

Lived Experiences: From the Viewpoint (Perspectives) of a Student Exposed to Early Labor

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ABSTRACT

This phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of secondary students engaged in early labor while attending school at Angga-an Integrated School, Damulog, Bukidnon, during the 2025–2026 school year. Early labor remains a significant concern in economically vulnerable communities, yet the perspectives of student-workers are often underrepresented in educational research. The study aimed to understand the challenges students face, the circumstances that led them to work, the strategies they use to balance employment and schooling, and the support they believe is needed. Using purposive sampling, eleven participants who were actively engaged in work while enrolled in school were selected. Data was gathered through semi-structured interviews, field notes, and reflective memos, then analyzed using thematic analysis. Trustworthiness was established through member checking, peer debriefing, reflexive journaling, and an audit trail. Four major themes emerged: (1) multidimensional burdens of work, including fatigue, stress, and limited social participation; (2) labor as a response to economic necessity, shaped by poverty, family responsibilities, and school-related costs; (3) resilience in balancing work and study through time management, adaptive coping, and persistence; and (4) the need for shared systems of support from families, schools, communities, and government institutions. The study concludes that early labor is not merely an individual choice but a response to structural inequality. Sustainable interventions should reduce educational barriers, strengthen learner protection, and expand support systems that enable vulnerable students to remain in school.

Keywords: early labor, working students, phenomenology, educational inequality, student resilience

INTRODUCTION

Child labor and early exposure to work remain persistent global and national concerns, particularly in poor communities where poverty, limited livelihood opportunities, and social inequality continue to shape children's life chances. Although education is widely recognized as a pathway to social mobility and long-term well-being, many learners are compelled to divide their time between schooling and income-generating activities. In the Philippines, the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA, 2022) reported that approximately 1.48 million children aged 5–17 was engaged in child labor. This statistic highlights the continuing tension between children's right to education and the economic realities faced by vulnerable households. Despite the enactment of Republic Act No. 9231, which seeks to eliminate the worst forms of child labor, many children continue to work because of financial necessity and limited family resources (Republic Act No. 9231, 2003).

The educational consequences of early labor are substantial. Studies have shown that students involved in work are more likely to experience absenteeism, reduced academic engagement, lower school performance, fatigue, and psychological stress (Edmonds & Pavcnik, 2019). Work demands may consume the time, energy, and concentration needed for learning, making it more difficult for students to participate fully in school. At the same time, some studies suggest that young workers may develop responsibility, perseverance, and practical critical thinking skills through their experiences (Heady, 2018). These findings indicate that early labor is a complex phenomenon that cannot be understood solely through deficit-based perspectives. It reflects

both the risks associated with structural disadvantage and the adaptive capacities of young people navigating difficult circumstances.

The issue became even more urgent in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, which intensified socio-economic inequalities and increased household vulnerability in many communities. International evidence suggests that economic shocks, school disruptions, and reduced family income pushed more children into labor or increased the risk of child labor involvement (ILO & UNICEF, 2021). In educational settings, such pressures may deepen existing inequalities, especially among learners in rural or low-income areas where support systems are limited. As schools continue efforts toward inclusion and equitable access, greater attention is needed for students whose educational participation is affected by work responsibilities.

Although child labor has been widely studied, much of the existing literature emphasizes prevalence rates, economic determinants, school outcomes, or policy responses. While these contributions are valuable, they often provide limited insight into how students themselves understand and experience the realities of working while studying. Quantitative indicators can show the scale of the problem, but they may not fully capture the meanings, emotions, coping processes, and aspirations embedded in students' everyday lives. Qualitative inquiry is therefore essential in giving voice to learners whose experiences are frequently overlooked in policy and research discussions.

In the Philippine context, there remains a need for localized studies that examine how early labor is experienced within specific school and community settings. Many national discussions generalize the issue without accounting for differences in geography, livelihood conditions, transportation access, and school resources. Rural communities may present distinct pressures that shape why students work and how they sustain their education. Understanding these local realities is necessary for designing responsive and context-sensitive interventions.

