

**UNIVERSITY OF EL SALVADOR  
SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES  
FOREIGN LANGUAGES DEPARTMENT**



**How paid employment influences the academic performance of students at the Foreign Languages Department of the School of Arts and Sciences at the University of El Salvador and how it differs from their non-working peers.**

**PRESENTED BY:**

José Iván Doñán Alas

ID N° DA03012

Jennifer Elizabeth García Larios

ID N° GL03002

Zoryxa Ana María Sánchez Ruiz

ID N° SR02008

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**ADVISOR:**

M.A. Manuel Alexander Landaverde

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**AUTORIDADES DE LA UNIVERSIDAD DE EL SALVADOR**

ING. RUFINO ANTONIO QUEZADA SANCHEZ

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**JEFE DE DEPARTAMENTO**

M.A RICARDO GARAY SALINAS

**COORDINADOR GENERAL DE LOS PROCESOS DE GRADO**

M.A MANUEL ALEXANDER LANDAVERDE

**DOCENTE DIRECTOR**

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## I. INTRODUCTION

An essay is commonly known as a composition in which the author provides a personal opinion about different situations. Even though the definition of an essay is vague, an essay itself can be divided in several types. One of them is called *Opinion Essay*. An opinion essay is a formal essay which presents an author's point of view on a particular subject supported by reasons and examples. This research paper is an attempt to summarize how paid employment influences the academic performance of students at the Foreign Languages Department of the School of Arts and Sciences at the University of El Salvador and how it differs from their non-working peers.

The information to be included is the result of both a literature review from previous perspectives on the topic, through the comparison and contrast with data from their authors who have carried out similar investigation projects in the same area; as well as a brief interpretation of the challenges faced by the students after they have decided to start working.

The report includes a review of the literature on the topic of working students and the impact in their academic performance, as a synthesis of those previous perspectives, and an essay on the issue, to express the stand of the research team.

The information gathered alongside the data from previous authors was used to produce a conclusion on how the phenomenon occurs in the social context of our local reality, as well as a series of recommendations for dealing with this issue in the future.

## **II. OBJECTIVES**

### **GENERAL OBJECTIVE:**

- To inform how paid employment influences the academic performance of higher education students, aimed at the Foreign Languages Department of the School of Arts and Sciences at the University of El Salvador, and how it differs from their non-working peers.

### **SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES:**

- To review the literature in the field of working students and the impact in their academic performance.
- To synthesize the data from previous perspectives on the topic, in order to have a summarized yet solid theoretical basis of the phenomenon.
- To compose an essay based on the experiences and opinions of term-time working students at the Foreign Languages Department, concerning the disadvantages of working while studying.



### **III. JUSTIFICATION**

The purpose of this essay is to find out and to inform the readers about the different factors that directly or indirectly drive some students to initiate themselves in a working environment before finishing their higher education. Also, it emphasizes the advantages and disadvantages of carrying out two activities simultaneously. And to summarize, it is meant to compare academic performance of students who are dedicated to be full time students with those who are part-time students only.

This research represents an innovative step towards the investigative activity in the Foreign Languages Department, due to the lack of previous studies on this topic in our aforementioned department and therefore, the information within this essay aims to increase knowledge, help professors, and let the readers know about the different consequences of working and studying at the same time and how to handle and even improve the academic performance of these students in the near future.

## **IV. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **a. INTRODUCTION**

This document contains the literature review on the topic of term-time employment. The whole content is divided in seven sections. The first section is the glossary of terms to be used throughout the document. The second one lists the reasons why students decide to start laboring. The third section deals with the types of working students according to the activity they prioritize. The fourth section explains the disadvantages related to studying while working, especially focused on full-time working students. The fifth section in this review presents the general advantages of term-time employment. The sixth section deals with the social factors related to the whole phenomenon of term-time employment. Finally, the seventh section explains the intrinsic factors that influence the academic performance of working students.

## **b. GLOSSARY OF TERMS**

1. **Nontraditional students:** For this type of students, the primary responsibility is to work, but additionally they take courses at the University or College. These students prioritize their job over their studies, and usually have serious family commitments.
2. **Traditional students:** These are all the learners that are either fully dedicated to their studies without performing any kind of activity that provides an income, or students who start working at a specific moment in their lives, while actively involved in their majors. These individuals consider themselves students who have a job.
3. **Paid Employment:** This term makes reference to any kind of activity in which the performer receives an income as a payment.
4. **Locus of control:** Basically, this is the unique perception every human being has about their personality in which the attitude towards a specific activity they engage in is extremely important to determine the success or failure at it.
5. **Self efficacy:** This is the knowledge every person has about their own abilities and capacity to complete a duty and how to improve it.
6. **Full-time job:** It is the type of job in which the shift consists of 8 hours per day and 40 hours during the week.
7. **Part-time job:** It is the type of job in which the employee works from 4 to 6 hours per day and in a weekly basis that ranges between 20 to 30 hours.

8. **GPA:** Acronym that stands for Grades Point Average, which is achieved through every academic term by taking the evaluations required in each subject.
9. **Well-off families:** This is a term used for families with a stable economic status to support their children higher education.
10. **Academic Performance:** This refers to the students' academic outcome, which can be measured through their GPA and CPA.
11. **Term time employment:** It is the act of working either part-time or full-time during higher education.

**c. WHY DO THEY WORK?**

As a phenomenon becoming more and more evident each passing year, working students have caught the attention of researchers all around the world for decades. One of the most intriguing points from their investigations deals with the reasons behind this situation. Previous research works suggest that the main reasons why a person decides to step into the world of work while being engaged in academic activity are insufficient monetary income, parental-related issues, and the necessity to gain professional job experience.

