledge gained from working part/full time enhance working students' motivation and drive to complete their academic journey and boost their employability (Tumin et al., 2020 cited work from Curtis & Shani, 2002; Curtis & Williams, 2002). A qualitative study undertaken by Abenoja et al. (2019) revealed that participants' responses based on their perceptions surrounding working and studying simultaneously are motivated by self-development, financial support and intrinsic drive and motivation are utilised to integrate theory and practical experience. Economy theory advocates that working and studying simultaneously is able to create a smooth school-work transition. Young adults gain industry-related skills at their respective workplaces which cannot be obtained at university. These skills range from hard skills to soft skills. Hard skills entail things like writing a business report, whereas soft skills comprise things like the ability to work in teams and displaying empathy (Barbanchon et al., 2019 cited work from Adhvaryu et al., 2018).

### **2.4.2. Sub-research question 2: What are the challenges faced by working students when working while studying and how do they overcome these problems?**

One of the main reasons for students working and studying is to assist with their high tuition fees. Financial aids which are offered do not necessarily cover all university expenses (Matheuws, 2018). Students often take the decision to work full-time instead of part-time in order to cover their expenses throughout their academic journey (Tumin et al., 2020 cited Goldrick-Rab, 2016). Numerous studies examined the reason why individuals are working and studying concurrently and the conclusion is that working students are motivated to work part-time to fund their studies and/or to maintain the

standard of living they had before embarking on the journey of a full-time student (Richardson et al., 2014). Tuition discounts offered at universities are marginal as they only cover around 12–20% of the tuition and fees. With students working and studying simultaneously, they cannot afford to pay their tuition fees with the savings from previous employment due to rising tuition costs (Tumin et al., 2020). Often, only half of the students who enrolled for a degree/diploma tend to finish, many have succumb to poor health, lack of concentration on their studies and ‘giving up’ due to a financial concern (Abenoja et al., 2019).

### **2.4.3. Sub-research question 3: What are the positive and negative effects of working while studying?**

Working students are subjected to various negative impacts such as depression, burnout and acute anxiety (Mounsey et al., 2013). Working while studying can negatively affect working students’ mental health and state. Various studies advised that the major effect regarding employment is mental health; this negatively impacts on working students’ academic performance (Hovdhaugen, 2015; Darolia, 2014 cited in Tumin & Faizuddin, 2017). A recent investigation by McNiff (2020, in Calo, Flores, & Bustamante, 2021) revealed that the coronavirus pandemic has had a huge hand in mental health deteriorating amongst students. The investigation recorded high spikes in depression and overall anxiety since the inception of the pandemic in March 2020. According to Blona (2005, in Calo et al., 2021) students experience stress due to ever-demanding pressure of adapting to new living environments, rigorous academic standards and sexual concerns. Mental health and mental state within higher education are gaining momentum (Castillo & Schwartz, 2013). Various investigations revealed that financial stress and burdens contribute to poor academic grades and decreased levels of health. This phenomenon of financial stress has increased poor mental health within working students which in turn drives students to study and work simultaneously (Tumin & Faizuddin, 2017 cited work from Bennett et al., 2015; Britt et al., 2016).

From a personal and career development perspective, studying and working concurrently enables individuals to experience the real-world (Tumin & Faizuddin, 2017 cited Tymon,

2013). Despite numerous challenges faced such as high tuition fees and deteriorating health while attaining a degree, working students are motivated to improve the quality and standard of their lives through education (Perna, 2010).

#### **2.4.4. Sub-research question 4: What are some suggestions and recommendations for students who are working while studying?**

Gayle and Lowe (2007) conducted a work–school–life balance case study in which they explored the factors influencing both full-time and part-time students participating in higher education. The results showed that full- and part-time students' experiences were different, but they were equally threatened by role overload. The study noted that most of the time, student success in managing the school–work–life balance was due to having a support structure comprising family, fellow students, and employers. Students lacking such a support structure, on the other hand, experienced a vast amount of stress. Despite the substantial literature on working students, there remains a research deficit when it comes to understanding the academic support available for full-time students with part-time jobs. According to Curtis (2005), who attempted to understand this phenomenon by studying the attitudes of academic staff towards full-time students with part-time employment, most staff at the time were unaware of the magnitude of student employment. Moreover, Curtis's (2005) study also showed that most lecturers felt unqualified to provide any form of advice to students and that many lecturers were battling with their own work and considerable responsibilities; providing support to students was not compulsory for them and they viewed it as an addition to their ordinary workload.

Baca (2017) proposed two coping mechanisms to assist students with time management, namely the cultivation of self-control and boundaries. An individual with self-control could restrain their impulses to realise a longer-term goal (Duckworth & Seligman, 2006). Furthermore, self-control is needed to sustain and maintain personal boundaries. Similarly, establishing flexible boundaries was found to help with the creation of order in students' lives (Bulger et al., 2007). Students who would like to enjoy the happiness that accrues from a healthy work-life balance need to exercise self-control to implement necessary restrictions and boundaries in their lives (Kuhnle et al., 2010)

## **2.5. Assessment of the reviewed empirical literature**

The empirical literature has proved that an overwhelming number of students who are undertaking the working and studying journey are motivated by self-development and financial constraints. However, the positive side of this strenuous journey is ensuring a smooth transition from school to work and in time the working students are equipped with skills which they do not necessarily receive at university.

While students are working and studying simultaneously in an attempt to reduce the tuition fees, little to no literature exists on the mental effect on students who lose their jobs such as those who are working part-time. Part-time working is not necessarily a steady or guaranteed form of income. Given the current global coronavirus pandemic, more research is required around working students and job losses and how it may be affecting them. Secondly, students that are working and studying are doing their best to maintain a certain lifestyle they had before they were studying. This raises the question of 'what kind of lifestyle are working students embarking on'? Research by Tsurugano et al. (2021) on the impact of Covid-19 on working students and student lifestyle in Japan indicated that the number of working students who participated in the Labour Force Survey has declined since March 2020. The research revealed that students were concerned about lifestyle expenses and tuition fees and the associated poor financial insecurity which will have a negative impact on their lives, studies and health. Abenoja et al. (2019) reported that only half of students are able to finish their studies, with poor health or financial constraints often being the leading cause, and that the current Covid-19 pandemic will definitely contribute to more students terminating their education.

A high number of working students are prone to burnout, extreme exhaustion, depression and a lack of motivation. Added academic demands, parental responsibilities, work demands and financial stress are common reasons for poor mental health. Baca (2017) mentioned that students expressed that they would need more time to handle multiple demands; however, Baca (2017) referred to a dedicated time management plan. Having a dedicated time management schedule or plan is futile if the student lacks sleep or energy. Various studies concluded that poor sleep quality is detrimental to academic



performance and it often leads to sleep rebounds, excessive sleep during weekends and allowing students to be nocturnal. However additional factors which affect sleep are lifestyle choices and socio-demographic factors (Fischer et al., 2008; Kabrita, 2014).

Various studies have attempted to provide solutions in managing working and studying from a behaviour and cognitive perspective. However, with the recent changes within the learning and development sphere in 2021, organisations have introduced short courses whereby the student designs their own learning and chooses their own class time. Universities and academic researchers should research the effects of allowing part-time students to select their own class time and design their own educational journey within their selected degree. Using the module/course outline which was designed for full-time students to complete in a semester won't necessarily work for part-time students.

### **2.6. Chapter summary**

This chapter explored some of the concepts surrounding working students in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. To be coterminous with the South African context, the reviewed literature aimed to prioritise research done in developing countries. The literature review revealed that having a positive work-life balance does have beneficial consequences for both employers and employees. However, the consequence of having a poor work-life balance is that it inevitably leads to low employee morale, prolonged fatigue, stress, and unfortunately, drop-outs. This chapter identified the theories which apply to work-life balance which were the spillover theory and enrichment theory and juxtaposed literature against each sub-research question. When considering student mental health, the literature reveals that time management strategies appear to be of critical importance. Researchers revealed that students who understand the importance of time management have a greater chance of achieving their set goals and not overworking themselves. The financial struggles of working students were also highlighted by the literature, which showed how financial insecurity can seriously hinder students' academic progress. The general understanding is that without support from both universities and employers, working students will experience serious obstacles.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1. Introduction**

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a detailed explanation of the research design and methodology adopted for this investigation. The methodological choice of the researcher relied heavily on philosophical stance and the research problem. This chapter positions the research within the qualitative research paradigm conversant to the interpretive approach. The chapter explains why an explanatory research design was appropriate for this investigation. Research design is referred as the plan for guiding the research process with the intention of answering the research questions and aims of the investigation (Seeley, 2015). Further, the chapter provides details on the systematic research approached, details surrounding the participants, the data coding, data collection technique and lastly ethical steps that the research followed in gathering data, as well as the intricacies surrounding the analysis of raw data.

#### **3.2. The qualitative research paradigm**

Traditionally, the research methodology that was used for social sciences was quantitative methodology. The origin of this quantitative methodology lies in natural sciences, such as biology, physics, geology, and these sciences relied solely on the notion of observation and measurement in some form. The accepted and trusted research paradigm undertaken by researchers was thus quantitative research, especially educational research and this paradigm lasted until the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, in the 1980s, paradigm wars began advocating for qualitative research to be given more attention (Antwi & Hamza, 2015).

A paradigm consists of four components, namely epistemology, ontology, methodology and axiology. It is imperative for the research to reach a firm understanding of these components as they hold the basic assumptions, philosophy and beliefs that each paradigm holds (Guba & Lincoln, 1985 cited by Antwi & Hamza, 2015). Ontology refers to a branch of philosophical choice undertaken by a research to investigate the nature or

## Coping Mechanisms of Working Students

truth of social phenomenon (Terre Blanche et al., 2006; Scotland, 2012). Epistemology refers to the study of knowledge and the understanding of knowledge justification (Schwandt, 1997). Methodology refers to the researcher's strategy, designs, approaches and methods that are well articulated to investigate a phenomenon of interest (Keeves, 1997 cited in Kuyini & Kivunja, 2017). Axiology is described as the ethical principles that the researcher needs to consider when completing a research proposal. Axiology may refer to the philosophical method of making ethical decisions (Finnis, 1980 cited by Kuyini & Kivunja, 2017).

The qualitative research paradigm accepts multiple and dynamic realities that are closely linked to the context of its occurrence. The qualitative research paradigm rejects a fixed version of truth or reality (Nolan & Behi, 1995 cited by Seeley, 2015). Therefore, qualitative researchers employ specific qualitative research methods to understand participants' perceptions and experiences (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). The most suitable and widely used data gathering methods for qualitative research are interviews, focus groups discussions and observations (Antwi & Hamza, 2015). How one interprets and makes meaning of reality and truth often influences how knowledge will be obtained or sought after (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Qualitative researchers use words and descriptions other than numbers to report on their research findings, they utilise empathy and understanding during their interaction with participants, and interpret results based on the context in which they occur (Terre Blanche et al., 2006).

