



## BALANCING WORK AND STUDIES: THE OMANI STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVE

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### **Abstract:**

The study was conducted to describe the demographics of the working students and their work and study conditions; it also determined the relationship of the former to the latter. A total of one-hundred twenty-eight students from one private higher education institution (HEI) in the Sultanate of Oman participated in the study. The study adopted a quantitative method of research. The instrument which was designed by the researchers had high internal consistency and was validated by a group of researchers. Likert scaling was used to describe the conditions while frequency, mean, standard deviation were used to analyse the data. The relationship was tested through Pearson r. The findings revealed that majority of the respondents are young learners. Almost half are married; while majority are male; respondents were almost equally distributed in terms of private and government employment while a few have their own business. In regard to work and study conditions, three items were strongly agreed while only one was strongly disagreed; five items were agreed and another item was disagreed. As to relationship, respondents' age, nature of employment, and study level were seen to have significant relationship with some of the work and study factors while marital status and gender were not found to have relationship. The findings in this study could be a starting point to obtain some relevant information about the conditions of students who are working while studying especially in the Sultanate; given that there is limited state-of-the-art literature in terms of this research endeavour. The future study could be conducted involving a higher number of education institutions so to gather more pertinent information.

**Keywords:** work and study conditions, working students, student profile, Oman

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## 1. Introduction

Working and studying have been a global concern for both secondary and college students. The situation is more noticeable among the latter group. In fact, the number of students in the higher education has risen sharply in recent years, and an increasing proportion of them combine paid employment with college/university life. According to Carnevale et al (2015) the number of students enrolled in postsecondary institutions increased from 2.4 million in 1949 to 20 million in 2010. Much of the growth since 1973 can be attributed to rising demand for college graduates in the labor market and the difference in wages that could be earned by college graduates over high school graduate. In the Sultanate of Oman more than 23,000 students graduated from the government and private HEIs in 2015/2016, according to the Higher Education Statistics Bulletin issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information. Of these graduates, a chunk is working while studying, which has been a phenomenon in global HEIs.

As cited by Watanabe (2005) the exact numbers of students working part-time are difficult to determine, yet several investigations found that between 50 and 60 percent of all university students do some forms of part-time jobs (Curtis, 2007; Häkkinen, 2006).

Most of the studies both early and contemporary period focus on the impact of working to one's academic performance. Balancing school work with employment may also lead students to exert minimal effort into both because they are struggling to stabilise the imbalance between the two (Astin, 1993). The root of the problems is not the job itself but the amount of time spent on work because it is assumed that working students spend less time on homework, thus can't also pay full attention in class (Steinberg & Dornbusch, 1991) as cited by Watanabe (2005).

As quoted by Faizuddin (2018), Curtis and Shani (2002) believed that students who are working part-time will most likely miss lecturers and feel that they could achieve higher grades had they not been working. Universities therefore should be aware of the conditions that their students have. They should be flexible and considerate enough in structuring assignments and course requirements to support these kinds of students. (Curtis, 2007). As found in one study, more hours worked decreased the likelihood of being an "A" student (Pritchard, 1996) cited by Watanabe (2005).

Exploring more of relevant literature, Manthei and Gilmore (2005), considered that working part-time leaves less desired time to study. Further, new students who choose to do part-time job while having full-time academic load were most likely to suffer from stress (Jogarathnam and Buchanan, 2004). Quoted by Watanabe (2005) many studies were a combination of full-time studying and part-time working adversely affects the physical and mental wellbeing of students and can also create a negative effect on their academic performance (Hovdhaugen, 2015; Creed, French & Hood, 2015; Darolia, 2014)

It is observed that the overall focus has been on the negative impact of combining students' roles. This suggests that term-time employment leads to poorer adjustment to college/university life in terms of academic performance, social inclusion and psychological well-being. (Rose, 2005). Looking at the opposite results at the University of Brighton, Watts (2000) found that four out of twelve working undergraduates, did not affect their academics despite working and five said that it actually had a positive impact. Some of the previously mentioned studies used samples of high-school students rather than undergraduates yet their results were consistent. The fact that some contained samples of less than fifty students, however, may have accounted for some of the differences between the positive and negative academic results.