Predictably, insufficient income heads the list of reasons as the main circumstance that pushes a student to work. According to King (2006), ideally, students should only have to work to cover the expenses of items they need and that can't be afforded by their parents.

Nevertheless, in our real world, many of them have much more serious burdens on their backs, since they have to pay high medical bills, or don't have a choice but to help their parents with their low monthly income. On top of that, there are cases in which a traditional student from a family of lower income may decide to start working because at home only their mother, father or another relative works and the salary is not enough to cover the expenses of consumer goods (Motte & Schwartz, 2009). In other words, the decision of working is triggered by the absence of one of the students' progenitors, being the father, in the worst case scenario, who is by tradition in our country the one who economically supports the family. Furthermore, there is a considerable amount of students who work in order to afford their university instruction. Most students who work more than twenty-five hours a week claim that they would not be able to pay for their studies at college if they did not have a job (King, 2002). It is worth mentioning that these tuition fees keep on rising each year, pushing even more students to work (Motte and Schwartz, 2009). Having mentioned that, it also seems predictable that the amount of students who have to pay for their studies will increase due to the worsening economic crisis and the rise of the cost of basic products.

A second reason for working while studying has to do with parental issues. One of these is the pressure students have from their parents, who urge them into working. King (2006) states that more than a sixty percent of working students claim that their parents expect them to engage in employment. Interestingly, however, he also adds that family income does not significantly influence this decision, from which it is reasonable to conclude that working is not only regarded as a necessity, but also as a family tradition in society. On the other hand, DeSimone (2008) claims that paternal schooling has a negative impact on labour market, since parents with more

financial capabilities are more likely to provide their children with the necessary monetary resources so that they can spend more time studying rather than working, placing education as a priority and disregarding employment; which would mean, in turn, that parents from less well-off backgrounds aren't able to afford doing the same thing due to their limited capital. Interestingly, Humphrey (2006) noted that students who still live with their parents are much more likely to have a term-time job than those who have succeeded in leaving the parental home. Also, he discovered that the aforementioned parent-dependent students are more likely to have attended public schools prior to the university, hinting that their parents could not afford private education; thus, evidencing their humble background. All this suggests that parents strongly influence their children's decision to engage –or not– into paid employment.

The necessity to gain experience, rather than earning money, finds its way as the third reason for the existence of working students in modern society. Being by nature a non-material desire, experience drifts apart from the previous, more tangible reasons for working, becoming a matter of personal fulfillment. Indeed, King (2002) stated that higher education and subsequent related employment should not only be aimed at achieving a higher earning potential, but it should also be an enriching life experience. Thus, academic activity, combined with employment can lead to personal gratification through the feeling of being able to gain the experience required to perform the tasks for which one is studying. This, however, in realistic terms, is rarely the case for students from lower-income families, who are more likely to work in order to make a living, which implies that their main criteria for choosing a job is not the relationship it might have to their studies, but the income they might earn. King (2006) states that students from well-off backgrounds typically claim that their primary reason for working is not necessarily to pay for

tuition, fees, or family expenses, but to earn some extra money and to gain professional experience.

Although gaining experience is an option aimed to personal fulfilment for some, it is an absolutely necessary stage for most people, –university students included– as they intend to find a job. The reason behind this lies in the labour market, which grows more and more demanding every day, and requires a minimum degree of experience from applicants. Many people, regardless whether they are still in higher education or not, lose very attractive job opportunities due to inexperience in their respective work fields. This leads to professional and personal frustration and sometimes despair, especially when money is needed with urgency. Thus, in order to avoid these inconvenient situations, students look for employment in order to start a relationship between their major and their career, as an attempt to make their résumés more attractive to employees, and consequently to increase the chances of getting a job in the future.

As mentioned before, there are different reasons why a student decides to start working while studying. They do it because of economical issues within their family, related to home expenses and the price of higher education; parental pressure, either of traditional or material nature. They also do it to ensure a better professional life by gaining the necessary experience to increase the likelihood to be employed in the future, or as means of personal growth and fulfillment, usually for students from higher-income families.

#### **d. TYPES OF STUDENTS**

A worth-mentioning second point in this whole phenomenon is the type of students who engage in paid employment. According to Orszag and Whitmore (2001), these college and university students can be classified in two different categories, depending on the activity they prioritize: The ones who primarily identify themselves as students who work, and those who identify themselves as workers who take some courses at college. Choy (2002), also based on their primary focus, uses a similar taxonomy, basically set by the same parameters, calling these two groups of students by different names: the first as traditional students, and the latter as non-traditional students.

The first group, students who work, also known as traditional students, are those who first enroll at college or university and then, pushed by the reasons mentioned in the previous section (See “Why do they work?”) look for a job. Traditional students consider their studies as primary, and their jobs as secondary. Although there are clear exceptions, their reasons for working are usually considered less serious, immediate, and urgent than those from their non-traditional peers. Most of the time these needs involve urgent family commitment, but they also range from a need for personal growth to a whim for some extra money to spare. In terms of quantity, these students constitute at least two thirds of the average college working population (Orszag and Whitmore, 2001). They also were even more common in the past, since they represented the vast majority of college-entering people. Interestingly, King (2006) points out that they are considered a much more diverse group than non-traditional students in terms of age and background.



The ones in the second group, non-traditional students, are those who consider themselves employees who happen to take courses at college or the university. Also known as worker students, they work to support themselves and their families, and they continue to do so after enrolling in college (King, 2006). Having said that, it becomes evident that their primary focus is their job, rather than their studies. Unlike traditional students, these worker students usually have more urgent and serious reasons for engaging in paid employment, which normally involve family commitment and basic home expenses, as well as loans and bills to pay. Knowing this, it is easy to understand the motivation of those who view themselves as employees who study (King, 2006). In terms of quantity, Orszag and Whitmore (2001) point out that a third of all working students belong to this group, being this information supported by King (2006) who states that one of each three working students consider that their job comes first.