Angga-an Integrated School in Damulog, Bukidnon, provides a relevant context for this inquiry. The school serves learners from low-income families, many of whom rely on agriculture, informal work, and small-scale livelihood activities. Teachers and school personnel have observed that some students struggle to balance academic responsibilities with economic obligations. These conditions make the school an appropriate setting for exploring how early labor influences students' educational and personal lives.

Guided by phenomenology, this study sought to explore the lived experiences of secondary students engaged in early labor while attending school. Specifically, it aimed to understand the challenges they face, the circumstances that led them to work, the strategies they use to balance employment and schooling, and the forms of support they believe are needed. By centering student perspectives, the study contributes to ongoing conversations on inclusive education, learner protection, and social justice for vulnerable youth.

Objective of the Study

This study aimed to explore the lived experiences of secondary students engaged in early labor while attending school at Angga-an Integrated School during the 2025–2026 school year. Specifically, it sought to:

1. Describe the challenges experienced by students involved in early labor.
2. Examine the circumstances that led students to begin working at an early age.
3. Understand how students balance work responsibilities with their studies and academic performance; and
4. Identify the forms of support and recommendations students consider helpful for learners in similar situations.

Theoretical Framework

This study was anchored in Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, which explains that human development is shaped by interactions within multiple environmental systems, including family, school,

community, and broader social structures. This framework is relevant because students engaged in early labor are influenced not only by personal circumstances but also by household poverty, school demands, and community conditions.

The study was also informed by resilience theory, which emphasizes how individuals adapt positively despite adversity. This perspective helps explain how student-workers develop coping strategies, persistence, and determination while balancing work and education.

Together, these frameworks provide a holistic lens for understanding both the structural challenges and adaptive responses present in the lived experiences of working students.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design using a phenomenological approach. Qualitative research is appropriate when the purpose of inquiry is to understand human experiences, meanings, and social realities from the perspectives of those who live them (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Phenomenology is particularly suitable for examining shared experiences and describing how individuals interpret a common phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). In this study, the phenomenon of interest was engagement in early labor while attending school. The design enabled the researcher to explore how students perceived the challenges of working at an early age, the circumstances that led them to labor, the strategies they used to remain in school, and the support they considered necessary. By focusing on participants' narratives, the study generated rich descriptions that may not be captured through numerical methods. This approach was therefore appropriate for understanding the depth, complexity, and meaning of students' lived experiences.

Research Locale

The study was conducted at Angga-an Integrated School in Damulog, Bukidnon. It is a public educational institution serving learners from kindergarten to senior high school. Families in the surrounding community rely on farming, small-scale trading, and informal labor as primary sources of income. The area is characterized by limited economic opportunities, which may contribute to students' involvement in early labor. The school was selected because it reflects the realities of a rural educational setting where learners may face competing academic and economic responsibilities. The locale provided an appropriate context for exploring the lived experiences of students who work while studying.

Participants and Sampling Procedure

The participants consisted of eleven secondary students who were currently engaged in paid or unpaid work while enrolled at Angga-an Integrated School. Purposive sampling was used to select information-rich participants who had direct experience of the phenomenon under investigation (Palinkas et al., 2015). The inclusion criteria were (1) currently enrolled in the secondary level, (2) engaged in work while studying, and (3) willing to participate voluntarily in the study. Participants represented diverse backgrounds in terms of age, gender, type of work, and family circumstances, allowing varied perspectives on early labor.

The sample size of eleven participants was considered adequate for phenomenological inquiry because the goal was depth of understanding rather than statistical generalization. Data collection continued until thematic saturation was reached or when no new insights emerged from subsequent interviews (Guest et al., 2006).

Research Instrument

The primary instrument used in the study was a semi-structured interview guide. The guide contained open-ended questions aligned with the objectives of the study, focusing on students' challenges, reasons for working, balancing strategies, and recommendations for support. Semi-structured interviews are appropriate in qualitative research because they provide consistency across participants while allowing flexibility to probe deeper into relevant experiences (Kallio et al., 2016).