The qualitative research paradigm is applicable to this investigation, as the researcher attempted to understand the perceptions and experience of working students in relation to their coping mechanism strategies. The investigation itself is subjective in nature. Given the aim of this study, a qualitative research permitted the researcher to interact and explore the feelings, experiences and challenges of working students. The qualitative research paradigm pursues to answer questions of "How" or "What" other than "Why" (Creswell, 1998 cited by Seeley, 2015). The research question of this investigation is "What are working students' experiences, problems and coping mechanism as they navigate work and student life?", hence the qualitative research paradigm is appropriate in answering this research question.

### 3.3. The interpretive approach

The central foundation of the interpretive paradigm is through observation and interpretation based on the human experience (Guba & Lincoln, 1989 cited by Kuyini & Kivunja, 2017). Researchers trust and accept that reality comprises individuals' subjective experience and that often reality is believed as being socially fabricated – often referred to as a human paradigm (Mutch, 2005). Interpretivism endeavors to understand the different types of meanings that individuals assign to their lives (Antwi & Hamza, 2015). The interpretivist paradigm has been referred to as the constructivist paradigm. This paradigm assures that theory and literature do not herald the research; however, it is grounded based on the data gathered by the researcher's data collection technique. This implies that the constructivist/interpretivist paradigm undertakes a subjective epistemology, a relativist ontology, a naturalist methodology, and a balanced axiology (Kuyini & Kivunja, 2017).

Subjectivist epistemology refers to the researcher attempting to associate meaning based on first-hand research data through their own cognitive thinking and processing. The researcher will construct social knowledge through their personal interaction with the participants in a natural setting. This interaction involves questioning, listening, probing, recording, asking and dialogue (Punch, 2005 cited by Kuyini & Kivunja, 2017). A relativist ontology ensures that the condition under investigation consists of multiple realities, and those realities could be explored and meaning could be attached through an in-depth interaction between participants and the investigator or researcher (Chalmers, et al., 2009). A naturalist methodology utilises data gathering techniques such as interviews, discussions, and reflective sessions with the research actively in the position of a participant observer (Carr & Kemmis, 1986). A balanced axiology assumes that the research is a true reflection of the values associated with the researcher with the effort of presenting a balanced report of the findings from participants (Kuyini & Kivunja, 2017).

Interpretivism centres around subjective meaning, and understanding research participants' reality, the researcher would interpret their meaning within their context (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). Interpretive research is devoted to understanding the human

## Coping Mechanisms of Working Students

phenomenon, especially within the social construct, and utilises qualitative methods to recognise the human phenomenon (Seeley, 2015 cited Terre Blanche et al., 2006). According to Antwi and Hamza (2015), both interpretive and positivist researchers believe that human behaviour could be regular and predictable. However, positivists hold this human behaviour according to the cause-and-effect law, while interpretivists view this dynamic human behaviour based on people associating different meanings through social interaction with others. The concept of “*verstehen*” is referred to when qualitative researchers constantly attempt to understand research participants by getting an insider’s perspective (Antwi & Hamza, 2015).

As previously stated, work-family or work-school-life balance is a subjective phenomenon, as several realities of work-life balance or work-school-life exist. In order to understand working students’ reality in relation to their coping mechanisms, the researcher interviewed participants and unpacked their experiences and challenges as a working student. The interpretivist approach was applicable for this study and research objectives as the researcher had to step into participants’ reality and collect data from a first-hand perspective. Their responses are seen as meanings which they associated through their social interaction.

### **3.4. Research design**

The research design is non-experimental, descriptive, and explorative. Exploratory survey research is conducted when there is insufficient knowledge or information about a phenomenon that has not been clearly defined or identified within the educational research committee (Saunders et al., 2007). This study attempted to explore and describe the phenomenon of work-life balance among working students. The study made use of qualitative analysis, in the form of thematic analysis, to answer the research question and sub-questions. The qualitative nature of the study allowed the researcher to acquire a deeper understanding of participants’ lived experiences by capturing their perceptions around working and studying simultaneously and the impact this has on their professional and academic performance. The investigation aimed to add to the limited research on working students in South Africa. By highlighting the current experiences of working

## Coping Mechanisms of Working Students

students at the University of the Western Cape, it intended to identify possible ways to address the challenges these students face.

### **3.5. Study participants and location**

The location of the investigation was at the University of the Western Cape campus in Bellville, Western Cape. The University of the Western Cape is one of four universities that students can choose from in the Western Cape.

This research involved participants all of whom were under an employment contract. Self-employment and entrepreneurs were excluded as the criteria spoke directly to participants being employed by an organisation with either full-time or part-time studying. All participants resided within the city of Cape Town Metro. Sixty percent of the participants were in the age range of 18-29 and 40% of the participants were in the age range of 30-39. The nationality and ethnic group of the participants were all South African and Coloured respectively. Forty percent of the participants were males and 60% were female. All five participants were completing postgraduate studies (NQF: level 8 and above). Out of the five working students who participated, only one (Participant 5) was working part-time; the remaining participants were full-time employees. Lastly, 60% of the participants were completing their studies part-time and 40% were completing their studies full-time. The researcher sought to approach working students who differed in age, to capture as diverse a picture as possible of the experiences or coping mechanisms of working students at the University of the Western Cape. Table 3.1 below presents a concise biographical make-up of the participants.

**Table 3.1: Biographical information of participants**

	Age group	Gender	Ethnic Group	Nationality	Degree/Diploma	Occupation	Full-time/Part-time
P1	30–39	Male	Coloured	South African	BCom Honours – Industrial Psychology	Head: Human Capital (full-time)	Part-time
P2	18–29	Female	Coloured	South African	BCom Honours – Industrial Psychology	HR Administrator (full-time)	Part-time
P3	30–39	Male	Coloured	South African	Postgraduate Diploma in Computer and Media Application	Operations Manager (full-time)	Full-time
P4	18–29	Female	Coloured	South African	Master's in Industrial Psychology	Learning and Development Assistant (full-time)	Part-time
P5	18–29	Female	Coloured	South African	Master's in Information Systems	Admin Assistant (part-time)	Full-time

### 3.6. Sampling Technique

This investigation employed a non-probability convenience sampling technique. A sample of five participants was taken from the University of the Western Cape by approaching students who had evening classes. Research participants were not randomly selected; however, certain criteria were implemented to ensure eligibility to this study. These criteria required that participants (1) are working and studying simultaneously, (2) are studying towards a postgraduate degree/diploma, (3) are willing to participate in this study, (3) will consent to being interviewed and their responses being tape-recorded. Qualitative researchers need to pre-determine their research sample size to please and satisfy ethics committees and funding agencies (Young & Casey, 2019). Qualitative researchers are required to collect sufficient quality data to answer research questions as there are no set 'rules' for determining the applicable sampling size of a study (Gill, 2020). According to Hennink et al. (2019) the purpose of qualitative sampling is to ensure that sufficient participants are recruited that yield rich and in-depth data that may answer the research question or understand the phenomenon studied.

## Coping Mechanisms of Working Students

According to Gill (2020), convenience sampling refers to participants who are easy to reach and they are convenient sources of data. The advantage of convenience sampling is ease of reaching participants, it is efficient to source participants and economical to the researcher. However, the downside of convenience sampling is that participants may not produce or supply quality information.

Rather than probability, the main criterion for selecting participants was accessibility: the researcher is currently studying (part-time) at one of the faculties at the University of the Western Cape and therefore selected appropriate participants from his own institution. To this extent, the specific non-probability sampling technique used was convenience sampling.

The small sample size, non-probability sampling method, and single location of the study limited its generalisability. However, convenience sampling was homogenous in that all participants were selected from the same university, as well as from the same ethnic group. The resulting uniformity of the sample, in terms of sociodemographic characteristics, does allow for some generalisability. The drawback of this technique is that the findings of the study are only applicable to working students at the University of the Western Cape and cannot be applied elsewhere.

### **3.7. Data collection method**

The data collection instrument of this investigation was structured interviews. Interviews are used to extract specific information from individuals on a one-to-one basis, utilising a set of pre-determined questions. Interviews are recorded and transcribed (Paradis et al., 2016). In this investigation, each participant was asked the same questions in the same order, creating more reliability and validity compared to unstructured interviews (United States Office for Personnel Management, 2008). Structured interviews are pre-determined questions that are posed in the same way to all participants with the purpose of prompting unique response (McGrath et al., 2019). The interview guide included 13 questions that were used during the face-to-face interviews that related directly to the research question and sub-questions.



### **3.7.1. Before the interview**

Prior to the commencement of the field work, the researcher obtained ethical approval for the research from the Humanities and Social Science Research Ethics Committee of the University of the Western Cape (HS19/9/25). The researcher placed emphasis on familiarising the interview guide, consent form and information sheet to fluently present the information in a manner for participants to understand. Secondly, the researcher ensured that each participant was comfortable to be recorded; he reiterated their right to privacy and willingness to withdraw from the investigation at any point in time; and ensured that they understood the purpose of this investigation. Thirdly, the researcher conducted the interview at a private space with minimal noise and free from disturbance at the University of the Western Cape. The researcher read the information sheet surrounding the investigation, handed the consent form to the participant to read, reiterating that their signature complies with the information sheet and the structure of the investigation.

### **3.7.2. During the interview**

The participants completed the necessary protocols such as agreeing to be part of the study and signing the consent form. The researcher ensured that a mobile device had enough battery life to undertake an interview of 30–45 minutes. The researcher opened the 'recording' application on the mobile device and started recording and proceeded to ask the interview questions slowly and audibly. In the first interview, the participant received a phone call halfway during the interview. Despite the phone call and noise, the participant rejected the call and continued to answer the questions. The researcher ensured that the following interviewees placed their mobile device on 'silent' to avoid a disturbance and potentially losing their thought process while answering the questions. The researcher ensured participants that the interview duration would be 30–45 minutes to allow enough time for an in-depth interview.

### **3.7.3. After the interview**

As soon as the last question had been answered, the researcher stopped the recording to save the audio and to avoid data loss. The researcher then immediately saved the audio on a cloud storage to ensure research data security. The researcher thanked each participant for their time and for sharing their responses with the researcher. Each participant was reminded that they are free to send an email requesting access to a copy of their transcript. All participants enquired about the reason for the study and thus the next step after the interview entailed the researcher specifying the structure of the research and speaking briefly about academic and career goals.

The questions in the interview guide aimed to capture the work-life balance experiences and workload management strategies of working students. Since the investigation focused on the perceptions of working students, most questions were open-ended, and, most importantly, no leading questions were used (Phillips & Mrowczynski, 2019).

### **3.7.4. Recording of data**

Each recording was labelled and saved according to the code for each participant, such as P1 which is short for Participant 1. This code was only known to the researcher. Unfortunately, the researcher did not record observation notes throughout the interview, as he felt it would make the participant uncomfortable; instead, he focused on retaining their undivided attention and maintaining eye contact. Each audio recording was safely stored on the researcher's cloud storage in the event of data loss. The participants' privacy, confidentiality and protection were upheld throughout the process.

## **3.8. Data analysis and coding**

This investigation employed content analysis to analyse the verbatim transcripts. According to Bengtsson (2016), content analysis is used to organise and elicit meaning from the data which was collected and to draw inferences from texts in order to quantify the phenomena. This method of qualitative analysis was applicable and appropriate to this investigation, as its focus was on content and contextual meaning derived from text (Berg, 2001).