In summary, students can be classified according to their priority and necessity when it comes to work and study. Being the largest group, those who are primarily students who have a job are known as traditional students, whereas the ones who consider themselves workers who study are known as non-traditional students. The two groups show some marked differences, such as the reason for engaging in paid employment, as well as their backgrounds.

#### **e. DISADVANTAGES OF TERM-TIME EMPLOYMENT.**

Numerous previous research projects have attempted to find out if there any observable effects that, either for the better or for the worse, paid employment has on students' performance.

The findings from many of these investigations suggest that having a job does have a number of unfavorable effects on academic activity. Indeed, Motte and Schwartz (2009) state that working while studying is more harmful than it is generally thought. The main consequences and side effects are primarily related to lack of time for studying, a decline in academic performance – normally observable on students' GPA, and specially found on full-time working students–, a marked tendency to spend more years studying, an increased likelihood to abandon their studies prematurely, and a predictable disadvantage for society in general.

The first drawback related to term-time employment deals with the time to be distributed between working and studying. According to Humphrey (2006), working during term consumes precious hours and days that students should dedicate to their studies, personal interests, and necessary recreation. This lack of time prevents students' full involvement in academic activities, and has an impact on their personal lives by cancelling their hobbies or reducing their participation in sports or social affairs. He also adds that lack of participation on college activity is not the result of poor time-management skills from students having to cope with the demands of having a job while studying. Instead, he concludes that the reason behind this trend is ultimately the lack of time generated by termtime employment, since working students do not report to be less able to manage their responsibilities than those unemployed. From this point of view, the time devoted to duty at work limits students potential to engage in a large variety of activities concerning both academic relevance and personal recreation.

The second and most anticipated disadvantage for working students is the seemingly-unavoidable impairment to their academic performance. Humphrey (2006) claims that regardless

the number of hours worked, having a job invariably has a negative effect on students' grades. According to him, working students tend to be awarded lower marks for their academic work and are more likely to have fewer chances to get into on campus societies and clubs than non-working students. He also states that these students are doubtlessly in disadvantage, since they end up graduating with lower grades or even a lower class of degree, along with the impending consequences they are to suffer once they enter the graduate employment market, as the marks assigned during their university instruction reflect the poorly conveyed contents studied during their major. This would eventually lead to a decrease in job opportunities for these graduates.

A sub-phenomenon worth to be mentioned, and that almost invariably appears in every research carried out on this topic before, is that the impaired academic performance that term-time workers experience is especially marked among full-time working students, putting them in a clear position of disadvantage compared to those who work a limited number of hours and those who do not work at all. King (2006), noted that, in general terms, working more than part-time has a negative impact on grades at most types of institutions. This claim is supported by King (2002), who states that statistically speaking, almost a fifty percent of all full-time working students end up hurting their academic achievement and the overall quality of their education due to the time dedicated to their duties at work. The likelihood of academic impairment is directly proportional to the number of hours worked, as claimed by DeSimone (2008), who points out that each additional working hour reduces academic year Grade Point Average (GPA) by 0.011 points. Furthermore, Orszag and Whitmore (2001) noted that full-time employment impairs student's performance by limiting their class schedule, their class choice, the number of classes they take, and their access to facilities, such as libraries. DeSimone (2008) summarizes this trend

claiming that, regardless the reason why they do it, students who work ultimately perform worse than they otherwise would.

The time students spend at college, in terms of years, is also affected by term-time employment. On the one hand, working students, especially those with full-time jobs, are more likely to drop out of school (Orszag and Whitmore, 2001). The statistical data gathered in his research suggests that there is a differential 10 percent in graduation rates between full-time and part-time students, which evidences their claims. This data implies that there are tens of thousands of working students with high probabilities to abandon their studies before graduating and thus failing to receive a college or university degree. Also, Motte and Schawartz (2009) noticed a negative relationship, being the number of hours worked inversely proportional to the probability of academic persistence. On the other hand, it has also been reported by Mangla (2008) that students who work more than fifteen hours per week have lower possibilities to graduate within the ideally established period of time, which, depending on the country, university attended, and major studied, normally ranges between 4 and 8 years. This, in the long run, represents a problem for students, as it inevitably implies more tuition to pay, which ultimately affects not only the students' budget, but their families' as well.

At third consideration is that society in general suffers from term-time students' impaired academic performance, since it compromises the desired level of professionalism that students are required to possess by the time they finish their majors and step into the labor market. Nevertheless, DeSimone (2008) has a positive point of view regarding this situation since he considers that actions to limit working hours for these students will eventually be set on each

university, as the State becomes concerned of the consequences that term-time employment brings to modern society. However, he also observes that an entity in charge of establishing and controlling these regulations is yet to be assigned and seen, making the execution of a viable plan for avoiding this situation still a distant dream.

#### **f. ADVANTAGES OF TERM-TIME EMPLOYMENT.**

As there are two sides to every coin, term time working is reported to have its pros too. Research suggests that working while studying supplants non-productive activities, sparks students' interest in further academic programs, opens consequent job opportunities, and represents certain academic advantage for part-time working students over their fulltime working peers. These benefits, however, seem to exclude full-time working students.