To establish content validity, the interview guide was reviewed by individuals with expertise in education and research methodology. Revisions were made based on their feedback to improve clarity, relevance, and sequencing of questions. Pilot testing was also conducted with individuals the same as the target participants to refine wording and ensure comprehensibility.

Data Gathering Procedure

Prior to data collection, permission to conduct the study was secured from the school administration. Informed consent was obtained from participants and their parents or guardians. The researcher explained the purpose of the study, procedures, voluntary nature of participation, confidentiality measures, and participants' right to withdraw at any time without penalty.

Individual interviews were scheduled at mutually convenient times and conducted in a quiet and undisclosed setting on the school premises. With permission, interviews were audio-recorded to ensure accurate capture of responses. Field notes were taken to document non-verbal cues, contextual observations, and emerging reflections. After each interview, recordings were transcribed verbatim and checked for accuracy before analysis.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis following the framework of Braun and Clarke (2006). First, the researcher became familiar with the data through repeated reading of transcripts. Second, meaningful statements and segments of text were assigned initial codes. Third, related codes were grouped into categories and candidate themes. Fourth, themes were reviewed and refined to ensure coherence and alignment with the data set. Finally, themes were clearly defined, named, and organized according to the objectives of the study.

Thematic analysis was appropriate because it provided a systematic yet flexible process for identifying patterns of meaning across participants' experiences. Representative quotations were selected to support the interpretation of each theme.

Trustworthiness of the Study

Several strategies were employed to enhance trustworthiness. Credibility was strengthened through member checking, wherein participants were given opportunities to clarify or confirm the accuracy of interpretations. Peer debriefing was also conducted to challenge assumptions and improve analytic decisions. Dependability was supported through an audit trail documenting research procedures, coding decisions, and theme development. Confirmability was enhanced through reflexive journaling, which allowed the researcher to examine personal assumptions and minimize bias. Transferability was addressed by providing thick descriptions of the research context, participants, and findings so that readers may determine the applicability of results to similar settings (Nowell et al., 2017).

Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles were strictly observed throughout the study. Participation was voluntary, and no participant was forced or coerced to join. Pseudonyms were used in transcripts and reports to protect identities. All data were stored securely and were accessible only to the researcher. Participants were informed that they could decline to answer any question or withdraw from the study at any stage. Given that some participants were minors, parental or guardian consent and participant assent were obtained before participation. The study prioritized respect, confidentiality, and the welfare of all participants.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of interview transcripts generated initial codes that were clustered into categories and synthesized into four overarching themes. The coding process followed repeated reading of transcripts, open coding of significant statements, grouping of related meanings, and refinement of themes.

The presentation of findings for objective one focuses on the major challenges experienced by students involved in early labor. Through thematic analysis of the participants' responses, three dominant themes emerged: physical challenges, emotional or psychological challenges, and social challenges. These themes reflect the common difficulties encountered by working students as they balance labor responsibilities with their personal and academic lives. The results indicate that the impact of early labor goes beyond financial necessity and affects students' overall well-being and development.

Table 1 presents the three major themes derived from the data.

Codes	Themes
Fatigue, body pain, illness, heat exposure	Physical Challenges
Stress, pressure, emotional strain, loss of motivation	Emotional/Psychological Challenges
Reduced interaction, isolation, missed bonding	Social Challenges