A variety of studies have examined the impacts of part-time employment on full-time students which clearly indicate that negative results outweigh positive impact of working while studying. This paves the way to focus this study on the real conditions of working students. Rather than merely focusing on the impact, this study attempted to determine the factors that possibly affect the work and study conditions of college students. In the course of the teaching encounters with the students, the researchers noted some pertinent concerns like tardiness/truancy, random lack of focus, occasional inattentiveness and half-hearted participation during class hours which are common observations and findings of researches among working students (<https://owlcation.com>). Regardless of the reason for working; trying to meet the multiple and sometimes conflicting demands of being a student, employee, a manager, or parent often creates high level of stress and anxiety, making students who work less likely to cope with their college obligations. At this point of their life also, students have to balance college work not only with their job but also with family life or social life, in general.

### **1.1 Statement of the Problems**

Teaching working students in college is a tough and challenging job to anybody both for novice and seasoned teachers alike. It is an endeavour that requires understanding and patience on the part of the tutors so that they would be able to respond to the expectation of their students. Colleges and universities catering working students are supposed to support these learners with faculty, administrators, facilities, modes of study and fees which can foster success among them (Pema, 2005). Hence, it is in this context that this study is undertaken by the researchers to fully understand the work and study conditions of Omani students in one private college in the Sultanate of Oman. It specifically sought to answer the following queries:

- 1) How may the respondents be described in terms of age, marital status, gender, nature of employment, and study level?
- 2) How may the respondents describe their work and study conditions?
- 3) Is there a relationship between the respondents' profile and their responses?

## 2. Material and Methods

### 2.1 Design

The study adopted quantitative method of research design. According to Babbie (2010) quantitative research focuses on gathering numerical data and generalizing it across groups of people or to explain a particular phenomenon. The profile was presented using frequency and percentages; the items in the questionnaire were described using mean, standard deviation while the relationship was tested using Pearson r through Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

### 2.2 Instrument

The primary instrument used in the study is the researcher- prepared questionnaire composed of two parts; the profile and ten statements to describe the work and study conditions. The profile includes respondents' age, marital status, nature of employment and study level. The questionnaire has undergone reliability test using Cronbach alpha and validation using Scates and Goods' validation criteria. The alpha coefficient for the 10 items in the questionnaire was .802; this indicates high internal consistency. A reliability coefficient of 0.80 is typically employed as a rule of thumb to denote an acceptable level of internal reliability (Bryman, 2008). In terms of validation, a number of researchers performed the validation and result showed "good"; this means that the instrument was valid to use.

### 2.3 Respondents

The respondents of the study were students in one private college in the Sultanate of Oman. These students come from the different faculties which means they have different programmes being pursued. They were chosen based on purpose and thus were selected through purposive sampling technique. Specifically, 128 respondents answered the questionnaire. The respondents were from the batch of first semester students of academic year 2018-2019.

## 3. Results and Discussions

This part presents the findings and discussions. The following tables reveal results such as respondents' profile, work and study conditions, and correlation of their profile to responses.

### 3.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

Table 1: Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Profile	Age Bracket	Frequency	Percentage
Age	51 above	0	0
	46-50	3	2
	41-45	4	3

	36-40	21	16
	31-35	6	5
	26-30	52	41
	25-below	42	38
	Total	128	100%
Marital Status	Married	71	55
	Single	54	42
	Annulled	3	3
	Total	128	100%
Gender	Male	114	89
	Female	14	11
	Total	128	100%
Nature of Employment	Government	63	49
	Private	59	46
	Own business	6	5
	Total	128	100%
Level	Level 3	17	13
	Level 4	57	45
	Level 5	27	21
	Level 6	27	21
	Total	128	100%

Table 1 shows the description of the respondents as to age, marital status, and gender, nature of employment and level of their higher studies. As to age, almost half (41%) of the respondents were in the age range of 26 to 30 followed by 38 percent who are below 25. This indicates that almost all the working students are below 30 years old (79%). This is similar with the statistics in 2013 wherein fourteen million Americans work while enrolled in an HEI. Two-thirds of working learners are between the ages of 16 and 29 (Carnavelae et al, 2015). Given that the higher education institution in the Sultanate started relatively late, this age bracket is a typical distribution of undergraduate students among HEIs in Oman.

