

## Striking a Balance during a Pandemic: A Portraiture of Working Filipino Students in Online Learning

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**Abstract:** Working while studying is an opportunity, at the same time, a challenge. Negotiating between studies and work during a pandemic and finding compatibility and balance between the conflicting roles lead these students incredibly phenomenal, making their life stories inspirational. The study focused on exploring the experiences of the working Mathematics education students, their acquisition of learning, and the voices that shaped them in face-to-face learning before and the ongoing online learning due to the pandemic. The participants were seven students at a state university in the Philippines who were working students enrolled in an online learning modality. The researchers used the narrative inquiry design in utilizing storytelling and portraiture, employing poetic portrayals of experiences to capture the richness of narrated texts. Data yielded the following major themes: (a) images and voices of the past and the acquisition of learning in face-to-face classes, (b) images and voices of the present and the acquisition of learning in online classes, and (c) images of the future and the portrait of a working Mathematics Education student. The images and voices of the past and present were both positive and negative but empowering. The participants, at this time, were challenged on how they could juggle their multiple roles and satisfactorily perform each of them. Images of the future were also positive. The emerging portrait was a resilient working Mathematics education student who has achieved balance amid responsibilities by a solid support system, a high level of courage and self-efficacy, and faith in God's providence.

**Key Words:** Distance Education, Narrative Inquiry, Resiliency, Work-Study Balance

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Working and studying simultaneously is difficult, especially for students who work more hours each week. This position may present difficulties in balancing education and work time (Frigillano et al., 2015). According to a 2010 poll by the Commission on Higher Education (CHED), approximately 8% of the entire college population in the country was juggling education and job (ABS-CBN News, 2010). Working students are divided into two groups: those who are paid to work outside the school during the day or night and those who work inside the school but are not paid but receive tuition savings (Cerna, 2017). According to several studies, students work while studying to sustain themselves financially and be self-sufficient (Gbadamosi et al., 2016). Finding work is a necessity for some students, especially those from low-income families. According to studies, working students can manage their schedules and studies efficiently while playing dual roles (Triventi, 2014; Blackmon & Major, 2012).

Studies also show that students who work have better time management skills than those who do not. Students learn discipline while working and highlighting class material. Students directly link part-time jobs to improving academic skills,

inspiration, and career prospects. Their hard work helped them understand the importance of studying and learning to help them progress as individuals. Achieving double the effort and living two separate lives gave working students a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction. The way they used their time to push themselves to their limits, as Frigillano et al. (2015) said, reflects their attitude.

The manner of learning influences working students' acquisition of knowledge. Face-to-face learning helps students receive greater attention and engagement from their professors and spend more time on their studies (Madan, 2020). According to Ghazalia and colleagues (2010), using learning materials in teaching practice fosters subject alignment in face-to-face learning. It does a good job of aligning procedural and conceptual understanding.

Meanwhile, online learning enables working students to get enrolled and study along with their job (Khan et al., 2021). Studies reported several benefits of online learning as experienced by the students, which include its flexibility, convenience, accommodation of different learning styles, and development of learning autonomy ((Muthuprasad et al., 2021; Sa & Serpa, 2020; Selvanathan et al., 2020; Snart, 2010). Moreover, since online learning allows students to control their own time and have

easy access to learning materials, then despite the varying work hours and schedules, working students can balance their academics with their schedules. Accordingly, more than three in five students said they studied online because it was the best fit for their current jobs and life commitments (Magda et al., 2020). Therefore, online learning benefits individual learning and develops new skills, ultimately leading to life-long learning (Dhawan, 2020).

However, the modes of learning posed adverse effects too, such as the lack of motivation, poor concentration, and significant learning difficulties to the students in their learning experiences in both face-to-face and online class settings: lack of access to the internet facilities, lack of proper interaction and contact with students and instructors and ineffective technology, and time management difficulties considering all requirements that they need to comply (Delgado & Arellano, 2021; Bestiantono et al., 2020; Zhong, 2020; Lovric et al., 2020; Kaisara & Bwalya, 2020). Furthermore, these adverse effects make the face-to-face and online learning process harder for working students.

Working while studying required some sacrifices. Studies identified the challenges encountered among working students, including lack of enough sleep, multiple tasking, and deprivation of free time and material enjoyment. The less rest the college students get, the more they are prone to experience anxiety and depression as they struggle to keep up with their hectic schedules. Moreover, students take fewer attributes in school due to job obligations (Darolia, 2014).