The findings revealed that students exposed to early labor experience three major challenges: physical challenges, emotional or psychological challenges, and social challenges. Physical challenges were the most frequently reported, as participants described fatigue, body pain, illness, and exhaustion caused by demanding work conditions. Participant *one* shared *that working under the hot sun caused severe tiredness and intense body aches after labor*. Similarly, participant *two* stated *pain in the hands and back because of heavy work and extreme heat*. Participant *five* also explained that too much work under the sun caused dizziness and sometimes fever. Emotional and psychological challenges were also common, with many respondents reporting stress, pressure, discouragement, and loss of motivation. Participant *one* stated that *work affected their emotions, especially when stress became overwhelming*. In the same manner, participant *two* shared that *the work was very tiring and stressful, but they had no choice because they needed extra money*. Participant *nine* further expressed that *the struggle to earn money sometimes caused loss of motivation and feelings of helplessness*. In addition, students experienced social challenges such as reduced interaction with friends, missed family bonding, and feelings of isolation. Participant *six* shared that *they could no longer spend time bonding with friends because they were always working on the farm*. Participant *three* also explained that *they could no longer keep up with family activities because they were busy with work*. Participant *seven* further stated that *work prevented them from joining friends and bonding with family members*. These results show that the effects of early labor extend beyond financial need and influence multiple dimensions of students' lives. Overall, the three themes reflect the complex realities faced by working students.

A closer analysis shows that these three challenges are interconnected rather than separate experiences. Physical exhaustion from labor often reduces students' energy for school tasks and daily functioning. This physical burden can contribute to emotional stress, especially when students feel pressured by financial responsibilities and academic expectations. At the same time, limited time for family and friends may intensify emotional strain by reducing sources of support and belonging. The findings suggest that early labor creates a cycle in which physical hardship, psychological burden, and social disconnection reinforce one another. As a result, students face challenges that affect both their well-being and educational performance.

Early labor significantly impacts students' holistic development, according to the findings. Students deal with physical fatigue, emotional stress, and fewer social opportunities. These challenges suggest that working students may face unequal conditions compared to those who can focus on school. The results suggest that academic outcomes should be considered alongside students' health, mental health, and relationships. Thus, early labor is more than just an economic issue. The findings show families, schools, communities, and policymakers must work together. Schools should offer working students flexible academic support, counseling, and inclusive programs. Encouragement and empathy from families should continue. Government and community agencies can improve financial aid and poverty-reduction programs to reduce early labor. Since students' physical, emotional, and social needs are equally important, academic concerns alone are insufficient. Overall, meaningful interventions must protect student well-being and promote learning.

The results of this study are supported by existing literature on child labor and working students. According to recent studies, students engaged in labor often experience physical exhaustion due to demanding work conditions (International Labour Organization, 2021). Research has shown that working students are more likely to experience stress and mental health challenges due to the dual burden of work and education (UNICEF, 2019). The emotional strain reported by participants in this study aligns with findings that financial responsibility at a young age can lead to increased anxiety and pressure (Basu & Tzannatos, 2020). In terms of social impact, previous studies have indicated that working students often have limited time for social interaction, which can affect their social development (Edmonds, 2018). In the Philippine context, Department of Education learner welfare policies emphasize inclusive support for vulnerable students. Overall, it confirms that early labor creates multidimensional challenges requiring holistic interventions.

The presentation of findings for objective two focuses on the circumstances that led students to start working at an early age. Through thematic analysis of the participants' responses, three dominant themes emerged: economic hardship, educational expenses, and family responsibility. These themes show that students entered labor mainly because of financial necessity and the desire to support their families while continuing their education. The findings further indicate that early labor is shaped by overlapping pressures from home and school environments rather than by personal choice alone.

Table 2 presents the three major themes derived from the data.

Codes	Themes
poverty, lack of income, unpaid bills, many dependents	Economic Hardships
project costs, school fees, allowance, transportation expenses	Educational Expenses
helping parents, supporting siblings, contributing to household needs, reducing parents' burden	Family Responsibility