In regard to respondents' marital status, 55 percent of the respondents are married while 42 percent are single, and 3 percent are annulled. The respondents' marital status was taken into consideration in this study since the level of engagement of students to their study may be affected due to other chores they need to perform as parents. Seemingly, students who are single are more likely to be independent in terms of time management than the married ones. Being parents would mean more tasks and household chores to perform which may lead to difficulty of balancing work and family. As a result, married students may face more challenging issues about their studies. On the other hand, annulled ones may have more time and independent compare to married ones. According to Carnevale et al (2015) mature working learners are much more likely to be married and have children than their young working learner counterparts. Hence, the said results support the current situation of working students in this study.

When it comes to gender, 89 percent of respondents are male while the remaining (11%) are female. This means that there is monopoly of response, which is

accounted to male respondents. This implies too that women are underrepresented in higher education. As a result, the findings in this study may not actually represent the voice of female working students when it comes to issues they face while studying. This contradicts to the findings that women are more likely than men to be working learners, nearly 60 percent of working learners are women (Carnevale et al., 2015).

In terms of nature of employment, 49 percent work in the government sector, while 46 percent are in the private sector, and the remaining 5 percent manage their own business. This profile is common for working students as they are considered to be adult learners who combine education and work. It is now becoming a norm for a wide range of students to mix study with employment for reasons like need of extra income to pay the fees, desire to integrate into the job market and to fill spare time. Even in Great Britain, term-time employment is a growing phenomenon among undergraduates.

In terms of study level, most of the respondents are in level 4 which comprised 45 percent; followed by levels 5 and 6 with 21percent respectively and in level 3 with 13 percent. The four levels of study pertain to the duration of study; of which each year is composed of two semesters (blocks). Simply, the higher the level, the closer students will finish the degree. This finding indicates that almost half of the respondents were in the middle of their academic journey (level 4, block 2).

### 3.2 Factors that contribute to work and study conditions

The next table reveals the work and study conditions of Omani students. The table shows ten factors that contribute to study and work, each of which had a computed mean, standard deviation and verbal interpretation. It can be noticed that all responses were scattered as the computed standard deviations were all closed to means and that none of the standard deviations were higher than the computed mean.

**Table 2:** Factors that contribute to work and study conditions

S.No.	Factors that contribute to work and study conditions	Mean Score	Standard deviation	Verbal Interpretation
1	I am able to comply with academic requirements (attending classes and assessments, submit assignments) on time.	3.27	0.74	strongly agree
2	I employ study habits such as studying at my favorite place, studying with friends,	3.30	0.63	strongly agree
3	I seek advice from my academic advisor whenever I am struggling to my study.	3.03	0.77	agree
4	I spend quality time with my family, colleagues, and other social relations despite studying.	3.13	0.65	agree
5	I am motivated to study due to some rewards such as job security, promotion, social recognition, and financial benefits.	3.26	0.62	strongly agree
6	I am aware that study and work are equally important to achieve my personal goals.	2.45	1.09	disagree
7	I learn stress management to cope with study and work related problems.	1.73	0.63	strongly disagree

8	I become more appreciative of time and social responsibility.	2.52	1.11	agree
9	I seek assistance/ help from my colleagues at work if some unplanned study-related tasks need to perform and leave my job.	3.08	0.27	agree
10	I develop flexibility/tolerance in adjusting to study and work timings.	2.51	0.97	agree

Legend: 3.25 – 4.00 strongly agree; 2.50 – 3.24 agree; 1.75 – 2.49 disagree; 1.00 – 1.74 strongly disagree.

As to responses of strong agreement, the respondents strongly agreed that they are “able to comply with academic requirements (attending classes and assessments, submit assignments), “employ study habits such as studying at their favorite place, or studying with friends “and motivated to study due to some rewards such as job security, promotion, social recognition, and financial benefits” and “with mean score of 3.27; 3.30; and 3.26 respectively. These findings imply that probably the reason students able to comply with academic requirement could be due to employment of study habits and motivation.

