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Student Employment in The Era of The Digitally Driven Gig Economy: The Role of Self-Efficacy

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Abstract: *The increasing participation of university students in part-time employment reflects the growing relevance of flexible work arrangements. However, balancing academic and employment responsibilities presents challenges that require effective personal management and psychological resources. This study aims to identify the challenges experienced by student workers, explore their understanding of self-efficacy, and examine its role in managing dual responsibilities. A qualitative approach with a descriptive-analytical design was employed through a case study at Hero Creative. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, observation, and documentation involving eight female university students selected through purposive sampling. The findings reveal that the main challenges include time management, physical fatigue, academic assignments, examinations, and schedule conflicts. Self-efficacy was demonstrated through prioritization, problem solving, pressure management, and adaptability. Previous successful experiences, work experience, skill development, supportive coworkers, flexible working arrangements, and academic support also strengthened participants' perceived capabilities. These findings indicate that self-efficacy serves as an internal resource in managing competing academic and employment demands, supported by organizational and academic environments that facilitate adaptation.*

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Introduction

The transition from university to employment has increasingly become intertwined with students' participation in work during their studies. Students may engage in part-time employment to obtain additional income, gain practical experience, develop professional skills, and prepare for future careers. This phenomenon is particularly relevant in the context of flexible employment arrangements and the digitally driven gig economy, in which work can be organized around changing schedules, project-based assignments, and individual availability.

Student employment, however, creates a dual-role situation in which students are required to fulfill academic responsibilities while simultaneously meeting expectations associated with employment. Managing these two roles may generate challenges related to time allocation, physical fatigue, academic workload, schedule conflicts, and the need to adapt to changing work demands. In this context, the ability to cope with multiple roles is related not only to effective time management but also to individuals' beliefs in their capabilities. Utami and Adhiatma (2020) found that multiple-role conflict had a significant negative effect on self-efficacy, whereas social support had a significant positive effect on self-efficacy. These findings indicate that increasing conflict between multiple roles may weaken individuals' beliefs in their capabilities, while social support may strengthen such beliefs. This perspective is particularly relevant to student workers because they must simultaneously manage academic and employment responsibilities. Therefore, self-efficacy can be understood as an important psychological resource that supports students in managing competing demands, maintaining persistence, and adapting to the challenges associated with their dual roles.

Self-efficacy is also relevant to how individuals perform and respond to demands within the workplace. Arivani et al. (2023) found that self-efficacy had a significant effect on organizational citizenship behavior and employee performance. This finding suggests that individuals' beliefs in their capabilities may contribute not only to their willingness to engage in work-related responsibilities but also to their ability to perform effectively in an organizational context. For student workers, such a perspective is particularly relevant because they must apply their capabilities while managing both academic and employment responsibilities. Therefore, self-efficacy may function as an important personal resource that supports students in maintaining their work responsibilities while adapting to the demands of their academic roles.

Within this context, individual psychological resources become important. One of the concepts relevant to understanding how students respond to competing demands is self-efficacy. Bandura (1997) defines self-efficacy as an individual's belief in their capability to organize and execute actions required to manage prospective situations. Self-efficacy influences how individuals approach difficult tasks, how much effort they invest, how persistent they remain when facing obstacles, and how they respond to pressure.

For student workers, self-efficacy may influence how they perceive and respond to academic and employment demands. Students with strong beliefs in their capabilities may be more willing to confront challenges, organize priorities, seek solutions, and persist in completing responsibilities. However, self-efficacy does not operate independently from the surrounding environment. Flexible work arrangements, supportive coworkers, and academic flexibility may provide contextual conditions that allow students to apply their perceived capabilities effectively.

The phenomenon is particularly visible at Hero Creative, a photography service company that employs university students through a flexible part-time system. Student workers are able to communicate their availability and adjust work schedules according to their academic activities. This arrangement provides an appropriate context for examining how students manage dual responsibilities and how self-efficacy operates within flexible employment.

The existing discussion on student employment has often emphasized academic performance, work-life conflict, and employment outcomes. Less attention has been given to how student workers themselves interpret self-efficacy as an internal resource while navigating flexible work arrangements in the creative-service sector. Therefore, this study focuses on the role of self-efficacy among student workers at Hero Creative.

This study aims to: (1) identify the challenges experienced by student workers in managing academic and work responsibilities; (2) examine how student workers understand self-efficacy; and (3)

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analyze how self-efficacy contributes to students' ability to manage dual academic and employment demands.