Even so, such obstacles might be alleviated by better understanding their issues and receiving help from instructors, friends, and family. Thomas et al. (2017) underscore that family bonds are long-lasting and essential for one's well-being throughout one's life. At every stage of life, family members intertwine in significant ways, and these connections give a solid social connection and influence individuals in their entire life (Umberson et al., 2010). Also, studies showed that personal experience provides a one-of-a-kind avenue for inspired individuals to alter their behavior (Haselhuhn et al., 2012). Hence, working students have the willingness, determination, and fortitude to continue their studies.

In general, multiple recent studies were conducted on the students' experiences with online learning during this new normal (Kaisara & Bwalya, 2020; Lovric et al., 2020; Selvanathan et al., 2020; Yang, 2021). However, studies focusing on the experiences of working students were few

(Frigillano et al., 2015). Furthermore, these studies did not explore the online experiences or face-to-face and online learning experiences of the working students, confirming less attention devoted to the experiences of preservice working students (Triventi, 2014). Therefore, based on the literature review, exploring the experiences of the working students in the new normal and their challenges and opportunities to learn during face-to-face and online learning has not yet been tackled.

Moreover, there is a need to study this since such data could also assist universities and instructors in determining what obstacles the working students faced in face-to-face learning and online learning in this new normal, which could be an effective line of investigation in the future. Thus, this study aimed to explore the experiences of the working students in their acquisition of learning and the voices that shaped them during face-to-face and online learning on the new normal.

## 2. MATERIAL AND METHODS

This study used a qualitative method, narrative inquiry, with portraiture (Rosario & Rayos, 2019). The narrative inquiry examines the human experience through narratives that emerge through social and historical interaction (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). This seeks to comprehend human experiences over time. It also used interpretivism, or seeing the world through the eyes of the people being studied (Chowdhury, 2014). Retelling, or reconstructing the tale as told by the participant, is a hallmark of narrative inquiry, as cited by Creswell (2013). Portraiture combines scientific accuracy with artistic expression (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2016). Its purpose is to demonstrate the splendor and intricacy of human life.

The study was conducted in a state university located in Northern Mindanao, Philippines. In compliance with the Commission of Higher Education guidelines for preventing, controlling, and mitigating the spread of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), the institution suspended the face-to-face classes. It used flexible learning modalities for the continuity of teaching and learning processes. As an alternative, students may have the following modality choices: e-module with Facebook group chat; e-module via Google classroom and Google meet; and printed modules with a text message or phone call. Modalities like e-module with Facebook group chat and e-module via Google Classroom and Google Meet are considered online learning since it involves internet connectivity for the continuity of the teaching and learning processes.

Participants' choosing is considered a crucial phase in portraiture (Muccio et al., 2015). The researcher's interactions with them might repeat several times. As a result, they must devote time and collaborate through the various stages of data collecting. Seven participants were selected through purposive random sampling. The selection criteria are: (a) they were students in the Bachelor of Secondary Education major in Mathematics who were enrolled in online learning modality in the 2nd semester of the school year 2020-2021; (b) they were working students; (c) they were 18 years old and above, and (c) they voluntarily participate in the study. The profile of the participants is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Profile of the Participants

Participants (Not their true names)	Work	Work Duration	Religious Affiliation
Nene	Online selling	Nine months	Christian
Gemb	House related chores and other concerns from her boss	Three years	Muslim
Joseph	Farming and waiter	Seven years	Christian
Jarel	House related chores and other concerns from her boss	Five years	Christian
John Kebyn	Student assistant and sometimes a laborer	Four years	Christian
Angelito	Photographer	One year	Christian
Kimberlie	Saleslady and farming	Four months	Christian

This study's findings came from in-depth interviews and aesthetic descriptions. The in-depth interview includes participants' reflections and story development. A biographical sketch was created by participants recounting their life as young adults, students, and working students highlights. Participants were also invited to use metaphors to communicate their experiences, which included co-constructing the story, evoking their voices, gathering artifacts, and learning about their environments (Muccio et al., 2015). The researchers next asked participants to explain their feelings as working students using aesthetic depictions such as symbols and phrases. They all explained their pictorial representations. The researchers used thematic analysis to discover emerging themes by classifying participants' recurring refrains and analogies (Braun & Clarke, 2013). A discussion of themes and participant testimonies was then followed by a lyrical depiction of the person.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The researchers reconstructed narrative portraits of each participant and transformed one of these narrative portraits into a poetic representation. Here is the story of Joseph, who had thorns on his heart when his parents left him.