The first of the advantages deals with the time students devote to working rather than engaging in any other activities. Orszag and Whitmore (2001) point out that working part-time seems to replace non-productive activities such as watching TV. This means that, since students have to distribute their time effectively in order to keep a balance between their job and their students, the only option they have is giving up some of their leisure time activities, which in the end, are often a waste of time. Thus, a student who was used to spend long hours listening to music, chatting online, or talking on the phone might have to quit –or significantly restrict himself from– these activities once he starts working part-time. As stated before, this advantage seems to exclude full-time working students, who undoubtedly have less time to spare and therefore, devote very little time to their hobbies, if any at all.

Furthermore, Orszag and Whitmore (2001) state that part-time employment may bring other beneficial effects. As an example, they explain that it can spark students' interest in further academic programs, as a result of campus research position. Also, if the job the students engage in is directly related to their major, it can provide the necessary work experience to improve labor market prospects. This, however, is not the only possible benefit derived from this situation. Indeed, King (2006) claims that working in-campus, especially in an area closely related to academic interests, influences students' attitude positively, by promoting persistence and degree completion, and thus reducing the chances of dropping out. Unfortunately, he also states that such ideal working conditions are rarely met, since most students work off-campus.

In terms of academic performance, part-time working students have the upper hand on those who work full time and non-working students. Research suggest that those who study and work a limited number of hours do better at college than students who don't have a job (Mangla, 2008). This statement is supported by King (2006) who noticed that students who work one to twenty hours a week, on average, do slightly better than those who are unemployed. He also hinted the drawback faced by full-time working students, since their average GPA shows a decrease as number of hours spent working increases. Orszag and Whitmore (2001) also emphasize the importance of working a limited number of hours per week (e.g. 10 hours a week) as it appears to have a positive impact on academic performance, differently from those who work a significant number of hours, for whom, conversely, it has adverse consequences. In short, it seems that, when it comes to academic performance, part-time working students hold an advantageous position over their full-time working peers and unemployed students in general.

### **g. SOCIAL FACTORS RELATED TO TERM-TIME EMPLOYMENT**

There is a number of factors related to the students' social background which is intimately related to term-time working. The main ones have to do with the type of school attended prior to university, and whether or not the students live in the area before taking up their university place (Humphrey R., 2006).

To begin with, the type of school attended before is a clear indicator of the student's -or their parents'- socio-economic status. Clearly speaking, most students who seek termtime employment come from less well-off families, who usually sent them to state schools. They differ from those graduated from private schools, whose economic situation is more stable, are more likely to receive enough money from their parents, (depending on their necessities and lifestyles) and therefore don't need, or don't consider necessary an extra source of monetary income. Second, whether the students live or not in, or near their university area makes a difference between students who work and the ones who don't. Many students who come from distant regions have parents who can afford sending them away from their homes by paying for an apartment, a house, or a single room closer to university facilities This economic capacity usually includes paying for their children's basic needs too. According to Aguirre M. A. (2002), in El Salvador, a 78.5% of students who live in the urban area are unemployed, in contrast with a 54.7% of non-working students who live in the rural area. Also, the percentage of working students who come from distant regions (6.9%) is higher than the one for students who live in urban areas (5.1%).

School background marks a difference between academic performance amongst working students. Public school students are adversely affected by working during termtime, while for private school students such work may even be beneficial (Humphrey R. 2006). The reason for this phenomenon finds its answer in the motivation and reason students have for engaging in paid employment, since those who can afford studying at a private institution might not be pushed to do so, but are more likely to do it motivated by something else than financial necessity . In other words, the university they attend is an indicator of their necessity (or lack thereof) of a solid, extra income.

#### **h. INTRINSIC FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE**

The effect that working has on academic performance does not only depend on whether a person has a job or not, but also on many other factors associated with a student's specific situation. If it is true that a term-time employment has an effect on students' grades -for the better or for the worse-, it's not simply attributable to the fact that they are working while studying. In other words, while social or extrinsic factors are important in predicting student academic performance, intrinsic or psychological factors are equally important (Klomegah, R. Y., 2007). These factors, normally unobservable, are also related to the effect of term-time employment on students. For example, a lackluster student who works would not necessarily perform better if he were prevented from working, since his lack of motivation is part of his very personality. Conversely, overlooking their social background and/or economic situation, high-motivated and self-confident students are more likely to work and study simultaneously while showing non-



existent or relatively insignificant negative impact on their academic performance. Thus, it would be wrong to conclude that academic success and failure depend entirely on term-time employment, since intrinsic and psychosocial factors also play a role in the whole situation.

As mentioned before, psychosocial factors influence academic performance of working students too. Previous studies have documented two psychosocial factors, locus of control and self-efficacy, as important predictors of academic performance of college students (Roger, Y. K., 2007). A positive locus of control, (or positive attitude) increases the possibilities of getting a satisfactory result in academic performance, even if the student is working. Similarly, a negative attitude towards working and studying simultaneously will surely impair this performance since the very beginning. The second factor, self-efficacy, involves the realistic awareness of one's capacity to accomplish an undertaking. Here, self-confidence plays an important role in managing out term-time employment while performing well academically. For example, someone who is realistically confident about his capacity of carrying out both activities simultaneously has higher chances to succeed, whereas someone who perceives himself incapable of focusing on his studies and/or keeping a satisfactory academic record due to his job is more likely to drop out. This, however, could also depend on how much he or she needs to work.

Following the same trend, academic performance is in large part the result of what students actually come to believe that they have accomplished and can accomplish. (Roger, Y. K., 2007) The awareness of students' own abilities, skills and previous achievements allow working-students to have a clear perception of what can or cannot be attained concerning university

involvement and academic performance. This knowledge is particularly important to achieve a feeling of well-being, as stated by Abraham Maslow, who originally placed *Self-actualization* (the necessity of looking for personal growth and fulfillment, and unleashing one's full potential), on the top of his five-stage model of Human Hierarchy of Needs. Altogether, this reinforces the widely held conception that students -regardless they work or not-, who are aware of their capabilities are able to choose what to do with their knowledge. Meaning, even if they work, students who are conscious of their capacity and limitations are more likely to do well academically if they chose, or have chosen a major in which their abilities and knowledge can be seized appropriately for their own profit and advantage, ultimately leading to their psychological satisfaction and happiness.