Literature Review

Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief regarding their ability to organize and execute actions necessary to achieve particular outcomes (Bandura, 1997). It is not simply a general feeling of confidence but a judgment concerning one's capability to perform specific tasks or deal with particular circumstances. According to Bandura (1997), self-efficacy develops through four major sources: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and physiological and affective states. Successful experiences are particularly important because previous achievements can strengthen an individual's belief that similar challenges can be managed in the future. Self-efficacy also influences behavioral processes. Individuals with stronger self-efficacy tend to demonstrate greater effort, persistence, and resilience when facing difficulties. In an employment context, these characteristics may support employees when they encounter unfamiliar tasks, changing demands, or workplace pressure.

Student Employment and Dual Roles

Student employment refers to participation in paid work while continuing formal education. Working while studying can provide practical experience and opportunities for skill development. However, students must allocate limited time and energy between academic and employment responsibilities. The dual-role condition can produce role conflict when academic and employment schedules overlap. Time pressure may become particularly visible during examinations, periods of intensive coursework, or high-demand work periods. Therefore, the ability to establish priorities and adjust schedules becomes important for student workers.

Flexible Work and the Gig Economy

The gig economy is associated with flexible, temporary, project-based, or task-oriented work arrangements. Flexibility allows workers to participate in employment without necessarily following conventional fixed schedules. For students, this flexibility can create opportunities to integrate employment with academic activities. However, flexibility does not automatically eliminate work-related challenges. Workers remain responsible for managing their own availability, workload, and performance. Consequently, personal capabilities and organizational support remain relevant in determining how workers experience flexible employment.

Self-Efficacy in Managing Academic and Work Demands

Self-efficacy may serve as an internal mechanism that connects external demands with individual responses. When students face overlapping academic and work responsibilities, self-efficacy may influence their willingness to identify solutions, regulate effort, maintain motivation, and adapt to changing circumstances. In this study, self-efficacy is examined not only as an individual belief but also through its practical manifestations in student workers' daily experiences, including time management, problem solving, stress management, adaptability, and prioritization.

Research Method

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive-analytical design. The research focused on understanding the experiences and interpretations of university students who work part-time while completing their academic responsibilities. A case study was conducted at Hero Creative, a photography service company that employs university students through a flexible part-time work arrangement.

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Participants

Participants were selected using purposive sampling. The criteria included active university students who worked as part-time employees at Hero Creative and had sufficient experience in performing dual roles as students and workers. The study involved eight female student workers from different academic programs, semesters, work divisions, and levels of work experience.

Table 1. Profile of Research Participants

Informant	Study Program	Semester	GPA	Work Experience	Division
N1	Guidance and Counseling	8	3.75	4 years	Photographer
N2	Computer Systems	8	3.90	3 years	Stylish
N3	Management	6	3.90	3 years	Photographer
N4	Urban and Regional Planning	4	3.78	2 years	Administration
N5	Management	4	4.00	9 months	Administration
N6	Management	4	3.95	9 months	Administration
N7	English Literature	4	3.60	9 months	Back-up
N8	Law	4	3.98	6 months	Stylish

The participants represented different work divisions and levels of experience, allowing the study to capture diverse experiences of student employment within the same organizational context.

Data Collection

Data were collected through three techniques: in-depth semi-structured interviews, observation, and documentation. The interviews focused on participants' experiences in managing academic and work demands, their understanding of self-efficacy, challenges encountered in performing dual roles, strategies for dealing with difficulties, and factors that strengthened their belief in their capabilities. Observation was conducted to complement interview findings by examining participants' behavior and responses during the research process. Documentation was used as supporting evidence.

Data Analysis

Data analysis followed the qualitative analysis process consisting of data collection, data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification (Miles et al., 2014). Interview data were organized according to emerging themes, including academic-work challenges, time management, physical fatigue, self-efficacy, problem solving, stress management, adaptability, and sources of self-efficacy.

Data Trustworthiness

Data credibility was established through source triangulation, technique triangulation, and member checking. Source triangulation involved comparing information obtained from eight participants with different academic and employment backgrounds and confirming relevant information with Hero Creative management. Technique triangulation compared information obtained through interviews, observation, and documentation. Member checking was conducted by confirming interview interpretations with participants. The participants indicated that the transcription and interpretation represented their experiences, with no significant changes required.