A family picture has no price at all,  
It cannot equate to even the biggest mall,  
For him and his brother, it's more than anything,

The value is worth more than the throne of a king.

He was five years old when his parent's love story ended,  
Even before they come to make amends,  
With his brother, both left in their grandparents' custody,  
They're the one who loves them unconditionally.

His life hasn't ended with his parents' failure,  
For he is stronger to build their future,  
Yet past may haunt him in his dreams,  
It's not his reason to stop studying for the family's dream.

After seven years of being a working student,  
It has molded him to become resilient,  
It is not the sweat nor the tiring day that matter,  
It's the family's needs that he needs to cater to also.

Either in a food house or the farm field,  
As long as it is decent and legal, he'll go and take hold,  
Coz' at the end of the day,  
No one gives him even a penny.

Life has thrown him a lot of challenges,  
May it be a financial or emotional crisis,  
Hustling to work and study is his everyday,  
To sustain their financial needs and lift his family.

The extracted themes were organized into the following: (a) images and voices of the past and its acquisition of learning in the face-to-face classes, (b) images and voices of the present and its acquisition of learning in the online classes, and (c) images of the future and the portrait of a working Education student. The participants attested that they were shaped by what they had seen and heard throughout their experiences as students and later when they combined it with work. From the past and the present, they saw a picture of who they could be in the future.

#### *Theme 1: Images and Voices of the Past and its Acquisition of Learning in the Face-to-Face Classes*

From their past, the participants saw images and heard voices. As they narrated their life experiences, they drew from memories of being a student alone; this time, they had not yet combined their work with their studies. Most of their pictures were related to their daily school routine. The participants highlighted the positive and negative symbolism of those experiences. Some also recalled their painful memories of their studies—stopping schooling, feeling worthlessness, and daily struggles in school. The negative symbolism they mentioned represents their hardships in life. Meanwhile, the positive ones were their positive outlook on life. From those experiences, they drew inspiration and strength.

*Images of the past.* The participants identified the following negative symbolisms of their past : (a) stone, (b) a broken heart, (c) a messy garden, (d) a box, and (e) walking in the dark flashes in their

minds. Sadly, the participants look back on how their lives were when they did not yet work. Nene looked back to those days when she felt so unmotivated to move forward. *"I imagined myself as a stone; if no one pushes me to do so, I cannot do anything."* Jarel considered her studies as her life. Knowing that she could not continue her studies broke her heart. She opened her heart to work with complete determination while studying, bringing her life again. Like Jarel, John Kebyn imagined himself in a messy garden; his parents could not sustain his studies' financial needs.

Meanwhile, Kimberlie felt no freedom, no place to explore, and no space to grow in when she looked back at her life before. Just like how she imagined herself inside a box. She focused her attention no other than on her studies. Angelito remembered his daily routine every Monday dawn, walking on the dark road and waiting for a highway bus to arrive at school on time. He also compared it to his student life; he felt in the dark when thinking about the activities he needed to comply with.

Despite the hardships coming along their way, other participants looked at its opposite angle—positive symbolism. They mentioned that they symbolized their past as a (a) candle and (b) door. Joseph spoke highly of his grandparents as his candle, which he wanted to sustain the lights on: *"My grandparents light up my life in the dark."* He testified how his grandparents took care of him and his brother when their parents left them. He added that his grandparents poured him so much love that his parents could not let him feel it. Angelito lost his father when he was in his teenage years. His grandmother was now one of his central support systems for his studies. He shared that his grandmother was the one who took his father's obligations to their family when his father passed away. Like a candle in life, the influence of grandparents corresponds to one of the participants who said that she is a door that symbolizes her freedom. Gemb treasured her memories of freely bonding with her friends without worrying about doing some work and having responsibilities to fulfill at work.