In terms of determination, another intrinsic factor that affects academic performance of working students is the capacity of setting their own goals. Roger, Y. K. (2007) believes that self-set goals affect student performance directly, because they motivate individuals who possess the required ability into action. It is also stated that self-set goals determine the choice of tasks and learning strategies a student makes to directly affect performance. The ability of setting one's own goals determines the way the activities are to be executed when it comes to choosing them, the degree of effort put into them, the persistence and determination during times of hardship, and the evaluation of the final outcome once they have been completed. This, in particular, plays an important role in the setting of realistic goals in the future, based on the student's satisfaction with previous results. Working students who lack the ability to set their own goals are less likely to have a picture of their desired outcome in terms of academic performance and, therefore, will not put the same amount of effort into it, even if they have considerably high potential.

## **i. CONCLUSIONS**

- There are four main reasons why students decide to engage in paid employment. The first one is related to economic issues, as the monthly income from their parents to satisfy the basic needs at home, as well as the most immediate and vital services is often insufficient. Second, students decide to work in order to be able to pay for their studies, as many of them claim it would be impossible to continue studying without the salary they earn. The third reason is parental pressure, which urges students into working, either for tradition or economic support. The last reason is the necessity students have for gaining experience on their major field, given the opportunities it generates for potential jobs in the future, or as means of personal fulfillment.
- There are four main disadvantages for working students, especially marked for those who with full-time shifts. First, term-time workers suffer from lack of time, which affects them by preventing participation in college and university activity. Second, students experience the impairment to their academic performance, as each hour worked per week decreases their GPA considerably. Third, working students are more likely to drop out of college, and, for those who decide to stay, working usually implies a delay in the progress of their university instruction, making them take more years to graduate. Last, society is the ultimate entity affected by this phenomenon, since working while studying compromises the ideal level of professionalism required in the labor market.
- There are three main advantages of working and studying. The first one is the suppression of time-wasting activities due to limited free time. The second one is the gain

of experience on labor fields, as well as the development of interest in further academic programs. The third one is the advantage that part-time working students have over their full-time working peers and unemployed students in terms of academic performance, which is considerably better.

- □ There are two social factors related to term-time employment. The first one deals with the type of school attended prior to university (public or private), as this is a clear indicator of their family's economic situation. The second one is the university background, since students who come from state schools are more likely to work, and suffer the disadvantages related to it, whereas those from private schools usually engage in paid employment motivated by something else than financial necessity, finding a job more beneficial than their aforementioned peers.
- The academic performance of working students isn't limited to whether they work or not. There are two psychological factors that influence this performance: Locus of Control, and Self Efficacy. Also, for students, being aware their own abilities and skills allows them to have a clear perception of what can be achievable or not concerning university involvement and academic performance. Finally, the capacity to set one's own goals is crucial for determining what to do, when to do it, the effort to be put into it, and the evaluation to be conducted once their task have been completed.

## **V. OPINION ESSAY**

### **The price to pay:**

#### **Term-time employment at the Foreign Languages Department of the University of El Salvador**

*By José Iván Doñán Alas, Jennifer Elizabeth García Larios, and Zoryxa Ana Maria Sanchez.*

As necessity arises, and the economic situation in El Salvador worsens, more and more people look for jobs in order to get a monthly income that suits their needs. The students at the Foreign Languages Department in the University of El Salvador are not the exception. Either for personal satisfaction or economic issues, every year dozens of these students engage in paid employment when the opportunity knocks on their doors, and pay the price of an exhausting and very demanding lifestyle. Term-time employment has a negative impact on the students from the Foreign Languages Department in terms of time constraints, physiological and psychological problems, graduation delay, personal issues, and some particular disadvantages linked to certain specific types of jobs, all of which ultimately leads to academic performance impairment.

Without a doubt, the greatest of all problems that working students at the Foreign Languages Department face is directly related to time constraints. To begin with, these students lack the proper time for studying and doing homework. Part-time jobs usually take more than four hours, and the two main fields available for these students, working as teachers and call operators, usually take longer than that. Teaching requires working extra time, planning,

checking, and evaluating; whereas working in a call center takes normally from six to nine hours a day (considering that “part-time” in a call center, unlike most jobs, equals six hours rather than four). Also, full academic load at the Foreign Languages Department usually requires taking up to four courses per semester. This implies staying at the university either the whole morning, or the whole afternoon. Meaning, students technically divide all of their time between classes and working, leaving very little (if any) time for studying. Consequently, as we have observed and experienced, it is very difficult for them to dedicate any free time to studying due to physical and mental exhaustion.

Following this trend, we find that the limited time to be distributed between working and studying prevents students from doing enough (or any) extra practice on the target languages to develop their four macroskills (Listening, Reading, Speaking, and Writing). This primarily affects the students from the Modern Languages (Lenguas Modernas) major, who, by the end of their university instruction, must have mastered both English and French to a satisfactory level, which in terms of linguistic competence, means a clear disadvantage compared to their peers from English Language Major (Licenciatura en Idioma Inglés), who focus exclusively on English. *Students from the Modern Languages major, (especially those who work) often claim to perceive their own English level to be noticeably inferior to the one of their English Language peers*. Silvia, an ex-student from Modern Languages stated during her university instruction that “[she] was considering taking extra English courses in an academy, because [she] felt her [then] current level simply wasn’t good enough.” Working also prevents (or limits, at least) participation in the tutoring program, and the clubs (such as The Book Club, and The

Conversation Club), which were especially designed for developing and improving students' skills and grammar.