Results And Discussion

Flexible Employment as a Context for Student Workers

The findings indicate that flexibility is an important characteristic of student employment at Hero Creative. Student workers can communicate their availability and adjust work schedules according to academic responsibilities. Participants generally reported that academic responsibilities remained an important priority. When academic activities unexpectedly conflicted with work schedules, participants used several strategies, including requesting schedule adjustments, exchanging shifts, asking for permission, or determining which responsibility was most urgent.

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This flexibility provides an organizational context in which students can maintain both roles. Management confirmation also indicated that student workers are given flexibility in determining work schedules based on their availability, provided that work responsibilities remain fulfilled. The finding demonstrates that flexible work arrangements can reduce direct schedule conflicts between academic and employment activities. Nevertheless, flexibility requires students to actively manage their own time and responsibilities.

Challenges Experienced by Student Workers

The primary challenges identified in the study were time management and physical fatigue. Participants also described academic assignments, examinations, unexpected academic activities, and work-intensive periods as situations that increased the difficulty of maintaining both roles. Rather than describing severe psychological pressure as the dominant challenge, participants more frequently emphasized physical exhaustion and the need to allocate time effectively. High-season work periods and examination periods were particularly demanding because both require greater concentration and energy.

Table 2. Main Challenges and Adaptive Responses

Challenge	Participant Experience	Adaptive Response
Time management	Overlapping academic and work schedules	Schedule planning and priority setting
Academic assignments	Increased workload during certain periods	Completing tasks gradually and managing deadlines
Examinations	Increased academic concentration requirements	Adjusting work availability
Physical fatigue	Fatigue after intensive work activities	Managing workload and rest
Unexpected academic activities	Sudden schedule changes	Shift exchange, permission, or schedule adjustment
High-season work	Increased work intensity	Prioritizing responsibilities and adapting schedules

These findings are consistent with previous research indicating that students who work part-time may experience time conflicts and fatigue due to simultaneous academic and employment responsibilities. However, the Hero Creative case demonstrates that organizational flexibility may provide an important condition for managing these challenges.

Student Workers' Understanding of Self-Efficacy

Participants generally understood self-efficacy as a belief in their ability to complete responsibilities and overcome challenges. This belief was expressed through their willingness to continue performing academic and work responsibilities even when demands increased. Several participants expressed a strong level of belief in their abilities. Some described their self-efficacy as approximately 90 percent, while others connected their confidence to years of work experience and opportunities to improve their skills.

The findings indicate that self-efficacy was not understood merely as an abstract psychological concept. Instead, participants associated it with concrete experiences, including successfully completing previous responsibilities, developing skills, managing multiple activities, and overcoming difficulties. One important finding is that participants' beliefs were strengthened by previous successful experiences. Students who had repeatedly managed academic and work responsibilities developed stronger expectations that they could manage similar demands in the future. This finding is consistent with Bandura's (1997) proposition that mastery experiences represent a major source of self-efficacy.

Self-Efficacy and Problem Solving

Self-efficacy was reflected in participants' approaches to solving problems caused by competing academic and work demands. When schedule conflicts occurred, participants did not simply abandon

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one responsibility. Instead, they considered available alternatives, such as finding replacement workers, requesting permission, adjusting schedules, or deciding which responsibility required immediate attention.

The ability to identify alternatives suggests that self-efficacy operates through behavioral responses. Believing that a problem can be managed encourages individuals to search for possible solutions rather than immediately perceiving the situation as impossible. Thus, self-efficacy in the Hero Creative context is reflected through practical problem-solving behavior.

Self-Efficacy in Managing Pressure

Participants reported that self-efficacy helped them remain motivated when facing academic and work pressure. Their belief in their ability to complete responsibilities contributed to their willingness to continue working toward task completion. Observation findings also supported interview data. Participants generally demonstrated calm and constructive responses when discussing challenges and were able to explain strategies they used to deal with difficulties.

However, the findings should not be interpreted as indicating that self-efficacy eliminates fatigue or pressure. Participants still experienced physical fatigue and increased workload during demanding periods. Rather, self-efficacy appeared to support their ability to respond to those conditions.

Self-Efficacy and Adaptability

Adaptability was another important manifestation of self-efficacy. Participants adjusted their schedules and approaches according to changing academic and employment demands. For example, when academic activities occurred unexpectedly, participants considered whether they could arrive late at work, request permission, exchange shifts, or adjust academic participation. Such responses demonstrate an effort to maintain responsibility toward both roles. The findings therefore indicate that self-efficacy is closely associated with students' ability to adapt their behavior to changing circumstances.