The findings revealed that students began working at an early age due to three major circumstances: economic hardship, educational expenses, and family responsibility. Economic hardship was the most dominant factor, as many participants explained that their families lacked sufficient income for food, bills, and daily needs. Participant *one* shared that *poverty and the need for school expenses pushed them to work*. Correspondingly, participant *two* stated that *money was needed for rice, food, and other necessities because they had many siblings to support*. Participant *eleven* also explained that *their parents' earnings were only enough for food, leaving no money for school-related expenses*. Educational expenses also emerged as a strong reason for entering work. Participant *six* shared that *when school projects were required, there was often no money left because family income had already been used to pay debts*. In the same way, participant *nine* stated that *they sometimes could not buy project materials because available money had to be used for more urgent needs*. Family responsibility was another important circumstance, as students wanted to help their parents and reduce household burdens. Participant *three* explained that *they worked to help their family*. Participant *four* also shared that they started working so they could contribute to family needs. These findings show that students entered labor not because of preference but because of financial necessity and family obligations. The themes reflect the difficult realities that pushed students into work at an early age.

A closer analysis shows that these circumstances are interconnected rather than inaccessible factors. Economic hardship created the immediate need for income, especially when families struggled to provide food and pay household expenses. At the same time, educational expenses such as projects, transportation, and school contributions increased financial pressure. Instead of serving only as a pathway out of poverty, schooling also became a source of additional cost for low-income families. Family responsibility further intensified the situation, as many students felt obliged to help their parents and support younger siblings. These findings suggest that students' entry into work was shaped by overlapping pressures from home and school environments. As a result, early labor became a coping strategy for survival rather than a voluntary decision.

Based on the conclusions, it can be concluded that students started working at an early age primarily because of necessity rather than personal choice. Poverty and limited family income forced many learners to seek ways

of contributing financially. The added burden of school-related expenses further pushed students into labor, while family responsibility encouraged them to assume adult-like roles at an early age. These circumstances indicate that early labor is deeply rooted in structural inequalities affecting households and access to education. Therefore, student labor should be understood as a response to economic and social disadvantage rather than as an individual preference.

The findings highlight the need for stronger support systems for financially vulnerable students and families. Schools should reduce hidden educational costs through subsidies for projects, transportation, and school materials. Families may benefit from livelihood assistance programs that lessen dependence on student income. Government and community agencies should strengthen poverty-reduction initiatives and direct educational support for disadvantaged learners. Addressing early labor requires more than discouraging students from working; it requires removing the conditions that make work necessary. Overall, coordinated educational and economic interventions are essential to prevent students from entering labor too early.

The findings are consistent with studies showing that child and student labor is strongly associated with poverty, household financial instability, and barriers to education. The International Labour Organization (ILO) and UNICEF have reported that children often enter work when family income is insufficient to meet basic needs or sustain schooling. Recent research also suggests that indirect school costs such as supplies, transportation, and project fees can contribute to dropout risk and labor participation. In the Philippine context, Department of Education learner support initiatives emphasize access and retention for vulnerable students. The sources confirm that early labor is linked to economic hardship and unequal educational opportunities.

The presentation of findings for objective three focuses on how students manage balancing their work responsibilities with their studies and academic performance. Through thematic analysis of the participants' responses, three dominant themes emerged: time management strategies, adaptive academic coping, and support systems. These themes show that students sustain their education through personal discipline, practical coping strategies, and assistance from people around them. The findings further indicate that balancing work and studies is not achieved through effort alone but through continuous adjustment and available support.

Table 3 presents the three major themes derived from the data.

Codes	Themes
weekend work schedule, weekday schooling, prioritizing, and planned academic time	time management strategies
use of AI tools, asking for help from siblings or classmates, adjusting study methods	adaptive academic coping
parental encouragement, sibling assistance, peer support, teacher guidance	support systems