Schedule inaccessibility finds its way as the third problem related to time constraints. As stated before, the main job areas available for students of the Foreign Languages Department usually demand from six to nine hours a day, which exceeds both the standard number of working hours for part-time and full-time jobs. This implies that even part time jobs usually take the whole morning and part of the afternoon (or vice versa), which interferes with the subjects to be registered. On top of that, some workplaces, such as call centers, are well known for their sudden changes of their employees' shifts, which often generate schedule conflicts with the subjects under way.

As fourth in our list of problems related to time constraints, we point out the students' irregular class attendance. Workload can accumulate, and some jobs demand their employees to stay longer at work in order to finish or to catch up with deadlines. This inevitably leads to irregular class attendance if these students attend classes after work. Also, as term-time working takes time from students and limits their hours of entertainment and rest, some students choose not to attend some classes (which, unlike working hours, *can* be skipped) in order to get some sleep or recreation. Brenda, a working student from the Department, states that “[she] used to skip classes very often. [She] didn't even felt like getting up sometimes. As a result, the very same year, [she] failed two courses.” Rina, another working student from the Department, claims that “the worst thing is the schedule. I sometimes work at night, so I have to take the courses in the morning. There are occasions in which I sleep very little, I don't get enough rest. Concerning

homework, it was the same thing. Even though I do have time for doing it, I prefer to sleep, and sometimes that's all I want to do when I get home. I know I have to study but there are times in which I just don't do it, due to tiredness." Also, some students, especially those who work, choose to skip some classes in order to study for quizzes and mid-terms, to do homework they just didn't have the chance to start or finish at home due to insufficient time, or simply to rest for a while.

Group work is also affected by time issues. As students eventually register content based courses (such as English Didactics), they are heavily required to work in groups to carry out reports, presentations, and sample classes. Predictably, students who work are disadvantaged due to their limited availability. This lack of time results in students skipping important group meetings, and thus missing vital information about the development of the general assignment or report to be done, and workload distribution. This often leads to unequal task load amongst the members of the group, being those unemployed usually the ones who carry out most or all the work, since they have more time in hand, which in turn, can lead to the eventual (and sometimes, inevitable) expulsion of the non-producing member from the group.

Now, lack of time is not the only sort of adversity that working students at the Foreign Languages Department have to face. These students who work must also deal with the physiological problems that their demanding lifestyles generate. The first one here, as expected, is physical exhaustion, also known as fatigue. The most common observable symptoms of fatigue amongst the working students from the Foreign Languages Department vary from one person to another, seemingly depending on the type of job they perform. Teachers, for example,



suffer from pain in their feet and back, as their job requires them to be standing most of the time. On the other hand, those who work in call centers usually complain about headaches, backaches, and a constant or highly recurrent feeling of strain in their shoulders.

Some working students at the Foreign Languages Department also suffer from insomnia. This physiological disorder is normally caused by the general stress generated from the pressure of working and studying simultaneously. Interestingly, this phenomenon is more common, yet not exclusive, to those who work at call centers rather than schools and academies. Call operators must constantly go through rigorous evaluations to measure their capacity to execute their job. In some workplaces these tests heavily determine whether the operators will be taken into account for further service in the company or not. The anxiety generated by this uncertainty, along with the demands from their majors, result in insomnia episodes which can sometimes last for several days.

Another physiological problem related to term-time employment is the physical and/or mental stress that manifests itself through a series of signs and symptoms among the students. The first noticeable sign of this stress is mood disturbance. This can be easily observed during group work: The more tired a student feels due to the demands of his/her job, the higher are the possibilities of losing his/her temper. When this happens, students can easily get upset and even insult their teammates over relatively insignificant and meaningless matters. The three of us, also students who work, have experienced this ourselves. Headaches are also common, especially for those who work in call centers. These individuals are technically forced to spend long hours in front of a screen, with very limited chances to stand up, go to the restroom, or use their minds in

anything else. This causes frequent headaches, although it isn't always the case for every Foreign Languages Department student who works as a call operator. Furthermore, a constant sensation of tiredness is the third and probably the most common physiological symptom of job stress. Working students at the Foreign Languages Department are more likely to fall asleep in class, to show dark eye bags, and to express repeatedly just how sleepy and tired they feel all the time. On top of that, the stress generated by term-time employment also impairs the students' capacity of concentration. Either due to constant interference from their workplaces or simply due to fatigue, students experience a noticeable decrease in their ability to focus during classes or while reading. In some cases, their attention span can also be reduced.

Apart from time constraints and physiological issues, working students at the Foreign Languages Department also suffer from psychological and emotional problems. To begin with, working while studying can really be demotivating. Depending on the job, working consumes time and energy, which could be devoted to studying. This lack of energy leads to a noticeable demotivation towards any other activity the students have to do, especially studying, which is the most immediate of all. Furthermore, since students don't have the time they would wish for their studies, their grades, and general academic performance gets affected, which results in feelings of powerlessness, especially when they fail courses. Over the years, this frustration can grow stronger if students take more years than stipulated to graduate, due to time and schedule constraints. Brenda, a working student from the Department, adds that "The semester [she] started working, [she] failed two courses... and that was frustrating. Very frustrating."