## Coping Mechanisms of Working Students

As a first step in analysing the verbatim recorded data, the researcher attempted to transcribe the first interview and discovered that transcribing is time-consuming. It took roughly two days transcribing the first interview. The researcher then contacted a friend who was willing to assist with transcribing. After two weeks, the researcher received the transcribed data and listened to each recorded interview and read through every transcript to ensure accuracy. However, while listening to the recorded interview and transcript, the researcher found incorrect words and changes were made to ensure accuracy. During the transcription, all names pertaining to the participants were removed to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. This was an important step to ensure the study adhered to the ethics guideline of the Humanities and Social Science Research Ethics Committee of the University of the Western Cape. While listening to the recordings and transcripts, the researcher immersed himself in the data to understand each meaning and context of what participants associated with their social environment.

The next step in understanding the data entailed comparison. The researcher created a new document by placing all participants' responses for each question beneath each other. This allowed him to read the question and look for commonalities and themes per question. This structure employed thematic analysis. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis is analysing and organising recorded data according to themes and patterns. The researcher then proceeded to type themes or similar meanings for the responses to each question. Thematic analysis is valuable in summarising large amounts of data into key features, which compels the researcher to utilise a well-formulated approach in handling large amounts of data and ensuring that the data can be well presented (King, 2004).

Themes that were extracted from data were tabulated under their respective sub-research questions (see Table 4.1). Themes that were similar in different questions were coded and a new unified heading (code) was created. Themes such as *professional development* were identified in question 1 and *professional growth* was identified in question 4, and the unified heading (code) was labelled as "*Development and growth*". Seven codes were identified through this process: (1) *Development and growth*, (2) *Applicability of knowledge across school and work*, (3) *Time management and planning*,

(4) *Individual drive and ambition*, (5) *Struggles and sacrifices*, (6) *Support systems/services*, and (7) *Work-life balance* (see Table 4.2).

Each code was substantiated with literature from researchers who undertook studies under the banner of work-life balance. The code was presented as a heading, snippets of participant's response were presented to reveal the various themes that were identified. Participants' responses were correlated with literature to identify relevance, suitability, and quality.

### 3.9. Establishing trustworthiness and creditability

To ensure quality data and themes are extracted from participants, researchers need to follow certain criteria to allow such standards to be achieved. The positivist paradigm underpins the criteria of reliability, objectivity, internal validity, and external validity (Burns, 2000), whereas the interpretivist paradigm underpins the criteria of trustworthiness and credibility (Guba, 1981 cited in Kuyini & Kivunja, 2017). Trustworthiness is paramount and can be achieved by adhering to four criteria suggested by Guba and Lincoln (1985 cited by Seeley, 2015; Antwi & Hamza, 2015; Kuyini & Kivunja, 2017), namely (a) the credibility of the investigation, (b) the transferability of the investigation, (c) the dependability of the investigation, and (d) the confirmability of the investigation. These are summarised in Table 3.2.

**Table 3.2: Criteria of achieving trustworthiness**

Credibility	Truth value of findings
Transferability	Application of findings
Dependability	Consistency of findings
Conformability	Neutrality of findings

Sources: Adapted from (Guba & Lincoln, 1985 cited by Seeley, 2015)

The *criterion of credibility* refers to whether the data extracted from participants and the data analysis process are trustworthy and believable (Kuyini & Kivunja, 2017 cited Guba, 1981). Credibility is interpreted by how truthfully the findings from participants represent

## Coping Mechanisms of Working Students

the phenomenon being studied (Seeley, 2015 cited Trochim, 2006). Achieving credibility includes prolonged engagement, persistent observation, data collection triangulation and peer debriefing (Guba & Lincoln, 1985).

Sharing prolonged engagements with participants before and after the interview ensured that the researcher built trust. As a result, participants were free to ask questions surrounding the investigation and the researcher was comfortable and open to answer each question. Each interview was recorded and transcribed verbatim in order to triangulate the raw data with recent literature. Lastly, despite not making observation notes, the first interview opened up most of the various correction points such as switching mobile devices on silent, ensuring that participants are relaxed while answering and that they do not appear to be in a state of stress or panic, as it would have hindered the interview data which was being extracted.

The *criterion of transferability* refers to the results and findings of a qualitative research investigation that can be replicated or applied in different settings (Nowell et al., 2017). This raises the issue of generalisability (Tobin & Begley, 2004 cited by Nowell et al., 2017).

The researcher ensured that transferability was achieved by utilising the convenience sampling technique to ensure that the findings and results could be easily replicated in a university setting. The investigation presented findings that were logical and the researcher kept various drafts/unedited chapter versions before deciding on the final coding framework.

The *criterion of dependability* refers to when the research process, decisions and methodology are logical and could be examined by other researchers and readers to judge the investigation's dependability (Tobin & Begley, 2004; Seeley, 2015). The manner in which dependability is measured is through an audit trail of their process.

This investigation achieved dependability surrounding the researcher's decision and methodology by reading various journal articles for qualitative data collection suitability, the researcher kept all journal articles for compiling the methodology chapter. The

## Coping Mechanisms of Working Students

researcher completed a draft methodology chapter which the researcher's supervisor confirmed and signed off. All interview transcripts, interview recordings and supervisor communication were recorded and safely stored. These steps will assist other researchers in understanding this investigation, namely the researcher's methodological decisions in order to test this investigation's replicability.

The *criterion of confirmability* is concerned with how the researcher's interpretations and findings have been concluded based on the raw data gathered throughout the data collection procedure (Tobin & Begley, 2004 cited by Nowell et al., 2017). Guba and Lincoln (1989) emphasised that confirmability is when credibility, transferability and dependability are achieved.

In this step, the researcher ensured that all researcher biases were minimised by triangulating findings with literature by reading journal articles relating to 'working students' and their coping strategies. The research avoided personal reflections and experience which may hinder data analysis.

### **3.10. Ethics and confidentiality**

When collecting data from participants the researcher ensured that the strict guidelines and strict standards were applied to ensure ethical conduct throughout the research. When the structured interviews took place, the researcher first explained the purpose of the study, enabling the potential participants to understand what the study entailed and why it was being embarked on. When the participants had agreed that they understood the purpose of the study, they were given a consent form which comprised what the researcher had initially discussed verbally with them. The informed consent included: the aim of the study, the participants' ability to withdraw from the investigation, the participants agreeing to participate in this investigation and that they agreed to an audio/voice recording of the structured interviews. The informed consent included contact details of the researcher, the researcher's supervisor, the head of department and the ethics committee, should the participant raise questions at any further point in time. The investigation was steered in accordance with the ethical standards established by the Humanities and Social Science Research Ethics Committee of the University of the

Western Cape. Lastly, the researcher ensured the participants that strict anonymity and confidentiality would be applied with participants' responses throughout the investigation.

### **3.11. Chapter summary**

This chapter detailed the entire methodological process and steps the researcher undertook. The chapter discussed the qualitative research paradigm which made specific mention to epistemology, ontology, methodology and axiology. The investigation adopted the interpretivist approach by utilising structured interviews to understand participants' subjective meanings and their reality which coincides with the descriptive and explorative research design. The participants' biographical characteristics were tabulated. Convenience sampling was used to recruit participants from the University of the Western Cape. Details surrounding the interview process included the actions taken before, during and after interviews. Each interview was recorded and labelled which only the researcher would understand and differentiate, ensuring anonymity. Thematic analysis was selected as the data analysis approach. Lastly, trustworthiness and credibility were ensured throughout the data collection process by following the guidelines of the Humanities and Social Science Research Ethics Committee of the University of the Western Cape.



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## CHAPTER 4

### DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

#### 4.1. Introduction

The purpose of this investigation was understanding working students' experiences, problems, and their coping mechanism strategies at the University of the Western Cape. The sample was a homogeneous group with a mixture of genders. Drawing from the interpretivist approach, each participant gave meaning and their reality of being a working student and how their coping mechanism strategy shapes their work-life balance. The researcher tabulated the emerging themes from each question beneath its relevant sub-research question and juxtaposed it against recent literature – this is presented in this chapter. These emerging themes were clustered to create a unified code, with seven codes having been identified. In chapter 3, the researcher stated that during the study the data was analysed and triangulated with recent literature, with the hope of discovering unique experiences and coping mechanism strategies employed by the research sample.

#### 4.2. Data presentation

The purpose of data presentation is to provide an overview of interviewees' responses and tabulate how each question relates to each variable and theme. This overview is presented in Table 4.1 below, while the full transcript is in Appendix 2.

**Table 4.1: Emerging themes**

Sub-research question 1: <b>What are postgraduate students' perceptions of working while studying?</b>			
Question 1:	Question 2:	Question 3:	Question 4:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Professional development</li> <li>• Career development</li> <li>• Family benefits</li> <li>• Prosperous future</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Applicability/practicality</li> <li>• Work-life balance</li> <li>• Prioritise/planning</li> <li>• Time management</li> <li>• Motivation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work experience</li> <li>• Practicality</li> <li>• Career advising/curriculum</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Financial strain</li> <li>• Professional growth</li> <li>• Goal setting</li> <li>• Continuous learning</li> </ul>
Sub-research question 2: <b>What are the challenges faced by working students when working while studying and how do they overcome these problems?</b>			
Question 5:	Question 6:	Question 7:	Question 8:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poor time management</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Time management</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organisational support</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sacrifices</li> </ul>



## Coping Mechanisms of Working Students

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work/study balance</li> <li>• Poor quality of work</li> <li>• Stress</li> <li>• Work demands</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poor prioritisation</li> <li>• Social life sacrifice</li> <li>• Procrastination</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work demands</li> <li>• Poor mental state</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support system</li> <li>• Individual drive/courage</li> <li>• Balance</li> <li>• Schedule change</li> </ul>
Sub-research question 3: <b>What are the positive and negative effects of working while studying?</b>			
Question 9:	Question 10:	Question 11:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accomplishment</li> <li>• Applicability</li> <li>• Overwhelming</li> <li>• Planning</li> <li>• Goal-oriented</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Applicability</li> <li>• Experience</li> <li>• Knowledgeable</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Diary</li> <li>• Schedule</li> <li>• Time management</li> <li>• Planning</li> <li>• Role switch</li> <li>• Workload management</li> </ul>	
Sub-research question 4: <b>What are some suggestions and recommendations for students who are working while studying?</b>			
Question 12:	Question 13:		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lecturer expectation</li> <li>• Time management</li> <li>• Workload analysis</li> <li>• Adhere to deadlines</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Workplace expectations</li> <li>• Relationship with lecturer</li> <li>• Support network/group</li> <li>• Familiarity with course content</li> </ul>		

### 4.3. Results of data coding

Table 4.2 below shows the final and original coding frameworks that emerged during the data analysis and coding process described in section 3.8 above.