The findings revealed that students manage balancing work and studies through three major themes: time management strategies, adaptive academic coping, and support systems. Time management strategies were the most common, as many participants arranged their schedules by prioritizing school during weekdays and working during weekends. Participant *one* shared that *they only worked on Saturdays and Sundays so their schooling would not be affected, and they used free days without classes to earn money*. Likewise, participant *three* explained that *Monday to Friday was for school, Saturday was for sideline work, and Sunday was reserved for church activities*. Participant *ten* also stated that *weekdays were focused on schooling, while weekends were used for farm work in the province*. Adaptive academic coping also emerged as an important strategy when students were already tired from work. Participant *six* shared that *they used AI tools for homework because they were too exhausted to think clearly after labor*. Participant *eight* explained that *they asked for help from an older sibling when body pain prevented them from completing assignments*. Support systems were another major theme, as family members, classmates, and teachers helped students continue their education. Participant *two* stated that *their family motivated them to finish school so they would not experience the same hardships as previous generations*. Participant *eleven* also shared that *teachers helped them complete their grades and stay in school*. These findings show that students remain in school through discipline,

adaptation, and support from others. Overall, the themes reflect the resilience of working students in managing dual responsibilities.

A closer analysis shows that these themes are interconnected rather than independent strategies. Time management allows students to create space for both work and study, but scheduling alone does not remove the challenges of fatigue and academic pressure. Because students often become physically and mentally exhausted after work, they develop adaptive coping strategies such as using technology tools or asking for assistance with school tasks. This indicates that coping mechanisms arise in response to the limitations created by labor demands. At the same time, support systems from family, peers, and teachers strengthen students' ability to persist despite difficulties. Emotional encouragement from parents, practical help from siblings, and academic guidance from teachers all reduce the burden of balancing two major responsibilities. The findings suggest that student success is sustained through the combined effect of self-management, adaptability, and social support. As a result, balancing work and education becomes possible, although still challenging.

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that students balance work and studies through resilience, continuous adjustment, and the support of others. Their ability to remain in school while working demonstrates determination and responsibility. However, the need to rely on coping strategies and external help also suggests that the burden of dual responsibilities is significant. Working students succeed not through effort alone, but through systems of support that help them overcome fatigue, time limitations, and academic pressure. These results indicate that academic performance should be understood within the broader realities of students' economic and social circumstances. Therefore, balancing work and education is both a personal and structural challenge.

The findings highlight the need for schools and communities to strengthen support for working students. Schools should provide flexible deadlines, academic consultations, and learner-friendly policies for students with work responsibilities. Families should continue offering motivation, guidance, and emotional encouragement. Peer mentoring and teacher support systems may also help students sustain academic performance. Government and community programs that reduce household poverty can lessen the need for students to divide their time between labor and schooling. Addressing the needs of working students requires support not only for academic success but also for their overall well-being. Overall, coordinated interventions are essential to help students balance education and employment.

The findings are consistent with studies showing that working students often rely on time management, adaptive coping, and support networks to remain in school. Recent research suggests that learners who combine work and education commonly use schedule adjustments to reduce academic disruption. Studies also indicate that family encouragement, peer assistance, and positive teacher relationships improve persistence and retention among financially challenged students. These patterns closely align with the responses of the participants in this study. In the Philippine context, the Department of Education learner welfare initiatives emphasize support for vulnerable students, while the Commission on Higher Education promotes student assistance and development programs. Overall, the literature confirms that working students succeed through resilience, adaptation, and strong social support.

The presentation of findings for objective four focuses on the recommendations of students on how to better support learners involved in early labor. Through thematic analysis of the participants' responses, three dominant themes emerged: family support systems, school assistance, and government or community intervention. These themes show that students view early labor as a shared social issue that requires support from families, schools, and public institutions. The findings further indicate that meaningful solutions must address both the immediate needs of working students and the broader conditions of poverty that lead to early labor.

Table 4 presents the three major themes derived from the data.