Exploring more of the results, half of the items in the table were agreed by the respondents specifically, students “seek advice from academic advisor whenever they struggle on study “spend quality time with the family, colleagues, and other social relations despite studying”, “become more appreciative of time and social responsibility”, “seek assistance/ help from my colleagues at work if some unplanned study-related tasks need to perform” and they “develop flexibility in adjusting to study and work timings”. The computed mean was 3.03; 3.13; 2.52; 3.08, and 2.51 respectively. These findings imply that seeking support from both people at work and in college is a typical practice by students. It implies too that students’ social life is not compromised despite studying and working. This supports the findings of Wang et.al (2010) that doing part-time jobs by college students enrich students' school life and increases their social support network as well. In fact, they become more appreciative on time and develop flexibility to adjust study and work timings.

When it comes to strong disagreement, the respondents strongly disagreed that they “learn stress management to cope with study and work related problems” with mean score of 1.73. There could be two reasons about this finding. First, students are not totally aware on the concept or importance of stress management. Second, they may be applying some stress management techniques but do not label them as an avenue to get rid of stress. Either reason, it is clear that stress management needs to be emphasized or introduced in the world of working students. This may be helping students to manage work and study.

Lastly, in terms of disagreed item, the respondents disagreed that “study and work are equally important to achieve their personal goals” with mean score of 2.45. This is a perplexing result which indicates that these two are seen as mutually exclusive ingredients of achieving personal goals. Probably, students perceive that study has a different pathway to success, and the same goes true to work. However, it does not mean that study and work do not have role to play to achieve personal goals.

### 3.2 Relationship between work and study conditions and demographic profile

**Table 3:** Relationship between respondents' profile and work and study factors

S.No.	Factors that contribute to work and study conditions	Profile				
		Age	Marital Status	Gender	Nature of Employment	Study Level
1.	I am able to comply with academic requirements (attending classes and assessments, submit assignments) on time.	.234**	.019	-.163	-.044	.126
2.	I employ study habits such as studying at my favorite place, studying with friends,	.017	.073	-.089	.014	.348**
3.	I seek advice from my academic advisor whenever I am struggling to my study.	.011	-.042	-.166	.060	.029
4.	I spend quality time with my family, colleagues, and other social relations despite studying.	.001	.061	.041	-.198*	-.055
5.	I am motivated to study due to some rewards such as job security, promotion, social recognition, and financial benefits.	.012	.028	.047	-.247**	.167
6.	I am aware that study and work are equally important to achieve my personal goals.	.223*	.117	.019	.002	-.064
7.	I learn stress management to cope with study and work related problems.	-.082	-.073	.054	-.003	-.224*
8.	I become more appreciative of time and social responsibility.	.078	-.017	-.030	.197*	-.108
9.	I seek assistance/ help from my colleagues at work if some unplanned study-related tasks need to perform and leave my job.	.066	.057	-.003	-.207*	.021
10.	I am able to develop flexibility in adjusting to study and work timings.	-.202*	-.070	.076	.020	.034

\*\* Correlation is highly significant

\* Correlation is significant

Table 3 discloses the relationship of respondents' profile and their responses to the factors that contribute to work and study conditions. It can be seen that a positive and high significant relationship exists between age and compliance to academic requirements with obtained value of .234. This means that the more mature students are, the more able they can comply with academic requirements. This agrees to the findings of Furr and Elling (2000) as cited by Watanabe (2005) of which they found that upperclassmen worked more hours than freshmen, indicating that the older students would be more likely to suffer in their academics. Similarly, a positive and significant relationship exists between age and students' awareness on equal importance of work and study; with obtained value of .223. This indicates that the more mature students



are, the more they perceive study and work as equally important ingredient to achieve their personal goals. However, the relationship of between age and the flexibility of adjusting study and work timing was seen significant but negative; with obtained value of  $-.202$ . This means that the more mature students are, the less able they develop flexibility in adjusting study and work timings. In general, it is seen that age has relationship with some of the work and study factors. With these findings, it negates to the ones found by Rokcika (2014); Dustman and Van Soest (2007) and Beffy et. al. (2010) where it revealed that age has a weak effect on the academic performance. Probably, differences may have risen due to cultural variations, motivations and behaviour as the studies were conducted in different places such as UK, US, other parts of Europe and now in the Middle East.