**Table 4.2: Coding framework**

Final coding framework	Original coding framework
1. Development and growth	Professional development Career development Family benefits Prosperous future Career advising/curriculum Professional growth
2. Applicability of knowledge across school and work	Applicability Work experience Practicality Knowledgeable
3. Time management and planning	Prioritise/planning Time management Schedule change Poor quality of work Diary Schedule

## Coping Mechanisms of Working Students

	Workload analysis Adhere to deadlines Work demands
4. Individual drive and ambition	Individual drive/courage Goal setting Continuous learning Motivation Goal-oriented Accomplishment
5. Struggles and sacrifices	Stress Social life sacrifice Procrastination Financial strain Overwhelming Poor mental state
6. Support system/services	Relationship with lecturer Support network/group Familiarity with course Lecturer expectation Organisational support
7. Work-life balance	Work-life balance Role switching Balance Work-study balance Workplace expectations Workload management

Source: Adapted from Burnard et al. (2008)

### 4.4. Data analysis and interpretation

This section presents an analysis of the data according to the final coding framework. To uphold ethical and confidentiality standards, participants are referenced as “Participant 1”, “Participant 2”, “Participant 3”, “Participant 4”, and “Participant 5”.

Participants gave detailed explanations about their coping mechanisms and experiences surrounding working and studying. For each key theme from the final coding framework, illustrative participant quotes are cited and then contextualised with reference to the literature.

#### 4.4.1. Development and growth

- “I suppose it’s just professional development and really more about me developing my career or developing myself from an educational perspective...” (Participant 1)

## Coping Mechanisms of Working Students

- “So, the praise motivates me, you know, and also, I want to better myself...” (Participant 2)
- “...a future where your family benefits...And then that's part of your personal development as well...” (Participant 3)
- “...personal development and knowing how can I grow...the positive impact it can have on the life of me and my family...” (Participant 4)

The participants were fully aware of their motivations to continue studying while working. Participants 1, 2, 3, and 4 all agreed that the combination of working and studying would lead to personal and professional development. The specific reasons they cited for their decision to work and study simultaneously included personal or intellectual development, better personal prospects, better family prospects, and career progression. According to Govender and Wait (2017), university graduates are indeed sought-after by employers. However, employers expect that graduates will be able to apply the knowledge they have attained at university to their work (Govender & Wait, 2017). The application of knowledge is therefore key. The concept of “work-integrated learning”, or WIL, aims at ensuring that students are equipped with the tools they need to apply theoretical knowledge to work situations (Govender & Wait, 2017). According to McLennan and Keating (2008), the benefits of WIL include the fact that students can negotiate for higher salary packages and develop strategies for career advancement. In other words, obtaining an academic qualification is only the first step for those pursuing professional development. Equal attention should be paid to acquiring WIL skills and abilities.

### 4.4.2. Applicability of knowledge across school and work

- “...you can sort of deem and see applicability in that environment more so than someone that's not in a working environment who has never been before...” (Participant 1)
- “...I'm able to link the practical and the workplace with my actual studies...” (Participant 3)
- “...it is a bit overwhelming. It's very overwhelming. But I think it's more because of the type of person I am because I am an overachiever. So, I not only want to

## Coping Mechanisms of Working Students

achieve in my academics and my master's but in the workplace as well..." (Participant 4)

- "Yeah, so obviously working and studying I mean I'm getting the practical experience and learning the theory behind it. So, it obviously broadens my thinking box or helps me to think better..." (Participant 2)

Most of the participants shared the view that working and studying simultaneously can be beneficial in terms of the applicability of knowledge across both domains. The theoretical aspects of studying can complement practical outputs at work, and vice versa. This ties in with the concept of WIL (Govender & Wait, 2017). It also echoes Frea's (2007) finding that a major motivation for combining work and study is the acquisition of transferable skills. Moreover, according to Hakkinen (2006, cited in Jewel, 2014), students from a Finnish university who had work experience enjoyed wage increases a year after graduation. Having work experience enables students to find suitable jobs more easily, since employers use work experience and educational level as set criteria for potential employees (Altonji & Pierret, 2001; Farber & Gibbons, 1996). However, Participant 4 also stated that the effort to excel at both school and work is "overwhelming". Coll (2007, p. 137) referred directly to the tension that can exist between academic milestones and goals and workplace productivity. He explained that qualifications that are vocationally focused can have the effect of jeopardising the academic side of the educational process (Coll, 2007). The participants seemed to be aware of the challenges that simultaneously working and studying can bring to their personal lives and indicated that they realise that balancing work with university requires an enormous amount of both motivation and support.

### 4.4.3. Time management and planning

- "...Look, it's juggling time, hey...It obviously will impact all other aspects of my life, so, personal life, my family..." (Participant 1)
- "...the biggest one is time management. Because you know you're at work from half past eight to half past four, go home, then you have to start working on your thesis, you have to do a lot of research, data collection..." (Participant 5)

## Coping Mechanisms of Working Students

- “...I really just have to set aside time so I normally, you know, use my diary and I kind of just set aside time to say, this is the time that I need to study, and these are the times that I need to do work...” (Participant 1)
- “I live by a diary. That’s it (laughs). I stick strictly to a diary. Everything goes in my diary, because if it’s not in there, I’m going to forget about it...” (Participant 2)
- “...I wouldn’t say that I had an extremely negative impact, but it’s more an accumulation of small things. So, there is a stress component, so I didn’t, for example...have a breakdown or I never encountered that, but there’s a lot of little things, like stress, fatigue, time management, pressure from both angles...” (Participant 4)

Throughout the interview stages, the participants expressed that time management is essential to their success. They all agreed that simultaneously working and studying is time-consuming, as they experience role conflict daily. The participants also revealed that poor time management is detrimental to effective academic output. Nasrullah and Khan (2015) and Yilmaz et al. (2006) confirmed that effective time management plays a major role in improving working students’ academic success. Students who practise effective time management not only benefit from strong academic performance, but they also experience reduced stress (Miqdadi et al., 2014). According to Mohamed et al. (2018), the high level of knowledge, skill, and ability expected of employees has increased the need for time planning, with complex tasks demanding highly efficient time planning. Participants 1 and 2 stated in their interviews that they rely on their diaries to keep up with upcoming tasks and deadlines. This is a standard system for managing time in an academic context. However, it is also imperative that students get to know themselves (and their unique tendencies and shortcomings) well enough to be able to make the right decisions regarding the use of their time (Mohamed et al., 2018; Nasrullah & Khan, 2015).

### 4.4.4. Individual drive and ambition

- “...it depends on which mode I am in, if it’s like hectic stuff going on at work, and I have assignments due here at campus, if I have a test, obviously at that point I would feel tired and a bit stressed or whatever. But normally when I get over the

## Coping Mechanisms of Working Students

peak, I feel good about myself. I mean, I've accomplished something..." (Participant 2)

- "...I felt like quitting in that time, point in time, I felt like just not handing in this assignment, but my father-in-law told me that 'You might feel like quitting. Just don't quit.' So, you push through, you, this, you go through, you break through, because you need to break through barriers..." (Participant 3)
- "...my education has always been important to me. And I knew from the beginning from my undergrad that I wanted to do my PhD..." (Participant 5)
- "...So, I started an IT degree or diploma, in my first year of my studies I dropped out and was always, I always had the desire for the technical software... I always wanted to upscale myself technically..." (Participant 3)

The participants showed strong belief in their ability to accomplish their work and study goals, and high levels of ambition and determination. Participant 3 said that he needs to "break through barriers" and that he will not quit. Participant 5 already knew at the beginning of her studies what she wanted to achieve in the long-term. Participant 2 said she feels a sense of accomplishment and fulfilment whenever she overcomes difficult tasks, which in turn encourages her to keep going. Ambition, as defined by Bandura (1993), indicates an individual's core beliefs surrounding their ability to shape the main events of their life and their overall performance. According to Jewel (2014), students who gain work experience while studying tend to be more ambitious and better prepared for interviews, with a greater chance of obtaining high salaries. In general, people who fare well academically at university or at school exhibit high levels of motivation (Stinebrickner & Stinebrickner, 2003). Research shows that adherence to their ambitions can stimulate individuals and drive them to invest as much as possible in their future (Almomani & Theeb, 2016). It can also help them to face and deal with the inevitable challenges that arise (Almomani & Theeb, 2016). On the whole, it appeared that participants' ambition played a positive role in their studying and working journey.

#### 4.4.5. Struggles and sacrifices

- "...it really affects my academic performance, because I don't have enough time to do a proper job..." (Participant 3)
- "...Sometimes I have put my academic, my thesis at the back end and put my family first. But I've seen the consequences of that..." (Participant 5)
- "...working late, working weekends, studying weekends, studying late, it just is what it is, just sacrificing and then also sacrificing personal time..." (Participant 1)

The participants expressed their struggles in relation to working while studying. They stated that they must consciously sacrifice their personal and social life for the betterment of their future and in service of their goals. Curambao et al. (2014–2015) stated that tuition fees have risen worldwide in the last decade. As a result, being financially secure has become a requirement for aspiring degree holders, and most students in developing countries must support themselves by becoming working students. Similarly, research by Evans et al. (2014) concluded that working students typically work to combat financial difficulties, and to maintain the standard of living they enjoyed before becoming a full-time student. The authors also found that students regularly sacrifice their personal time to accommodate their studies (Evans et al., 2014). While the participants did not specifically mention the effects of high tuition fees, Participants 1 and 5 both highlighted the need for personal sacrifice, including giving up free time on weekends and time with family. Curambao et al. (2014–2015) stressed the mental, emotional, and physical toll of working while studying, with sleep deprivation common among working students, who often do not have enough time to fulfil their various commitments. Participant 3 spoke about how the lack of adequate time negatively affects her academic performance. The extent to which this sacrifice is worthwhile can, ultimately, only be determined by each individual, according to their life choices and circumstances.

#### 4.4.6. Support system/services

- "... No effect, actually, my work, it's actually really lenient. They support my studies..." (Participant 2)

## Coping Mechanisms of Working Students

- “...I think that having that support system around you much earlier, I think that helps and also just promote for me...” (Participant 3)
- “...my family understands at the moment that this is important to me. And they might not be okay with that fact. But we try to balance it out as well as we can...” (Participant 5)

Participants 2, 3, and 5 recognised the real value of having a support system or network. They agreed that having a support network during one’s academic journey can lessen the associated emotional, mental, and physical burden. A support group can be beneficial in providing emotional strength and keeping working students motivated and accountable for their goals. Generally, two main types of support available to working students exist, namely academic support (support services, counsellors, lecturers) and non-academic support (friends, family, and social groups). According to a study undertaken by Lowe and Gayle (2007), students’ success is dependent on the nature and quality of the support they receive from both organisations and families. Tang et al. (2013) affirmed that family support is often a strong motivating factor in students’ pursuit of higher education. Parental involvement is particularly important. Edelman (2013) asserted that parental involvement appears in various forms and can either promote or hinder students’ academic performance, depending on the quality of involvement. DeFauw et al. (2018) found that students perform optimally from an academic perspective when they feel surrounded by supportive peers or groups. The literature, along with the participants’ own statements, underscores the critical role of support systems for working students.