*Voices in the past.* There were no unfavorable voices from the past acknowledged by the participants. Instead, they highlighted the motivational messages they had heard from their parents and the significant persons in their lives. Angelito, whose father died when he was a teenager and who had a son at a young age, still recalled the voice of his father with whom he grew up telling him: *"You have to finish your studies. If you cannot, then you will be like me—laborer."* When he decided to work while

studying, his grandmother, who took his father's obligations to him, saw it as fulfilling his father's words. For Joseph, the voices of her grandparents continue to ring in his mind. He said he was young when he started working on the farm and helping his grandparents financially. *"Do not be ashamed of what you are doing—working hard under the sun and plowing in the rice field. You did it with your efforts and determination."* Gemb felt everything was light when she remembered what her parents told her. *"You are a strong independent woman."* Nene, who got involved in a teenage pregnancy issue, was challenged by her mother: *"If others did it, then how come you cannot make it."* In contrast, Jarel's parents remind her to keep calm and continue to pursue her dreams. She added that her parents' reminder of turning sacrifices into success made her grip even more on it.

Aside from those motivational voices coming from their parents and significant persons in their lives, other participants were self-motivated as they heard their inner cries from the current situation. For example, John Kebyn and Kimberlie attested that they did not want their future to be the same as their previous life. Therefore, John Kebyn said to himself, *"Do not give up. This moment of your life becomes your weapon and molds you as a strong person."* Meanwhile, Kimberlie motivated herself to work hard every day and help their family as soon as possible; she did not want to see her mother teary-eyed again. Studies showed that personal experience provides a one-of-a-kind avenue for inspired individuals to alter their behavior (Haselhuhn et al., 2012). Hence, working students have willingness, determination, and grit.

*Acquisition of Learning in the Face-to-Face Classes.* The participants enumerated their challenges and opportunities during their face-to-face classes. They mentioned that role conflict and difficulty understanding some major subjects' lessons challenged them to acquire learning. While recalling their acquisition of learning during face-to-face classes, they missed the opportunities of being acquainted with their friends and the assurance of knowing with less load of academic requirements. When it comes to the acquisition of learning, they found it less challenging and still prefer face-to-face classes.

With all their honesty, the participants confessed that they had difficulty understanding the mathematics subjects of their course. Kimberlie and Angelito attested that they had trouble understanding the lesson because their learning styles did not coincide with the teaching approach. Joseph, who lacked learning resources, also felt the



same. In contrast, others like Jarel, Gemb, and Angelito emphasized role conflicts that hindered them from learning. Jarel found herself tired physically and emotionally. At the same time, Gemb cannot solve her tardiness every Monday due to her work obligations. Angelito spent his weekends entirely taking care of his son. John Kebyn was not yet able to adjust his time to working and studying. Hence, they do not have enough time to focus on their learning; they are busy fulfilling their multiple roles. However, the participants blocked those challenges with the opportunities they saw.

Three of them (Nene, Kimberlie, and Angelito) confirmed that those challenges were just a pail compared to the ocean of learning they had inside the classroom. They said they have more focus on studying their lessons in face-to-face classes in unison. They find time to relax because they have less load of academic requirements. Meanwhile, Nene missed the acquaintance of her friends and classmates, which added to her excitement to study.

This finding was agreed with Lucardie (2014) that students who had fun and enjoyed learning were encouraged to participate in learning with excitement for the journey and hope for the results. Meanwhile, in his study, Akram Awla (2014) proposed that instructors use a balanced approach to teaching styles to deal with various learning styles. Also, Darolia (2014) stressed that students take fewer attributes in school due to work demands.

#### *Theme 2: Images and Voices of the Present and its Acquisition of Learning in the Online Classes*

Like their past, the participants acknowledged that those present were a mix of positive and negative experiences. When they narrated their life as a working student in their storytelling, they began with negative descriptions. Other participants also used positive symbolism, such as a harrow and a deaf turtle. These negative symbolisms pinpoint how their current roles affect them. At times, they expressed tiredness. As they proceeded, the images and voices they described were optimistic.

*Images of the present.* The participants saw themselves engaging in varied and competing roles. At home, they were daughters and sons and mothers and fathers to their children; in their online class, they were students. However, these demands do not weigh heavily upon them. Angelito, for example, a father of his toddler son who runs a photography business, was challenged in his day-to-day hustle. His partner, like him, was also a student who was beating on her academic requirements. However, both portrayed their role responsibly.