Sources That Strengthen Self-Efficacy

The study identified several factors that strengthened participants' self-efficacy:

1. **Successful experiences** : completing previous academic and work responsibilities strengthened belief in their abilities.
2. **Previous work experience** : longer experience provided familiarity with work demands and increased perceived capability.
3. **Skill development** : opportunities to improve photography, administrative, and other professional skills strengthened students' belief in their capabilities.
4. **Supportive coworkers** : assistance from colleagues reduced difficulties in managing work responsibilities.
5. **Flexible work arrangements** : schedule flexibility enabled students to coordinate employment with academic activities.
6. **Academic support** : flexible academic arrangements helped students respond to unexpected schedule conflicts.
7. **Social and environmental support** : supportive environments helped students maintain motivation and responsibility.

These findings indicate that self-efficacy is strengthened not only through individual achievement but also through interactions with the surrounding environment.

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Self-Efficacy as an Internal Mechanism

Based on the findings, a conceptual relationship can be identified:

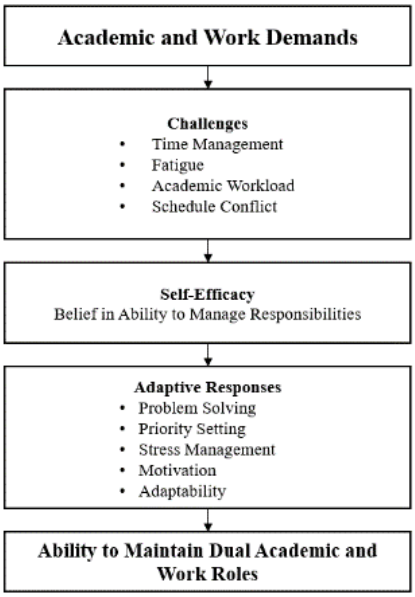


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of Self-Efficacy among Student Workers

The findings suggest that self-efficacy functions as an internal mechanism that helps students respond to competing demands. However, self-efficacy does not operate independently. Flexible work arrangements and supportive academic and organizational environments provide contextual conditions that enable students to apply their capabilities.

This relationship is consistent with Bandura's (1997) view that self-efficacy influences effort, persistence, and responses to difficulties. The present study extends this perspective to the experience of student workers in a flexible creative-service environment.

Implications

Theoretical Implications

The findings contribute to the discussion of self-efficacy by demonstrating how the concept can be understood in the context of student employment within flexible work arrangements. Self-efficacy appears not only as an individual belief but also as a resource manifested through problem solving, time management, prioritization, motivation, and adaptability. The findings also indicate the importance of considering contextual factors when examining self-efficacy among student workers. Flexible employment systems and supportive environments may interact with individual capabilities in helping students manage dual roles.

Practical Implications

For organizations employing university students, flexible scheduling may help reduce direct conflicts between academic and employment responsibilities. Clear communication regarding availability, shift exchange procedures, and academic commitments may further support student workers.

For student workers, developing time-management skills, establishing priorities, reflecting on previous successful experiences, and continuously improving work-related skills may strengthen their perceived capability to manage dual responsibilities.

For universities, flexible academic arrangements may provide additional support for students who combine education with employment.

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Limitations And Future Research

This study has several limitations. First, the research was conducted at a single organization, Hero Creative, which limits the transferability of the findings to other organizational and industry contexts.

Second, the study focuses specifically on self-efficacy as an internal capability. Other psychological and organizational factors may also influence students' experiences of part-time employment.

Future research could examine student workers across different industries, organizational structures, and employment arrangements. Comparative studies involving different levels of work intensity, academic programs, or demographic characteristics could provide broader understanding of how self-efficacy operates in student employment.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that student workers at Hero Creative experience the dual demands of academic study and employment primarily through challenges involving time management, physical fatigue, academic workload, examinations, and schedule conflicts. Self-efficacy plays an important role in helping students respond to these demands. Participants understood self-efficacy as a belief in their ability to complete responsibilities and demonstrated this belief through problem solving, prioritization, stress management, motivation, and adaptability.

The development of self-efficacy was associated with successful experiences, previous work experience, opportunities for skill development, supportive coworkers, and flexible work arrangements. At the same time, organizational and academic support provided important contextual conditions for maintaining the balance between academic and employment responsibilities. Therefore, the role of self-efficacy in student employment can be understood as an internal mechanism that supports adaptive responses to dual-role demands, rather than as an isolated individual characteristic. The findings provide insight into how flexible employment arrangements may be experienced by university students within the contemporary gig economy.

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