Next in our list of disadvantages related to term-time employment is graduation delay. Due to schedule and time conflicts, many working students in the Foreign Languages Department choose to limit, stop, or even postpone their studies. These students are often offered full-time jobs which, at the beginning, promise a greater schedule flexibility after some months (or sometimes a year) of laboring. For those who accept, this implies a restriction for registering courses (if it happens before a semester starts), a forced withdrawal of some courses under way, or, in the worst case scenario, the withdrawal of the whole academic load during such semester. In addition, as mentioned before, call centers are bound to sudden schedule changes, which sometimes force students to stop attending some of their courses, leading to course withdrawal and failure, and consequently, the impending delay in major completion.

The limitations that term-time working poses on student have a significant impact on their general academic activity. For example, in the Foreign Languages Department, some students take up to ten years to graduate, if they ever get to do it. Moreover, termtime employment poses serious difficulty for starting and finishing the students' social service. At the University of El Salvador, students cannot start their social service until they have satisfactorily completed the 80% of their courses. In the Foreign Languages Department, most students who work start laboring during their third or fourth year of instruction. This, along with the time they must dedicate to their studies, inevitably interferes with the students carrying out their social service. Also, students who aren't able to register their full academic load in one semester aren't able to be considered for *Honorific Final Point Average* (known as "CUM Honorífico"), which consists on shortening graduation time of those students who get it by making their thesis report

optional, rather than mandatory. This places most working students at the Foreign Languages Department in disadvantage compared to those who dedicate all their time to studying.

So far, we have exposed the disadvantages of term-time employment in terms of time constraints, physiological and psychological problems, and graduation delay. It is now our turn to mention the fifth problem these students have to face: Personal issues. First of all, working students at the Foreign Languages Department normally lack the time for proper recreation. Although not usually the case for those who work in public or private schools, the ones who work in private language institutions might be required to labor during the weekend. Similarly, call operators normally work on weekends, and they are sometimes required to do it on holidays such as Christmas and New Year. This lack of time for recreation eventually leads to partial social withdrawal, especially for those aforementioned working students who must spend their time laboring during weekends. This means little attention to family members and matters, exclusion from friendship circles, and limited to no involvement in religious activities and rites.

Second, as most working students in the Foreign Languages Department take longer to graduate, they also go through personal projection delay. This means that their ambitions must be postponed until their university instruction is over. Sometimes, dreams such as getting married, finding a place for living independently, or studying a master degree come true much later than ideally stipulated. Most working students at the Foreign Languages Department also report to have eventually become dependent to the income they earn every month, which means that they simply cannot stop working. If students are in great need for income, they even drop out

completely and devote all of their time to laboring. This, of course, automatically suppresses (or greatly delays) their further ambitions of academic and personal fulfillment.

Leaving aside personal issues, something else worth to be mentioned is that the most common jobs among the working community at the Foreign Languages Department involve teaching, call attending; and, in some cases, laboring for the government. Interestingly, there are some problems directly related to the type of job these students perform. The issues related to teaching, attending calls, and working for the government make their appearance here.

First, we can mention the disadvantages of studying and working as an English (or French) teacher. To begin with, and as said before, teachers work more than most people know. Few people are aware that a teacher's job starts before his class and finishes after it. In other words, all those activities performed before and after a class, such as planning lessons, checking exercises and tests, preparing extra material, evaluating, and assessing students, consume precious time that could be dedicated to studying. To continue, since those activities are never taken into account in a teacher's payroll, teaching is, to some extent, a not-very-well-paid job. Most teachers at public schools (and sometimes even at private ones) hardly ever earn a salary that exceeds \$400. Depending on their necessity for a decent income or professional satisfaction, such salary can lead to some degree of demotivation. Also, this never-ending circle of planning, teaching, and evaluating, which normally begins and finishes at home, often renders and keeps students who teach exhausted.

Working as a call operator has its downsides too. The first one is related to working schedule instability which, as stated before, limits and interferes with students' class schedule. Students are often obliged to change course groups, and even to withdraw their courses due to these unexpected changes in working shift. Some of the students who face this problem claim that this phenomenon often ends up irritating their professors, which somehow damage the students-professor relationship existent between them. Brenda, a working student at the Department, claims that "the first job [she] got wasn't related to teaching. [She] started at 5:00 pm, and that's why [she] had to beg professors to allow [her] to change her course schedule to the morning. One of the professors didn't like that, and ended up with [her] failing that subject, on the professor's whim." Also, this sudden workschedule change can lead to course (or even semester) withdrawal.

Students from the Foreign Languages Department who hold government jobs must deal with some inconveniences too. The first one has to do with working on something totally different from the students' major. In such cases, these working students hold posts which do not require the use of a second or foreign language, resulting in a loss of interest in their university instruction. The second one lies on the fact that government jobs sometimes demand extra working time in case of national alert or disaster, which unexpectedly interferes with academic activity.

In the end, all of the problems previously mentioned lead to the last in our list of disadvantages related to term-time working: Impaired academic performance. In the Foreign Language Department, nearly all of the students who work invariably acknowledge that their

grade point average was significantly higher before they started laboring. Also, students often show an unbalanced effort among the subjects under way, normally prioritizing the one or ones they consider hardest, and disregarding the ones they consider easier, resulting in lower marks in such courses. Finally, once they begin working, students are much more likely to fail their courses and thus experience the aforementioned graduation delay.

In summary, regardless of the reason why they do it, the type of job they engage in, or the amount of hours it takes, students who work at the Foreign Languages Department of the University of El Salvador face a series of problems and challenges. The first one is related to time constraints, and usually involves lack of time for studying and doing homework, limitations for practicing the languages being studied, schedule inaccessibility, irregular class attendance, and difficulties for group work. The second problem deals with physiological difficulties, including exhaustion, insomnia, and stress. The third issue is related to psychological matters, involving demotivation, and frustration. The fourth one has to do with graduation delay due to course withdrawal and incomplete academic load during one or more terms of university instruction. The fifth one, personal issues, is related to lack of proper recreation, social withdrawal, and personal projection delay. Finally, the sixth problem is the impending academic performance impairment that results from summing up all the aforementioned issues. We are convinced that term-time employment has a negative impact on the students from the Foreign Languages Department of the University of El Salvador.