### 4.4.7. Work-life balance

- “...I think it’s just you’ve got to prioritise, and you’ve got to plan and don’t wait for the last minute...” (Participant 1)
- “...time management and make sure you set aside time for certain things, you need to share, you need to share your time between social life, work life, study life, but it all needs to be balanced...” (Participant 2)
- “...that is challenging, being able to integrate everything, I did time management training once...” (Participant 3)



## Coping Mechanisms of Working Students

Participants described their difficulties around managing both school and work responsibilities. Although time management has already been discussed, its importance cannot be overstated for students who are actively trying to achieve an optimum balance between school and work. Participants specifically proposed efficient planning as a strategy for managing one's time. Martinez et al. (2013) studied how full-time doctoral students balance school, work, and life commitments and found that four out of five participants cited time management as their greatest challenge. In another study, Andrade and Matias (2017) investigated work-life balance among working mothers and observed that supportive peers were a crucial indicator of the ability to successfully integrate work, life, and school responsibilities. In both the interview data and the literature, then, the link between time management and work-life balance emerges strongly, with the literature also linking strong support networks to improved work-life balance.

### **4.5. Chapter summary**

This chapter presented and discussed in detail the interview transcripts, identifying the overarching themes within the participants' responses. From the data analysis, it became evident that the participants share similar challenges and struggles, especially around time management. The final coding framework organised themes into seven major clusters: development and growth; applicability of knowledge across school and work, time management and planning; individual drive and ambition; struggles and sacrifices; support systems/services; and work-life balance. The findings show no great disparities in participants' motivation, ambition, and determination levels, which were consistently high. The following chapter concludes the study by synthesising the findings, making recommendations, and pointing to areas of further research.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, SUGGESTIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

#### 5.1. Introduction

The previous chapter articulated the main themes and patterns within the data and juxtaposed these results with the literature, highlighting the specific points of commonality and convergence. This chapter provides a holistic and high-level discussion of the research findings and proposes a comprehensive coping mechanism model in response to participants' challenges. It goes on to offer recommendations for working students and suggestions for future researchers, while also outlining the limitations of the study.

#### 5.2. Discussion of findings

This investigation sought to better understand the experiences of working students and the types of strategies they employ to cope and perform well across both their school and work domains. As explained in the previous chapter, seven major themes were extracted from the data during analysis: development and growth; applicability of knowledge across school and work, time management and planning; individual drive and ambition; struggles and sacrifices; support systems/services; and work-life balance.

Participants were all in agreement that time management and planning are the antidotes to procrastination. Participants acknowledged the importance of time management and how effective it is when juggling school and work commitments alongside personal life matters. In line with Nasrullah and Khan (2015), they affirmed that time management is strongly related to academic success. Nasrullah and Khan (2015) provided a useful framework for time management. They proposed that the three dimensions of time management are long-range planning, short-range planning, and time attitude. Long-range planning is concerned with the efficient execution of routine tasks over a long period of time, for example knowing how long it would take to complete certain daily tasks at work or at home. Most individuals have mastered this type of time management. Short-range planning, on the other hand, is concerned with carrying out specialised tasks with precision, for example estimating how long new or challenging activities in one's day will

## Coping Mechanisms of Working Students

take. This type of planning is more difficult for most people. Lastly, time attitude refers to how individuals must place emphasis on tasks that yield the best results. Many students use their time in a way that keeps them busy without yielding the desired results. For example, when a student has an assignment due, they may focus on cleaning their room. This poor use of time involves devoting resources (effort and energy) inappropriately.

This research study discovered that working students' motivation is linked to development, growth, and employability. The participants shared that, despite the burden that working and studying in tandem yields, the ability to apply new knowledge across both school and work contexts is highly beneficial. The participants' responses also highlighted the pivotal role of clear goals and strong motivation. They suggested that, in order to cope, students' motivation levels should be greater than the challenges they face. It was found that motivation can be more easily sustained if support is readily available across all the relevant domains (school, work, life). The participants placed great emphasis on the support that they receive from both their institutions and their families and peers. They also mentioned that setting expectations with family members and employers is essential for minimising disappointment and frustration on both sides. Participant 2 mentioned that her employer is very understanding of her academic commitment and is lenient when she needs to leave the office early to attend lectures. Participants 5 noted that she actively informed her family about her strict academic schedule and her inability to attend family events or be as present as she was before embarking on her postgraduate degree.

Kember's (1999) early coping mechanism model for students is another useful framework that consists of the following three elements: sacrifice, negotiation, and support. According to later elaborations of the model, these three elements—sacrifice, negotiation, and support—interact with four main variables: work, family, social, and self (Kember & Leung, 2004; Kember et al., 2005).

This model is highly relevant to the findings of this investigation. For example, Participant 5's sacrificing of family time in service of her academic commitments would be classified as "family/sacrifice" in the model. Meanwhile, the "social/sacrifice" interaction, wherein

## Coping Mechanisms of Working Students

social relationships or activities are neglected to accommodate classes and tests, was evident in Participant 2's response. She mentioned that both her social life and her partnership had been affected by her joint working and studying:

- "I didn't have a social life for a long time (chuckles) and my boyfriend suffered."  
(Participant 2)

Participant 5 also experienced the "family/negotiation" interaction, which involves reaching an agreement with one's family members about one's new academic responsibilities. See, for example, this statement:

- "My family understands at the moment that this is important to me. And they might not be okay with that fact. But we try to balance it out as well as we can. So, weekends are basically there for them..." (Participant 5)

The main purpose of this investigation was to understand the coping mechanisms that the five participants adopt. On the whole, the participants' coping mechanisms were strongly linked to their motivation and ambition—to the final goal or result to be attained by working and studying simultaneously. All the participants were highly motivated and extremely clear on their reasons for working and studying simultaneously. Moreover, they all utilised whatever coping mechanisms or resources were available to them in order to succeed in their individual goals. They moved adaptably between accessing support, negotiating terms with employers or family members, or making sacrifices in their personal lives, depending on which options were available to them. This was always done in service of their broader goals and ambitions. In this regard, Participant 3's statement is telling: "It's short-term sacrifices for longer-term things."

These findings imply that, ultimately, the participants' ambition and drive outweigh the difficulties they encounter as working students. Working and studying concurrently is not mandatory, nor is it imposed on anyone. The decision to pursue this path lies entirely with the participants and, as such, is a reflection of the strength of their desires and convictions.

### 5.3. Proposed coping mechanism model

The researcher devised the coping mechanism model below to assist the participants in finding success in their combined academic and professional pursuits. This model was developed with close reference to Kember et al.'s (2005) coping mechanism strategies and Nasrullah and Khan's (2015) work on time management and motivation.

**Figure 5.1: Proposed coping mechanism model**



## Coping Mechanisms of Working Students

This proposed model of coping mechanisms for working students at the University of the Western Cape is designed to bring about an optimum balance between working and studying. The model flows in both directions. Firstly, working students need to comprehend the key dimensions of time management, as mentioned by Nasrullah and Khan (2015) and discussed above: short-term range, long-term range, and time attitude. Understanding how to organise time according to these dimensions will enable the smooth application of the three coping mechanism strategies proposed by Kember et al. (2005): sacrifice, support, and negotiate. Applying these strategies can facilitate the attainment of the specific goals that working students have, without their personal lives, family lives, social lives, and work responsibilities being adversely affected. Motivation lies at the top of the diagram, because it drives goal-setting and provides the impetus or need for effective time management in the first place. On the other hand, if working students dismiss or fail to apply the dimensions of time management, the entire flow of the model is disrupted. In such cases, working students rely solely on their motivation when pursuing their goals, which, in the absence of good time management, can have a negative impact on well-being, relationships, and responsibilities. Despite the same results being achieved, the costs in the case of poor time management can be high. Therefore, the balancing of effective time management with strong motivation and goal-setting, as proposed by this model, is the ideal coping strategy for working students.

### 5.4. Recommendations

While reviewing participants' responses alongside literature, it becomes evident that effective time management is a primary indicator of academic and work success. The above coping mechanism model presents a coherent strategy for addressing this crucial aspect of working students' lives. The following recommendations are intended to address other issues raised by the working students who participated in this investigation:

- Working students should prioritise tasks from most important to least important. This will help them determine how much time, energy, and attention should be allocated to each task that needs to be completed.

## Coping Mechanisms of Working Students

- Setting more realistic expectations can enable peace of mind for working students. If employers and family are aware of the expectations that working students have set, then cohesion can be fostered with family, friends, and employers.
- Familiarising themselves with the course they have enrolled in—including its specific requirements and contents—is a crucial exercise that working students often overlook or undervalue. Adequate pre-reading and content familiarisation can provide working students with an advantage, reducing the time spent on trying to understand the course material.
- Working students should form alliances with their classmates. The literature stresses that students who belong to support groups typically cope much better than those who do not. A support group should be established at the beginning of the semester, in the form of a collective study group, for example, wherein group members share information with each other in the event that one or more members are unable to attend a particular lecture.
- Where possible, working students should link up or network with working students who have successfully completed the journey of simultaneous working and studying, to gain insights and possible mentorship.

### 5.5. Suggestions for further research

This investigation provided insight into how working students cope through their employment and educational journey. This section outlines possible areas for further research into working students.

- Researchers could undertake a comparative investigation of those who are currently studying and working simultaneously and those who have successfully done so in the past, to better understand the indicators of success.
- A quantitative investigation of the phenomenon could uncover and statistically test certain relationships surrounding working students. For example, researchers could test the hypothesis that a positive relationship exists between organisational leniency or support, individual ambition, and academic success, among other possible hypotheses.

## Coping Mechanisms of Working Students

- The present investigation could be replicated but with an increased sample size, to expand its generalisability. In conjunction with the increased sample size, a more heterogeneous group could be used, with multiple ethnic groups included.
- Given the high adoption rate of blended learning/e-learning in South Africa, researchers could explore whether blended learning is better suited to working students than face-to-face instruction.
- Researchers could also focus on the intangible factors affecting working students, such as motivation, ambition, goal setting, mind-set, attitude, and personality. Such research could include a close examination of motivational theories.

### 5.6. Limitations

The researcher encountered various limitations over the course of this project. These are discussed below.

- The investigation had a small sample size. The sample size was five ( $n=5$ ), which restricted the generalisability of the research. This limitation was somewhat mitigated using homogenous convenience sampling, although results remain transferable only to working students at the University of the Western Cape.
- The investigation did not probe into the life stories of the participants, despite the participants briefly mentioning their reasons for working and studying simultaneously. The interview guide should have been altered to allow for more personal sharing, rather than being directly adapted from Tumin and Faizuddin's (2017) study. In addition, participants' socio-economic circumstances should have been considered and captured during the interview, given the relevance of socio-economic factors in the South African context. Gender was also not adequately explored.
- The investigation employed structured interviews, but semi-structured interviews might have been a more appropriate data collection method. There were instances during the interview process where the participants responded with compelling concepts, but the researcher had to refrain from probing these further due to the structured nature of the interview protocol.