Hence, Angelito happily said, *"I like this way that I am challenged. It motivates me daily. Also, my partner and I had developed collaboration and unity in doing things unlike before. I even missed those times that we had a misunderstanding."* In a quote she wrote, Nene, who also had a son and managed her online business, motivated and challenged herself by asking: *"If others can, why cannot I? Just do not give up. If you are tired, rest."* Joseph, who always had a strong personality, described how his experiences influenced his life: *"I am a harrow. Dust and dirt may cover me, but I am still compact."* This metaphor was echoed by John Kebyn, who said with complete determination, *"I did not recognize difficulties in life just like how a deaf turtle did to his surroundings."*

*Voices of the present.* In unison, the participants attested that the new normal classes brought advantages to their current situation. It allowed them to use time wisely to earn money and help their families while studying. All of them find new normal classes as the door that delivers them with hope amidst the pandemic. They said that the financial demands on their studies and families were solved because of extra earnings from working. Their perceptions resonate with other working students motivated to work for economic necessity (Gbadamosi et al., 2016).

Meanwhile, they became fruitful in building themselves (Frigillano et al., 2015). Angelito, Kimberlie, and Nene feel self-satisfaction and fulfillment while helping their family gain self-independency. At the same time, Joseph and Jarel developed self-perseverance and optimism, respectively.

Indeed, role conflict was the issue for these working students. Were they still able to find the balance? If so, how did they do it? The participants said they could make sense of their situation and even sometimes enjoy life as they had it presently. In their narratives, they had mentioned their techniques to find balance. Among these techniques are (a) time management and self-discipline, (b) carving out family time, (c) setting priorities, and (d) finding time for self-rest. Angelito said, *"For the whole week, if we had photoshoot bookings, I woke up early to take care of my family—my partner and my son, to find time to do my work on that day, to finish my academic requirements every night—and time with God on Sunday."* Kimberlie, who worked ten hours a day, decided that *"every after work will be the time for academic requirements."* Joseph, in his narration, mentioned that when he was under pressure between work and studies he grasped the philosophy, *"first things*

first." While Jarel, aside from strictly following her schedules in work and studies, still finds time to visit her family and rest.

The participants claimed that they could navigate through their multiple roles because of the support—from their family, life partner, and self-driven personality. Nene spoke of her family very highly: "My family motivates me to keep going." Joseph proudly shared how his grandparents supported him in his studies and work by giving him daily motivation and moral support. Meanwhile, Angelito happily narrated how his grandmother helped their photography business by buying them a new camera lens and even giving him financial support for his online learning. Aside from that, he underscores the loving support of his partner, who takes care of their child and helps him in their business, doing his work and studying light to handle. Nene, Jarel, and John Kebyn maintained their self-driven personalities to conquer the battle of responsibilities they had.

Above all, the participants acknowledged the reality of God in their lives. The compensatory model of resilience posits that one of the four core characteristics of resilient young adults is having a strong trust in faith towards a consistent optimistic life view (Ledesma, 2014). Gemb attributed God as the great planner of her life. She entrusted her life to Him: "It is Allah's way of preparing me for a better future. I always trust Allah." Meanwhile, Angelito testified, "God is great. Before, I expected that it would be hard, but He twisted it, making it easy to live on."

Reflecting on their life as working students while in the pandemic, the participants penned: "Working is fulfilling" (Nene). "It helped me develop my life's skills in persevering in real-life battles" (Joseph). "Working while studying made me stronger and braver than before" (Jarel). "I find value in myself—working while studying" (Kimberlie). "If you feed your mind with positivity, then you will be limitless" (Angelito). They mentioned that their mission is to achieve their goals in life for themselves and their family.

Furthermore, the images and voices of the present made the participants see something else. This poetry represents how Angelito described and narrated his present life as we put it in a poetic portrayal.

Four roles, one man,  
A father, a partner, a student, and a son,  
Father passed, mother's sick,  
He has a son at an early age and a family to feed.

He is a tragedy and disappointment,

Had mistaken due to circumstances,  
Yet he is also a warrior with stronger faith,  
He is standing straight for the dreams he needs to keep.

He is optimistic and independent,  
He needs to be tough in every moment,  
He is strong, stable, and responsible,  
Support him, and he'll do the impossible.