## **a. RECOMMENDATIONS**

Dreadful as it might seem though, working while studying doesn't necessarily have to be such a painful journey. There are several actions the Foreign Languages Department could take in order to minimize the adverse effects of paid employment on the overall academic performance of its working population. Opening extra courses on students' demand, making sure the subjects corresponding to the academic load can be taken right one after the other, arranging advanced subjects to be given in different schedules along the day, opening exclusive courses on Saturdays accompanied with virtual lessons, and enabling Fridays for content-based tutoring sessions are some examples of the alternatives that could be taken to deal with the problem.

As mentioned before, some students work full-time shifts, and that heavily limits their time and chances for class attendance. Thus, the first step to be taken to counter this phenomenon is opening courses on students' demand. Since the University of El Salvador remains open for academic activity up to 8:00 pm, there could be more courses especially conceived and scheduled to include those who spend their whole day laboring. If these students could make a formal request (given some specific format), and include a document to evidence their situation, such as a letter from their company, the authorities at the Foreign Languages Department could study the possibility of opening extra courses at 6:00 or 7:00 pm. We are well aware that these courses already exist, but they are usually limited to English subjects that range from Basic to Advanced, rather than content-based courses.

Second, and directly related to our first point, we can mention the possibility of teaching the most advanced courses on previously unconsidered schedules. It is often the case at the Foreign



Languages Department that subjects such as Research Methods or Seminar I and II are taught in a single class, once a day. Eldaa, a student from the English Major, stated that “[...] definitely, the most difficult thing about working and studying simultaneously has been the schedule at the Department. [She] couldn’t take Seminar I for two years, because that subject was in the afternoon only, and [she] worked in the afternoon. Then [she] had the chance of changing shifts to the morning, and only then could [she] take this course. Situations like that lead [her] to finish [her] major in nine years.”

Another option to be considered is making sure the courses that correspond to the same semester’s academic load are given in blocks, that is, one subject right after the other. For example, in the fourth semester (Year II, Semester II), the complete academic load for students of Modern Languages is composed of the courses of *Advanced French*, *French Grammar I*, *English Grammar II*, and *Advanced Intensive English I*. The idea is that students can register all these courses either in the morning, the early afternoon, or during the late hours of the afternoon including the evening. If students have the possibility of taking these subjects in a row, they have higher chances of adequate their own working schedule to their academic instruction. This action, however, would only benefit those who are not delayed in terms of course achievement; in other words, those who have taken all possible courses so far (full academic load), and haven’t failed any.

Next in our list of alternative actions, we come across the possibility of opening exclusive courses on Saturdays, for those who definitely cannot take some specific regular courses during the weekdays. Given the nature of this schedule, we believe that this alternative can be applied in giving content-based courses, which depend more on memorization and theoretical concepts rather than language learning. These courses can be complemented with virtual lessons online, by taking advantage of the internet and its relatively easy access, or simply by creating interactive blogs with

didactic material to download, and giving the chance to students to upload homework assignments. This same resource can be used by the professors to follow their students' development.

Finally, our last suggestion for dealing with this issue is enabling Fridays for tutoring sessions or reinforcement classes. In the Foreign Languages Department, there is already a tutoring service for students with academic performance deficiency. However, this service is mainly aimed at the development of the four macroskills and grammar proficiency, leaving aside more specialized subjects such as Didactics. The idea is to schedule some lessons to reinforce the theory from content-based courses. Given the nature of these courses, of course, they would have to be given by the professors, rather than advanced students. Depending on the student population demand, there could be an arrangement on the appropriate schedule for each session, making it accessible for most or all students in need.

As seen before, even though working while studying inevitably has its downsides, the effects of these could be minimized considerably if the Foreign Languages Department takes some actions, most of them concerning course schedule. We strongly believe that the inclusion and consideration of this proposal could lead to more opportunities of major completion for working students or, at the very least, reduce their rate of graduation delay.

## **VI. METHODOLOGY**

First, an extensive search and review of the available literature was done. Coming mainly from the web, the articles and existing studies were carefully read in order to obtain the most important and relevant information concerning the topic. Only the information that concerned the topic, and that could be useful for explaining the situation at the Foreign Languages Department was taken into account. Any other data that was considered irrelevant, unrelated to the reality in the department, or simply useless for explaining the local phenomenon was immediately ignored.

Second, the authors' most relevant points and statements were recollected, forming a list of their quotes, which were classified into different categories to facilitate their later use in the outline of the literature review. The collection of quotes and the process of classifying them was a vital part in the process of creating the main points in which the literature review is divided. For example, preliminarily, categories such as "Main reasons why students work", "Statistical rise of working students", "Economic reasons why students work", "Students that are more likely to work?", and "Other factors that influence academic performance", among others, were created as the criteria for data classification.

The third step was the brainstorming stage for the opinion essay. Focusing mainly on the disadvantages of term-time employment, a list of drawbacks was written and then used as the basis for it. To help supporting and enriching the points in the essay, five working students from the Foreign Languages Department were informally interviewed (and recorded), stating their experiences of working and studying simultaneously.

Finally, recommendations were conceived in order to deal with the problem more efficiently in the future were added. Even though they cannot be taken as definite solutions, these recommendations are to be considered in order to study the possibility to implement the ideas stated, for the development of plans and strategies aimed at the minimization of the adverse effects that term-time employment has on the students at the Foreign Languages Department.

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