## Coping Mechanisms of Working Students

- The investigation did not run a pilot study or make use of focus groups to assess the validity and reliability of the interview questions. Because some questions sounded the same, participants sometimes gave similar responses to different questions, which was a limitation in terms of the richness of the data.
- Lastly, the researcher undertook data collection during a time of the day that is in close proximity to lecture times. Some participants were slightly apprehensive about participating as they were worried the interview would impede on their lecture attendance. This may have impacted or curtailed their responses.

### **5.7. Conclusions of the investigation**

Throughout this investigation, literature was consulted and referenced regarding the phenomenon of working students and the negative impact that poor coping mechanisms or a lack of work-life balance can have on academic and work-related performance. The participants provided their valuable viewpoints on the struggles they face when concurrently juggling work and school demands. The high levels of ambition they displayed in the face of this onerous undertaking, and the immense pressure that results from it, were truly remarkable. The investigation found that the most important skill to possess when simultaneously working and studying is effective time management, while motivation plays an equally crucial role by fuelling students' commitment and desire to achieve academic and professional success. Overall, the results or outcome of the study suggest that motivation and time management might be positively related or correlated among working students. The proposed coping mechanism model, which combines effective time management with strong motivation and goal setting, can be used to guide and assist working students as they navigate the demands of joint working and studying. The model is by no means a complete strategy for coping with these demands, but it might be able to provide some relief to those working students who find themselves struggling to keep up.

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Appendix 1: Interview Guide

**Dimitri Anthony Rockman (3428817)**

**Research title:** An evaluation of the coping mechanisms of working students at the University of the Western Cape

**Biographical information**

Age: [18 – 29] - [30 – 39] - [41 – 49] - [50 – 59] – [61 – 69]

Gender: [Male] – [Female] – [Transgender]

Nationality: [South African] – [Foreign National]

Ethnic Group:

Degree/Diploma registered for:

Occupation/Job Title:

Sub-research question 1: **What are working students' perception of working while studying?**

Question 1: What motivates you to continue studying while working?

Question 2: What do you think about working while studying for students?

Question 3: Have you started studying first and then working simultaneously or have you worked first and then decided to study simultaneously?

Question 4: What are the reasons for you to work while studying?

Sub-research question 2: **What are the challenges faced by working students when working while studying and how do they overcome these problems?**

Question 5: Has there been any negative impact for you when studying while working?

Question 6: What is the effect on your academic performance?

Question 7: What has been the effect on your work performance?

Question 8: How do you overcome the challenges?

## Coping Mechanisms of Working Students

Sub-research question 3: **What are the positive and negative effects of working while studying?**

Question 9: How do you feel when you are working while studying?

Question 10: Is there any positive impact for you, please explain?

Question 11: How do you manage your time in working while studying?

Sub-research question 4: **What are some suggestions and recommendations for students who are working while studying?**

Question 12: What are your suggestions for students who are working while studying?

Question 13: Do you have any recommendations to improve student's academic performance when they have to work?

(Adapted from Tumin & Faizuddin, 2017)



Appendix 2: Interview Transcripts

**Participant 1**

**What motivates you to continue studying, while working?**

Interviewee: I suppose it's just professional development and really more about me developing my career or developing myself from an educational perspective and a qualifications perspective for my career, so essentially that is pretty much my main motivation.

**What do you think about working while studying for students?**

Interviewee: There's two things to that. I think the one thing it is complex, because you know from a time perspective, you've got to, you know, work is quite hectic and also just being able to study and divide your time into two, that is, that is quite complicated, but what is good about it is that you're in a position where you in the working environment and you can sort of deem and see applicability in that environment more so than someone that's not in a working environment who has never been before.

**Have you started studying first and then working simultaneously or have you worked first and then decided to study simultaneously?**

Interviewee: Yeah, same with me so I studied many years ago and then I started formal employment and now studying again.

**What are the reasons for you to work while studying?**

Interviewee: Well, I can't do full time studies, because you know I don't want to so I have to yes, but that's unfortunately the reality I mean, if I could I would have it would've been easier to study full time and not have to work. But it is just the reality, so I have to work that.

**Has there been any negative impact for you when studying while working?**

Interviewee: Look its juggling time hey. I mean it's just a matter of being able to juggle studies being able to juggle work and it is quite hectic; it obviously will impact all other aspects of my life, so personal life my family etc.

**What is the effect on your academic performance?**

Interviewee: It's a difficult question I don't know quite just yet. I just started like last week so I don't know. So far it seems okay. We just did an online assessment which is very

rudimentary which I think I got like 95% for that. So that was okay. So, I don't know yet it's a difficult question to answer.

### **What has been the effect on your work performance?**

Interviewee: I don't think there's also been a massive impact, but I do know at the times when I would have been working at night which I normally do I now have to I can't. I have to you know juggle between that and studies. The other effect is, I look after a unit or units across the country so which means I have to travel less, and I can only travel, for example my classes are on Thursday night so that next week I'm going to Johannesburg on Monday. I mean Sunday Monday Tuesday and then and then on the following week the same Sunday Monday Tuesday Wednesday or something like that. So, it just becomes complicated.

### **How do you overcome the challenges?**

Interviewee: You just have to do what you got to do. It means working late, I'm not an early morning riser (chuckles) so working late working weekends studying weekends studying late it just is what it is, just sacrificing and then also sacrificing personal time.

### **How do you feel when you are working while studying?**

Interviewee: I think there is some positives in the sense that you can start saying as I mentioned it earlier applicability. So, what I know now I can actually start seeing how to better apply in my working environment so that's I think it's for me a good thing in as much as it's tiring.

### **Is there any positive impact for you, please explain?**

Interviewee: Yeah. So, it's exactly that it's the ability to start applying the theoretical knowledge to my practical work environment.

### **How do you manage your time in working while studying?**

Interviewee: So, I, I really just have to set aside time so I normally you know use my diary and I kind of just set aside time to say this is the time that I need to study, and these are the times that I need to do to do work. It's normally after hours and I mean I just don't have time during the day. So, I have to manage it after hours and weekends. So that's kind often.

### **What are your suggestions for students who are working while studying?**

## Coping Mechanisms of Working Students

Interviewee: Don't have children (chuckles). So, luckily, I don't so (chuckles) so no I'm kidding I think...I think it's just you've got to prioritize, and you've got to plan and don't wait for the last minute. And so, likely (laughter in the far distance) to be clear and make sure that you plan up front and that you stick to your deadlines and the timelines and stuff.

### **Do you have any recommendations to improve student's academic performance when they have to work?**

Interviewee: (inhales deeply), I think, on the one hand is to make sure that expectations at the workplace are understood so that people understand you are studying you might take a little bit longer with stuff might you know not always be able to come to the party with certain things it's just it's just one of those things and at least they'll have an understanding of it. Sometimes you know the work environment will not always be as understanding, but I think if you at least just make sure that there is an expectation creation up front, you should be relatively okay.

## **Participant 2**

### **What motivates you to continue studying while working?**

Interviewee: I would say my family, because I come from a background like my brothers they haven't studied and I'm like the golden child (chuckles). So, the praise motivates me, you know, and also, I want to better myself. So, that's actually my main motivation.

### **What do you think about working while studying for students?**

Interviewee: (clicks teeth and sighs) It's tough hey. It's not for everybody. You need to plan, prioritize, your life. Last year was my first year studying and working. I didn't have a social life for a long time (chuckles) and my boyfriend suffered. So, you really need to have someone, or you need to have people around you who will support you. And whose there to motivate you even though you feel like this is like it, I'm or whatever? So yeah.

### **Have you started studying first and then working simultaneously or have you worked first and then decided to study simultaneously?**

Interviewee: Yeah. Well, so after school I went straight to varsity undergrad and got my degree and then I wanted to take a break, because it was too much. And then I did like a graduate programme which was nothing to do was industrial psychology. That was like desperate times, comes desperate measures in this graduate programme was more for



## Coping Mechanisms of Working Students

work experience. That obviously helped me in terms of working, how to deal with people and those that type of thing. And then I went into my field the following year. It also was also not what I expected. But I also got some knowledge on the HR side and whatever. Then the year after I found another job which was better which I'm in now and then I started Honours. So, I do think that working while you're studying is very beneficial.

### **What are the reasons for you to work while studying?**

Interviewee: For me studying while working? Under the income, so no one's going to pay for my studies. So that's the reason why.

### **Has there been any negative impact for you when studying while working?**

Interviewee: Yes, there is. Obviously, studying takes a lot of my time. I mean, working eight to five everyday day, it does take a lot of my time. I'll say time that's it.

### **What is the effect on your academic performance?**

Interviewee: Mm, mm, I mean (sighs) I don't know actually, I feel like I'm doing fairly well, considering my circumstances, when I was in undergrad, I was obviously full time, but I wasn't that strict with my time. Like I could still have a social life or whatever. But, obviously now, I just don't have one. So just to maintain that performance level. Yeah.

### **What has been the effect on your work performance?**

Interviewee: No effect actually; my work it's actually really lenient. They support my studies. So, whenever I need to do something, though, say take the day off or whatever so there isn't really an impact.

### **How do you overcome the challenges?**

Interviewee: (participant pauses for 7 seconds). I don't really have any challenges. I just deal with it (smug chuckles). I don't have any specific challenge... So, yeah.

### **How do you feel when you are working while studying?**

Interviewee: It depends on in which mode I am in, if it's like hectic stuff going on at work, and do have assignments due here at campus, if I have a test, obviously at that point I would feel tired and a bit stressed or whatever. But normally when I get over the peak, I feel good about myself. I mean, I've accomplished something I overcame a mountain/walked over a mountain and stuff.

### **Is there any positive impact for you, please explain?**

## Coping Mechanisms of Working Students

Interviewee: Yeah, so obviously working and studying I mean I'm getting the practical experience and learning the theory behind it. So, it obviously broadens my thinking box or helps me to think better, understanding why I'm doing things, because before I was just doing it, I was like "Okay I don't know why I'm doing it but okay". But it falls part of this but now I actually know where its coming from how it became and all those things.

### **How do you manage your time in working while studying?**

Interviewee: I live by a diary. That's it (laughs). I stick strictly to a diary. Everything goes in my diary, because if it's not in there, I'm going to forget about it. So, whatever I write down it goes according to plan.

### **What are your suggestions for students who are working while studying?**

Interviewee: I would say, time management and make sure you set aside time for certain things you need to share you need to share your time between social life, work life, study life, but it all needs to be balanced, obviously, otherwise you're going to burn out and you're just going to go crazy.

### **Do you have any recommendations to improve student's academic performance when they have to work?**

Interviewee: Yes, I think what I answered to the previous one, I would say, yeah, just work out a schedule for yourself and stick to that schedule.

## **Participant 3**

### **What motivates you to continue studying while working?**

Interviewee: I think that a better future, more prosperous future, a future where your family benefits from a better job or better business opportunity. In my case, I'm not necessarily looking for better prospects in terms of corporate career, but more from a starting my own business and running my own business employing more people. And then that's part of your personal development as well. I think that you need to invest in yourself. So, you need equip yourself with the knowledge and skills, the abilities to ensure that you can give to others as well. And I believe that your studies don't just impact the lives of whoever you're working with, but also society at large with as I work at church, so it really benefits you holistically as a human being.