He is a hardworking man,  
His mother, partner, and son,  
It drives him to get things done,  
All he could risk just for his loved ones.

His journey was a camera,  
That led him to capture his eudaimonia,  
It gives him the purpose to survive,  
Challenging moments make him alive.

"Life is a camera that captures moments,  
And every picture lies different stories", he said,  
His story indeed is a photograph,  
That has purpose and meaning to be grasped.

Time management is the key,  
Primarily that he works and studies,  
While fulfilling a father, a partner, and a son's duty,  
Tomorrow is coming, and he needs to be ready.

He said, "feed your mind with positivity,"  
Then comes an unexpected opportunity,  
For it pushed you to conquer your weaknesses,  
That urged you to discover yourself and be limitless.

After all, for him, life is so fulfilling,  
The struggles he has been experiencing,  
Been worked and healed by God's blessing,  
Now, for his beloved, facing life alive and striving.

Other studies corroborated the findings in this study and identified the challenges of multiple tasking as the difficulties encountered by the working students. However, Blackmon and Major (2012) and Triventi (2014) claimed that despite varying work hours and schedules, working students are still able to handle their schedules and their studies effectively. Working students have better time management skills than students who do not work. Through working hard, they had a clearer vision of the importance of learning and gaining knowledge to help them improve as individuals (Frigillano et al., 2015).

*Acquisition of Learning in the Online Classes.* Like face-to-face classes, the participants shared their mixed experiences acquiring their learning in the online class mentioning their challenges and opportunities. However, this time they find it more challenging than the face-to-face classes. As they shared their experiences, a feeling of anxiety, pressure, and tiredness was dominant. However, those experiences molded them to become resourceful and independent learners.

The participants openly stated their challenges in the online class which include the following: they had lots of academic requirements to comply with, lack of immediate feedback and less interaction from their instructors, difficulty understanding the lesson, lack of resources for online learning, time conflict, and family problems. Nene and Kimberlie said that sometimes they were tired of complying with every subject's bundle of academic requirements.

Meanwhile, all participants admitted that they had difficulty understanding the lesson because there was less interaction and no immediate feedback from their instructors. Nene, Kimberlie, and Angelito reasoned that they were uncertain of their learning. They cannot say that their answers to their math problem-solving in major subjects were either right or wrong because the instructor did not even provide them the feedback. Angelito felt anxiety as he looked forward to the Licensure Examination for Teachers. *"I just study for the sake of compliance. I am even anxious if I cannot answer the LET exam and cannot pass it due to the subjects that I did not study well during this online class."* John Kebyn also had a problem attending their online discussion because he does not have a cellular phone that he can use. For Kimberlie, sometimes, there is a time conflict between her work and the online class schedule. Whereas, Jarel was distracted by her family problem. Hence, from their narratives, they seem to have a lack of acquisition of learning in the new normal set-up.

However, the participants take advantage of their opportunities. They mentioned that there is no deadline for submission to the academic requirements. They control their own time, and attending online classes is optional. Moreover, they become resourceful in finding other means to learn, like browsing the internet and searching for additional resources to better understand the lessons. Indeed, they were made to push beyond their limits to be an independent learner. These learning experiences resonate with the connectivism theory of learning. The instructor's responsibility for learning is transferred to the student. It is the learner's responsibility to design their learning environment (Siemens, 2005). The students create their own learning experience, engage in decision-making, and enhance their learning networks. Their learning relies heavily on the use of technology.

In addition, the results substantiate Snart's (2010) and Khan et al. (2021) notable findings that online learning allows students to control their own time and have easy access to learning materials.

Moreover, students take fewer attributes in school due to job obligations (Darolia, 2014). Aside from that, online learning posed adverse effects to the students on their learning experiences like significant learning difficulties, lack of communication and connection between students and instructors, ineffective technology, time management difficulties considering all requirements that they need to comply with, and a need for clarification and reassurance in their learning ( Delgado & Arellano, 2021; Kaisara & Bwalya, 2020; Bestiantono et al., 2020; Muthuprasad et al., 2021; Zhong, 2020; Lovric et al., 2020).

### *Theme 3: Images of the Future and the Portraiture of a Working Filipino Student in Online Learning*

The participants' images of the future are closely intertwined with the present. We summarized their statements and put them together into a poetic portrayal.