Codes	Themes
emotional support, encouragement, understanding, and shared responsibility	family support systems

teacher consideration, flexible deadlines, reduced fees, project support	school assistance
financial aid, livelihood programs, scholarships, child protection measures	government or community intervention

The findings revealed that participants offered recommendations centered on three major themes: family support systems, school assistance, and government or community intervention. Family support systems were the most frequently emphasized, as many respondents believed that encouragement, understanding, and shared responsibility at home make life easier for working students. Participant *one* shared that *support from parents can help students facing difficulties*. Also, participant *eleven* emphasized the *importance of support and understanding because of the many challenges in life*. Participant *seven* also explained that *family members supported their work and that they shared their earnings with parents, siblings, and relatives*. School assistance was another major theme, particularly the need for compassionate and flexible teachers. Participant *three* stated that *teachers should understand if assignments cannot be submitted immediately*. In the same way, participant *five* explained that *teachers who understand students' busy situations can help working learners*. Participant *one* further recommended *reducing school payments so working students would not struggle financially*. Government or community intervention also emerged as an important theme. Participant *six* suggested that *the government should provide money for students' projects*. Participant *eleven* recommended *creating better livelihood opportunities and direct school allowances for students who work early*. These findings show that students believe meaningful support must come from families, schools, and public institutions. The themes reflect practical solutions based on the lived experiences of working students.

A closer analysis shows that these recommendations address both the immediate and long-term needs of students involved in early labor. Family support systems respond to students' emotional and motivational needs by providing encouragement and a sense of shared responsibility. This suggests that strong family relationships can reduce the stress associated with balancing work and studies. School assistance focuses on reducing academic burdens through teacher understanding, flexible responses, and lower educational costs. These recommendations indicate that schools can either ease or intensify the struggles of working students depending on how they respond to learner realities. Government and community intervention addresses the structural causes of early labor, particularly poverty and limited opportunities. Financial aid, scholarships, livelihood programs, and project subsidies are viewed as long-term solutions that may prevent students from needing to work too early. The findings suggest that effective support must combine personal care, institutional flexibility, and socio-economic assistance.

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that students view early labor as a shared social issue rather than an individual problem. They recognize that personal determination alone is not enough to overcome the challenges of working while studying. Instead, family encouragement, responsive schools, and public support systems are necessary for student success. The emphasis on school and government assistance also suggests that early labor is closely tied to poverty and unequal access to educational resources. These results imply that preventing or reducing early labor requires both immediate support for affected students and broader reforms that improve family welfare. Therefore, meaningful interventions must address emotional, academic, and economic dimensions at the same time.

The findings highlight the need for coordinated action among families, schools, communities, and policymakers. Families should continue offering emotional support, guidance, and open communication to students facing work-related pressures. Schools should adopt learner-friendly practices such as flexible deadlines, compassionate attendance policies, and financial assistance for projects or fees. Teachers may also benefit from training on how to support students experiencing economic hardship. Government and local agencies should strengthen scholarships, livelihood opportunities, and anti-poverty programs for vulnerable households. The Department of Education and Commission on Higher Education may further expand student welfare and retention initiatives for disadvantaged learners. Overall, reducing early labor requires shared responsibility and sustained support across multiple sectors.

The findings are consistent with studies showing that child and student labor is best addressed through multi-level support systems. Research suggests that family encouragement and parental involvement improve

academic persistence among financially challenged learners. Studies also show that teacher empathy, flexible school practices, and reduced educational costs help retain vulnerable students in school. These patterns align with participants' recommendations for family support and school assistance. International evidence further indicates that poverty-reduction programs, cash assistance, and livelihood opportunities can reduce child labor and improve school participation. In the Philippine context, Department of Education learner welfare policies and Commission on Higher Education student assistance programs support inclusive access and retention. Overall, the literature confirms that coordinated family, school, and community interventions are essential in addressing early labor among students.

CONCLUSIONS

The study concludes that students involved in early labor face multidimensional challenges that affect their physical health, emotional well-being, social relationships, and academic experiences. Many students begin working because of poverty, educational expenses, and family responsibilities rather than personal choice. Despite these difficulties, they continue their studies through time management, adaptive coping strategies, and support from families, teachers, and peers. Their experiences show resilience and determination but also reveal unequal conditions that may hinder their full development and academic success. Overall, early labor is not only an economic issue but also an educational and social concern that requires holistic intervention.

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