### **What do you think about working while studying for students?**

## Coping Mechanisms of Working Students

Interviewee: There's a few things that come to mind. It's challenging (laughs). It's really challenging, but at the same time, I think it's very rewarding. I have two sons, a wife, a ministry is part of my life, I don't see it as something separate to Jason. And that is challenging, being able to integrate everything, I did time management training once. And we spoke about the work life balance and you will hear often about the work life balance and I shared with him the concept of not looking at the work life balance, but looking at integrating your work, life, whatever you busy with, it's, it's more of an integration than a balance, because when I think of balance, I think of a balancing act is like trying to juggle a scale, and something is eventually going to fall (laughs). It's more about how you integrate and make sure that you prioritize everything.

**Have you started studying first and then working simultaneously or have you worked first and then decided to study simultaneously?**

Interviewee: I started in 2004 so that is now 16 years ago, I realized the difference between starting studies at 24 and studying now in 2020 is that I have some experience, actually know a little bit more what I want, not entirely, but I'm able to link the practical and the workplace with my actual studies. So, when you start to when I started in 2004, it's just theory and you actually find that you have lecturers, even today's though, they only knew the textbook, they don't know the practical. And so for me, it is good being able to link the practical with, with a theory in actual fact, a lot of the theory they taught us. You actually realize like they never really implemented it in practice as well.

**What are the reasons for you to work while studying?**

Interviewee: Yeah. Okay, very simple. So, I started an IT degree or diploma in my first year of my studies, I dropped out and I always had the desire for the technical software development, iPhone, computer, from a young age I used to build all my own computers. I didn't buy a finished product. I went to different stores and I will buy the ram, CPU, the mother board, and so I always had that. So why do I why am I doing it now? I always wanted to upscale myself technically. And I did a business intelligence course myself because it allows me to do something that I always wanted to do, which is programming so the teacher's programme. And then also this there's some programming art as well, but that's more for data analytics. So, for me, it's place, it's putting me back on the

trajectory that I originally wanted to be. I love detail. I like solving problems. So, this course is very much about "how do you solve problems?"

### **Has there been any negative impact for you when studying while working?**

Interviewee: Yes (laughs) there's a lot. It has an impact on your family life. There's only 24 hours in the day and we sleep, I think I sleep about four or five hours or less, because I have kids. So, when I sleep at night whereas someone else sleep at night when they don't have kids they can sleep right through the night, my night is broken up, interrupted. It's interrupted throughout the night, because I have a young boy of two, almost two years old, that needs to be fed during the nights, so he needs bottle so, so that is challenging in terms of it. I could use the analogy of the car has petrol in the tank, so after a while, the petrol runs up now that's how I feel as a person. So sometimes your fuel runs out, because you only have so much to give. And so, what I've started doing, I started buying multivitamins I started buying, like the Effervescent, but or mostly something more natural.

### **What is the effect on your academic performance?**

Interviewee: It hampers your academic performance, because I find that I procrastinate. And so, when, and I'll give you a very practical example. I had an assignment due this past Saturday. And I started with the assignment on Saturday. And so, I was working. So, I tried to work from home the morning. I have two boys and a wife, and a lady was busy cleaning the house. And so, I realized that I need to leave the house, come to work and do the assignment. Then obviously, I realized that I don't have all the information that I need to start the assignment. So, but so yeah, it really affects my academic performance, because I don't have enough time to do a proper job for instance, after the assignment was submitted, I realized that I didn't have a conclusion, and in my first paragraph there was a spelling error; it was supposed to be the difference, but it said different. And to me, that's a big thing, because by nature, I know I like, I'm an attention to detail kind of person. So yes, I'm going to be marked down for it so I'm hoping at least for a 50% (laughs).

### **What has been the effect on your work performance?**

Interviewee: It's too early to say that whether it's, it's early in the year, so maybe it will have a great effect later on? I don't know. I'm hoping not. I'm doing my second assignment now, it's difficult to say what that kind of impact would be on my work, currently not a great impact, because I'm still doing what I need to do. The impact that it does have is that

## Coping Mechanisms of Working Students

some nights I am up till twelve, or one o'clock. I have even less sleep now from what I used to have. So, getting to work, it could retard my efficiency maybe I have not identified with it maybe I have not picked up that actually, I could say that there's some meetings that I'm attending where I zone out maybe a bit during the meetings and maybe it is because I have my studies on my mind. So, my mind's been occupied by studies as well. Whereas before studies, there was no, nothing occupied my mind from study perspective, now it does.

### **How do you overcome the challenges?**

Interviewee: So, overcoming the challenges is, I'm trying my best to do a little bit every day and not leave it till the last day to do the assignment. So, I've already with my second assignment, I've done a little bit more, or a lot more than first time round. And I think that support around you is important, because when I struggled on that Saturday, I called on the support of two of my colleagues. And they were a great support to me during that period by getting me over the line. So, I think that having that support system around you much earlier, I think that helps and also just promote for me, and again, I bring into church or other activities in my life, this is the priority now. So, if I need to shift other things slightly, then I will do some more. To remove some of the stress and the challenges I'm facing.

### **How do you feel when you are working while studying?**

Interviewee: In general, I managed stress well. Interviewee: On that Saturday I had heart palpitations (laughs, slight stutter). Interviewee: (laughs). I felt so stressed up. And I don't know how many times I told myself "Jason, why did you do this to yourself?" (laughs). And at that point in time, when, how do I feel again? I felt like quitting in that time, point in time, I felt like just not handing in this assignment, but my father-in-law told me the same that "You might feel like quitting. Just don't quit. So, you push through, you, this, you go through, you break through, because you need to break through barriers. It's almost like you need to constantly it's like going through a wall, then the next one you feel like, but you must go, because you have a deadline, that you need to achieve. And so, for me, it, it feels it felt very overwhelming, on that day, but again, it's, I think once you start thinking of a bigger picture, then it's worth it.

### **Is there any positive impact for you, please explain?**

## Coping Mechanisms of Working Students

Interviewee: (pauses) I think I'm more knowledgeable on, on certain things, before the course, I hadn't an understanding what the course was about I have a better understanding now. One of my stats subjects are Stats and Visualization. I'm not great at Stats, I see that as a good challenge to equip myself, statistically understanding numbers better, understanding how you are looking at things from a quantitative perspective, because qualitative is sometimes where we stay because maybe it's easier, but looking at things quantitatively, I think it challenges me. I think it's in doing this course as well, it's enriching. Because yes, it's hard, but it can an analogy. if you in the gym, and you want to build muscles from muscles there's a saying "No pain, no gain". So, and sometimes we do that pain, pain actually feels like a good pain. I think this is a good, this is a good pain, a good experience because, again, whatever learning is taking place, can only benefit me going forward and the future once again for myself and my family and then the broader picture.

### **How do you manage your time in working while studying?**

Interviewee: When I'm at work, I do work. When I leave I switch off from work. When it's about work and resume tomorrow, and so it's family time, after family time. I'm not, I'm still getting there, but once the boys are sleeping and my wife is, they are comfortable. Then I start my studies, so that is a way of managing my time. Unfortunately, weekends I get my family time, but for now, we have an agreement that, it's short-term sacrifices for longer term things.

### **What are your suggestions for students who are working while studying?**

Interviewee: The egg and the chicken which came first the chicken or the egg or the egg or the chicken? I'm not sure what the answer is in terms of studying first and then working or working first and then studying. It depends on the person. It depends on each person's reasons on difference. This is the answer. This is the solution to that question. However, I do think that starting to study early in life is much better. Get it out of the way. I wish I had better academic advisors that would have encouraged me to maybe pursue a master's as well with M-TECH in my instance. I think because once you start getting involved in working, once you start having a family, it makes things difficult. It's not impossible, but it's more difficult. So, I do encourage people to start studying early. If you're studying and working. then as I said earlier, I think that you if you "Fail to plan, you

## Coping Mechanisms of Working Students

plan to fail." So, you need to do proper planning, proper time management. I bought myself a calendar for my studies. So that is kind of when I study at home. And so, I've already I can see the calendar for the year, I can see where my deadlines and tasks are. So, again, I need to maybe start practicing, or going down to the granular level. So, planning and going down to the nuts and bolts of your studies are important. You can't just rock up doing an assignment, it is careful planning. And that's the process that I went through, because I studied 12 years ago, I finished my studies, so it's getting back into that, but I would say that this advice that I would give to students are read a lot. I think this is important, try to engage with people that are on the same trajectory that you are. I also think that's important. Something that I've been thinking about a lot lately is, you need a mentor as well, it is busy practicing what you are studying. It helps you; it helps you keep you focused. And of course, and also get people that can, can hold you accountable, whether it's your mother or father, have check in meetings to see how things are progressing. So, I think there's much more I could say, but I think that's it.

### **Do you have any recommendations to improve student's academic performance when they have to work?**

Interviewee: Academic performance? I think it's important to have a close relationship with your lecturer as well. For instance, one of our lectures and this assignment due I think on the seventh he said "Send your assignment a week before the time. I'll have a look at it, I'll comment on it". Because again, you need to have people that can actually go through your work, proofread it. I think that will increase your performance, and you will have better results. I don't think I'm answering your question properly but let me just think quickly ... improving your academic (participant takes time to think).

## **Participant 4**

### **What motivates you to continue studying while working?**

Interviewee: Okay. I think what motivates me to continue studying while working so you basically mean that to continue to see it to the end? Okay. Is not, like Jason said as well, personal development and knowing how can I grow, knowing getting my master's degree and way that can take me and the positive impact it can have on the life of me and my

## Coping Mechanisms of Working Students

family and what I can also take back into the field with the practical and the theoretical and giving back

### **What do you think about working while studying for students?**

Interviewee: Terrible, I'm not going to lie, it is not an easy thing, because sometimes work is not necessarily from 9 to 5, you have urgent tasks that come up which you have to cope with. And it's a constant juggle between this assignment needs to be in, writing a test, you write an exam but you're also responsible to your employees, your employer sorry to fulfil your job function. So, it's a constant conflict, not necessarily conflict, but there is a balance between the two.

### **Have you started studying first and then working simultaneously or have you worked first and then decided to study simultaneously?**

Interviewee: I worked first then I studied. Okay. So, because of financial constraints, I didn't have an option to study first, so I had to go work first. And then I started finding out about funding this first, other opportunities. And then I studied full time, but I also worked part time. So, I, I always, a few years ago, I always regretted not studying first. Now I've actually no regret, because I think if I hadn't worked first, I would've probably gone in the wrong field. Firstly, because I didn't have a proper career and curriculum advising, I would have definitely gone to the wrong field. And I wouldn't have learned necessarily what I enjoy and where I see myself career wise. So, I don't know, I don't regret it. And I find that it also helps me in academia, because I don't have theoretical, only I also have experiential and I'm able to apply both to one to one another. I worked till I was 22. And then so I worked full time, then resigned, studied full time, but I always had a part time job. So, whether it was in corporate or whether it was tutoring I work throughout in other words.