A diligent and responsible working student,  
Composed and resilient to every downfall,  
Propelled by a motivation to alleviate and succeed in life,  
Making life happier and being an inspiration for others.

Looking forward to a stable life.  
Having the heart to look back on where they came from,  
Humbly leaving a legacy and a heritage to the people they loved,  
Living happily with dreams they desired.

*The Portrait of a Working Student.* The researchers created a poetic portrayal of a working student from the narrative and poetic portraits. The images and voices focused on the present and the ideal they yearned to be. An illustration in Figure 1 is also presented to complement the poem.

Challenging oneself with double tasks and two distinct lives,  
They are clothed with courage,  
Their arms were full of baggage,  
Of dreams and aspirations for a better future.

They are heroes on their own,  
They sleep late and rise at dawn,  
Amidst multiple roles, they find balance and compatibility,  
Making their life independent.

They bring hope to their homes,  
It never fades because it has goals,  
God's guidance, family, and aims keep them going,  
Never get dragged by any criticism.

They are doers of their dreams,  
They are driven, motivated, and have the patience,  
I felt lost for a while, but I had strong faith to survive,  
They are rooted with a purpose, a purpose to thrive.

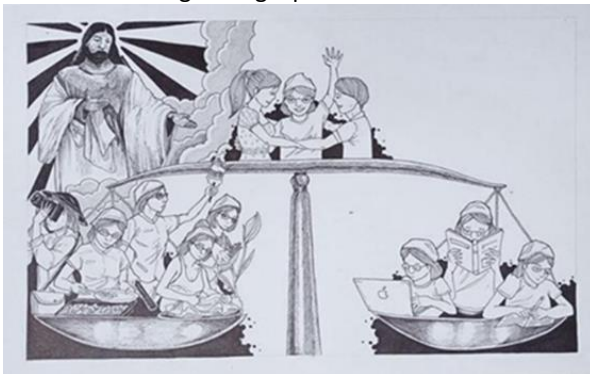
They are life warriors,  
They risk, and they fight battles,

Their worries? They turn it into prayers,  
They have saved themselves- for others.

They live with a purpose,  
They open their eyes every day for a cause,  
A purpose of taking for their loved ones,  
To fill life with the best meaning that was lost once.

Either working or studying,  
Their stamina to fight will never be faded,  
It is the battle that they longed to conquer,  
Nobody can dare their courage; they are resilient working students.

Figure 1. An illustration of a working Filipino student in online learning during a pandemic



#### 4. CONCLUSION

Based on the narratives, working students were able to fulfill their roles. Their successes, fueled by empowering images and voices from the past, guided them to rise or manage tensions caused by the demands of their numerous responsibilities in the present and by positive images of the future. Meanwhile, their face-to-face and online learning acquisition were affected by their roles (conflict of time between roles), instructors (less interaction and teaching approaches), and their resources for learning.

As a result, in the online class, students develop coping strategies in which most of them rely on their learning acquisition on the internet. Thus, the connectivism theory of learning supports this claim that learning responsibilities shift from instructor to student. Students connect to the machine (internet) to construct their learning. Furthermore, even if it is challenging for them, the online class provides more opportunities to work while studying than the face-to-face class.

Also, they managed to find balance and compatibility between work and studies by developing techniques and leaning on a solid support system from inside their own house, notably their family and life partner; their self-personality; and power above and beyond them, that is, God. Moreover, the academic resilience

theory supports the outcomes of this study, indicating that at-risk students, in this example, working students, may achieve their educational goals. Furthermore, the participants in this study demonstrated resilient traits such as the ability to handle issues proactively, rise above unpleasant experiences, seek support from others, and anchor one's life on trust in God.

Working students may gather support from their family and partner in life; join support groups that can provide academic assistance and friendship; and find strength in a Supreme Being, whom they claim as a "planner of their life." Teacher education institutions may provide a supportive and conducive environment. Support can come through study groups, accommodating class schedules, supportive and encouraging instructors and academic advisors, using differentiated instruction, and regular dialogues between school leaders and students to better understand the needs of working students. The study focused only on the perspective of the working Mathematics Education students on their experiences in face-to-face, and online classes, other perspectives, such as another set of students, may be explored. Moreover, other qualitative research methodologies such as phenomenology may deepen the understanding of the phenomenon of working students during a pandemic.

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