In terms of nature of employment, a significant but negative relationship exists between the respondents' nature of employment and quality time spent with others; with obtained value of  $-.198$ . This means that students who work in government/ ministry have more quality time spent with family, colleagues, and other social relations despite studying. This would probably mean that work at the government is less likely demanding when it comes to time. Similarly, a high and negative relationship exists between nature of employment and students' motivation to study; with obtained value of  $-.247$ . This indicates that students who work in government/ ministry are more motivated to study due to some rewards such as job security, promotion, social recognition, and financial benefits. The same goes true when it comes to nature of employment and tolerance of timings; with obtained value of  $-.207$ . Nevertheless, respondents' nature of employment was found to have high and positive relationship with the appreciation of time and social responsibility; with obtained value of  $.197$ . This means that students who have their own business as a form of employment, are more appreciative when it comes to time and social responsibility compare to those who are working in ministry/government or private institutions. Overall, the students' nature of employment has significant relationship with some of the factors of studying and working conditions especially on the aspect of time and motivation. This agrees to the investigation conducted by Faizuddin, (2017), of which working while studying postgraduate students admitted that they need to manage their time wisely because it is the most essential element in balancing the work and study at university. Further, they stated that it is not an easy task, but it is doable and manageable as long as the person is responsible in what he or she is doing.

When it comes to level of study, it was found that a high significant and positive relationship exists between respondents' study level and the employment of study habits; with obtained value of  $.348$ . This means that the higher the level is, the more able students employ study habits. Students who are near to finishing the programme tend to employ study habits more than those students who are in lower level. Probably, the journey of students from one level to another provides them more experience and awareness on the importance of developing study habits in academic pursuit. Specifically, level 6 students tend to study better by employing study habits than those who are in lower level, or probably the less matured ones. Conversely, students' study

level was found to have significant but negative relationship with learning stress management; with obtained value of  $-0.224$ . This means that the lower study level is, the more they learn stress management to cope with study and work related problems. Probably, the eagerness to learn stress management could be explain by the findings of Jogaratnam and Buchanan (2004) where new students who choose to do part-time job while having full-time academic load were most likely to suffer from stress. In order to get rid of stress, these young people try to learn how to manage it. As the youngest respondents in this study, this situation could be observed to level 3 students.

Of the respondents' profile, marital status was found to have no significant relationship with any of the statements. This result contradicts to the findings of D'Amico 1984, Stinebrickner and Stinebrickner (2003) and Rothstein (2007) as cited by Lee et al (2010) that single working students tend to be performing better and cope better with the demands of job and studies. Furthermore, the respondents' gender was also found to have no relationship to their profile.

#### **4. Recommendation**

- 1) The College may continue to be more flexible as to the designs of the timetable to cater to the needs of the working students. These may include offering classes on weekends, distance education platforms, blended learning schemes, establishing class schedules in advance, offering class advising on weekends as well as online course registrations and academic advising.
- 2) The working students may also be provided with support such as connecting of the College with the companies of these students. It can but not limited to providing academic experiences through career counselling and occupational placement.
- 3) Another similar study can be conducted to strengthen or confirm / negate the findings. It could involve several private HEIs or government institutions.

#### **5. Conclusion**

- 1) Seventy-nine percent of the respondents are between 26-30 years old. This means that majority of the young learners are employed. Almost half are married while most of the respondents are male, and only five percent have their own business; the rest are almost equally distributed either employed in government or in private company. Almost half of the respondents are in level 4, which means they are in the middle of their academic journey.
- 2) Of ten factors that contribute to work and study conditions among working students, the highest mean was given to "employ study habits such as studying at favorite place, studying with friends" while the lowest mean was given to "learn stress management to cope with study and work related problems"; which are translated as strongly agree and strongly disagree respectively. Half of the factors were agreed by the respondents.

- 3) Respondents' profile such as age, employment, and level were found to be significant to some of the work and study factors while marital status, and age were found to have no relationship at all.

### **Acknowledgements**

The authors wish to extend their deepest gratitude to the following people. To the students who actively participated; and was the primary source of data. To the staff and research coordinator of the private college, their unwavering support and ideas helped improved the manuscript. And most especially to the Almighty, the ultimate source of wisdom and strength.

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