### **What are the reasons for you to work while studying?**

Interviewee: Yes, so obviously I won't financially be able to just stop working. I mean, obviously, idealistically, I would love to be a full-time student. But financially I have to work while I study and for me, I kind of enjoy it because I'm constantly learning and getting new experiences, growing my network. So, I wouldn't necessarily say it's bad to work while studying. But I don't necessarily hate it in other words, it's what needs to be done. It's life.

### **Has there been any negative impact for you when studying while working?**



## Coping Mechanisms of Working Students

Interviewee: No, I didn't. (sighs, thinks). Okay, so it's obviously early in my Masters. So, I wouldn't say that I had an extremely negative impact, but it's more accumulation of small things. So, there is a stress comp, so I didn't, for example have a breakdown or I never encountered that, but there's a lot of little things like stress, fatigue, time management pressure from both angles. So, there is a lot of small things that sometimes amalgamate and train,

### **What is the effect on your academic performance?**

Interviewee: I didn't really have a, nothing really affected my academics, I think the only module that I really struggled with was psychometrics, because it was more practical and I'm not that way inclined. And theoretically I catch on very quickly and it's easy but where something requires me to apply myself and possibly practice. Such a psychometrics. That was my lowest module.

### **How do you overcome the challenges?**

interviewee: It definitely wasn't easy to reach it, but I think you just have to, like obviously, you'll be like down and be like, "geez, how am I going to get through this?" But I think we just have to look, you really have to push through now you're going to be sand, sanded down to the core. But once this week is over, it's going to be better. So, thinking about the long term, just do what you need to do now, do your best and then do each day you have no other option but to push through.

### **How do you feel when you are working while studying?**

Interviewee: Okay, it is a bit overwhelming. It's very overwhelming. But I think it's more because of the type of person I am, because I am an overachiever. I not only want to achieve in my academics and my Masters, but in the workplace as well. So, I'm not happy with just doing the bare minimum escaping, while I always have to, not to prove anything to make myself seem, you know, but it's just who I am. I want to achieve the best, so it's overwhelming to me, like before when I was just working, like for example the last two years, if I was tired, if I had a hectic day at work, I could go home and sleep. My weekends were to myself; I'm not married, and I don't have children so I could just work was my life. Not that you think oh my gosh when I'm tired and I get home I can't necessarily just lay down and forget about everything and come nine to five. Now it is 24 hours, there's classes after work, it doesn't stop there.

**Is there any positive impact for you, please explain?**

Interviewee: I did have a positive impact I did have impact was that I was able to bring what I learned into where I was working, so they might have the practical, but they don't have the theoretical and vice versa to bring the working into the study. And I found that a lot of my friends didn't know the working world. So, they were purely students, and they didn't know what was out there. So, I felt like it both, it impacted so and now even in a job I'm now in both complement each other extremely well. So, we can be doing a programme for Samsung, but then I'm thinking, but this isn't working in the real world, but this is what theory says. So, I really benefit from having both best of both worlds.

**How do you manage your time in working while studying?**

Interviewee: Shoo (exhales) Okay, so obviously now I'm in the beginning of masters, but sometimes it's not easy to manage your time at all, because you might have to say, okay, (speaking in third person) "Dominic you doing this you doing that and you have everything planned out and then your mom might feel, you have to take her to the day hospital, there's a crisis at home, there's a crisis at work". And that throws out everything. So yes, you manage time, but at the end of the day, that doesn't always go according to plan.

**What are your suggestions for students who are working while studying?**

Interviewee: (takes time to think, 12 seconds) ...just give me a second. I think time management, but you also need to use, you need to analyse how you use your time. And I think you need to try and start stuff as early as possible and you need to be cognizant of where you spending your time and that is a fault that I have because I'm an extrovert and a people's person so if I start accumulating so let a lot of people coming to me in the today, if I have to add up all those minutes and analyse where am I spending my time so people come to me ask me a question, Jan will come to me and ask me question, and because of the person I am - I go above and beyond for this hour, give them Plan B, C, D, E, F of what to do, they need to follow, where essentially, I just needed to give them A, but I'm wanting to help them but I just have to keep in the back of my mind that I don't have that availability anymore. So, I will sort of want to take the whole task and I'll help them follow up with them. But I'm realizing now I need to be a bit more. Not necessarily selfish but realize that I only have so much in my vessel. And at the end of the day, I'm going to burn out if I don't put myself first.

**Do you have any recommendations to improve student's academic performance when they have to work?**

Interviewee: I think one of the recommendations is start as early as possible, and I don't even follow my own advice (laughs). But start as early as possible and for me, build relationships whether it's with your lecturer, your fellow students (11:51) things off each other. Do not just stay by yourself you need to like Jason said "Have that support network" ask, ask questions. If I don't understand something in class and I don't care that I'm in masters, I will put up my hand. "What does that stand for?", don't be shy; if you don't understand ask, don't worry about what other people think of you. You'll find that 90% of the class also doesn't understand, but they were just too afraid to put up their hand. So, yeah start as early as possible, be cognizant of not only watching spend your time on but how you spend your time. And I think something that really ... and its major gap is technology. For example, checking your emails, are you checking your emails every 10 minutes, how many 10 minutes add up into five hours a day, spend one hour checking your emails, one hour writing a proposal and so forth, be restrict yourself and your screen time.

**Participant 5**

**What motivates you to continue studying while working?**

Interviewee: Okay so, my education has always been important to me. And I knew from the beginning from my undergrad that I wanted to do my PhD. So that was set in my head. But I also wanted experience in the working field.

**What do you think about working while studying for students?**

Interviewee: Well, it can get very difficult to balance it out, it's strenuous if you need a lot of motivation. You have to be determined. So that's at the top of my head, yeah that's what comes to mind. So yeah.

**Have you started studying first and then working simultaneously or have you worked first and then decided to study simultaneously?**

Interviewee: I studied up until only studied up until my Honours. And then I got a part time job at the University of the Western Cape. I was an administrator. And there after I've

## Coping Mechanisms of Working Students

been working and studying, so it was studying first and then the work was incorporated yeah.

### **What are the reasons for you to work while studying?**

Interviewee: What motivated me at first was my education, but realistically, I had to pay for myself, I had to pay for my accommodation and my (pauses for 3 seconds) travelling fees and all of that. So, yeah, that was my reason.

### **Has there been any negative impact for you when studying while working?**

Interviewee: Well, the biggest one is time management. Because you know you are at work from half past eight to half past four, go home, then you have to start working on your thesis, you have to do a lot of research data collection. And there after you don't really have time for yourself, you don't have time for your family really. And it puts a bit of strain on that. So that is my biggest challenges, balancing the time.

### **What is the effect on your academic performance?**

Interviewee: Sometimes I have put my academic; my thesis at the back end and put my family first. However, I've seen the consequences of that. Because one day turned into a week a week turned into two weeks and then I was completely behind. So just Yeah, the planning, yeah

### **What has been the effect on your work performance?**

Interviewee: This situation with my work is I put so much effort into that. So, there's no negative effect. But when it comes to my thesis and my personal life that's where the negative effect creeps in, yeah, because I'm doing a full thesis. I don't have a class. So, if I had a structured class, I think I would put more effort because I'm in class and I'm working, but now it's all up to me. Yeah.

### **How do you overcome the challenges?**

Interviewee: It's definitely about balance. My family understands at the moment that this is important to me. And they might not be okay with that fact. But we try to balance it out as well as we can. So, weekends are basically there for them, well my attention on my work is half past eight to half past four. And that's where I leave it then after that, go home and work on my thesis do as much research as I can. And there after phone whoever. Yeah, my sister, or my dad. Yeah.

### **How do you feel when you are working while studying?**

## Coping Mechanisms of Working Students

Interviewee: Sometimes, you know, the negative side is overwhelmed I'm very over-analytical person. So, I sometimes I feel something is slipping through my hands, especially if I don't plan ahead. As long as I stay proactive, I think I'll be fine, but the positive of it all is how my careers progressing and how my thesis aiding to that. So, I have so much experience now, and so much more exposure to that. And to put that into my thesis. That's the end goal.

### **Is there any positive impact for you, please explain?**

Interviewee: Yes, my career is progressing, and my dissertation is aiding to the practicality of my work and my understanding.

### **How do you manage your time in working while studying?**

Interviewee: it's basically not a set plan, but what works for me is leaving work at work. So, from half past eight till half past four, that's what for me, but I choose to leave it at that, but I never take work home. Then after that, I will research as much as I can, just get enough sleep in ... eight hours sleep Because that's, that's what works for me.

### **What are your suggestions for students who are working while studying?**

Interviewee: I think plan ahead. Understand really ...really what the lecture want, like how your time will be allocated for your thesis or whatever you are studying and work, have a discussion with the manager and be motivated honestly, be motivated in what you are doing, because if you aren't, something's going to slip through the cracks.

### **Do you have any recommendations to improve student's academic performance when they have to work?**

Interviewee: One thing that helped me was, I don't know if you know Zona Coon from UWC library. I go for a lot of sessions at the library. So, data search engine sessions, the data analysis and methodology. So, these kinds of classes, apart from the class that I have, it aided me so much, and a lot of the people that teach these sessions, are lecturers and professors, so that truly helped me. There's even a place where you can go for like two three days like a resort and just focus on your and that's over the weekend. So, things like that really helps outside of your class.

Appendix 3: Ethical Clearance Form



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18 February 2020

Mr DA Rockman  
Industrial Psychology  
Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences

**Ethics Reference Number:** HS19/9/25

**Project Title:** Evaluating of coping mechanisms of working students at a University of the Western Cape.

**Approval Period:** 18 February 2020 – 18 February 2021

I hereby certify that the Humanities and Social Science Research Ethics Committee of the University of the Western Cape approved the methodology and ethics of the above mentioned research project.

Any amendments, extension or other modifications to the protocol must be submitted to the Ethics Committee for approval.

**Please remember to submit a progress report in good time for annual renewal.**

The Committee must be informed of any serious adverse event and/or termination of the study.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Patricia Josias', written over a large, faint watermark of a classical building facade.

*Ms Patricia Josias  
Research Ethics Committee Officer  
University of the Western Cape*

**NEREC REGISTRATION NUMBER - 130416-049**

FROM TOPLE TO ACTION THROUGH KNOWLEDGE

Appendix 4: Consent Form



**PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM**

**TITLE OF RESEARCH STUDY:** Evaluating of coping mechanisms of working students at a University of the Western Cape

*Please answer the following questions by ticking the response that applies*

- |  | YES                      | NO                       |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. I have read the Information Sheet for this study and have had details of the study explained to me.   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. My questions about the study have been answered to my satisfaction and I understand that I may ask further questions at any point.  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study within the time limits outlined in the Information Sheet, without giving a reason for my withdrawal or to decline to answer any particular questions in the study without any consequences to my future treatment by the researcher. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. I agree to provide information to the researchers under the conditions of confidentiality set out in the Information Sheet.   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. I wish to participate in the study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6. I consent to the information collected for the purposes of this research study, once anonymised (so that I cannot be identified), to be used for any other research purposes.   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 7. I agree to a voice recording of the Structured Interview to be undertaken   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Participant's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Participant's Name (Printed): \_\_\_\_\_

Contact details: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

to raise quality  
to raise growth  
to raise standards  
to raise knowledge