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WORK LIFE BALANCE – THE IMPORTANCE OF BALANCE IN THE ACADEMIC LIVE OF STUDENTS

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Purpose: The aim of this study is to examine the relationship between the negative impact of paid work on academic performance, the balance between studies and personal life, and the level of academic stress among students. Additionally, the study seeks to determine whether these relationships vary according to selected sociodemographic and educational variables, such as gender, age, level of study, and mode of study.
Design/methodology/approach: The study was conducted using a diagnostic survey administered to 156 students majoring in Management as well as Finance and Accounting. Based on the survey items, three composite indicators were constructed to represent the key variables under investigation: the negative impact of paid work on academic performance, the balance between studies and personal life, and academic stress. The reliability of the scales was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. Data analysis included descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and nonparametric tests (the Mann-Whitney U test and the Kruskal-Wallis test) to examine differences between groups.
Findings: The results indicate that a greater negative impact of paid work on studies is associated with higher levels of academic stress and lower levels of work–life balance. A significant relationship was also found between work–life balance and academic stress. Furthermore, the findings show that the levels of the variables under study vary according to selected respondent characteristics, particularly age, gender, level of study, and mode of study.
Originality/value: This study contributes to the literature on the experiences of students engaged in paid work during their studies by adopting an integrated approach to the issue. Unlike many previous studies that have focused on individual aspects of students' employment, this research simultaneously examines the relationships between paid work, the balance between studies and personal life, and academic stress. The findings may serve as a basis for developing initiatives aimed at supporting students who combine academic responsibilities with professional work.
Keywords: students, work-life balance (WLB), academic environment, academic stress.
Category of the paper: Research paper.

1. Introduction

Starting college is a significant milestone in many students' lives, often accompanied by numerous challenges, including managing time, responsibilities, and financial demands. Rising living costs and education-related expenses lead a substantial proportion of students to undertake paid work during their studies (Robotham, Julian, 2006; Noor-ul-Huda et al., 2025). This situation may affect students' ability to meet academic and professional obligations, as well as their overall well-being. Given that students have limited time, which must be allocated among studying, paid work, and personal life, achieving balance between these competing domains represents a considerable individual challenge, requiring effective time and resource management (Beatson et al., 2021; Kanu et al., 2025).

In this context, maintaining a balance between studies, paid work, and personal life becomes particularly important; however, achieving such balance remains difficult within the academic environment (Ramachandaran et al., 2024; Kocsis, 2024). This study contributes to addressing a gap in the literature on combining paid work with academic study. Previous research has produced mixed findings, indicating both positive and negative effects of paid work on students' academic performance and well-being (Dundes, Marx, 2006; Triventi, 2014; Sánchez-Gelabert et al., 2017; Kutyło et al., 2019; Kocsis, 2021a, 2021b; Orbilla, Paglinawan, 2025). At the same time, the relationships between the negative impact of paid work on studying, the balance between studies and personal life, and academic stress—as well as the role of factors such as gender, age, field of study, and mode of study—remain relatively underexplored (Kroupová, 2024; Blindheim et al., 2025).

Against this background, the present study adopts an integrated approach, linking these dimensions to both students' academic functioning and mental well-being. Accordingly, the aim of this study is to analyze the relationships between undertaking paid work during studies, the balance between studies and personal life, and students' academic functioning, with particular emphasis on the level of academic stress. This objective is addressed using data from a survey conducted among full-time and part-time students enrolled in Management and in Finance and Accounting in Business.

2. Theoretical Background and Hypotheses

Work-life balance is commonly defined as the ability to harmoniously reconcile paid work with other areas of life, particularly personal and family life (Lantsoght, 2025; Anastasopoulou, Vraimaki, Trivellas, 2023). The concept refers to the relationship between two fundamental spheres of human functioning that are often in tension: the professional sphere, associated with

paid work, and the private sphere, encompassing rest, social relationships, and the pursuit of personal interests (Heijstra, Rafnsdottir, 2010). Due to the interpenetration of these domains, maintaining balance between them is considered a key condition for preserving psychophysical well-being, the quality of interpersonal relationships, life satisfaction, and professional effectiveness. In this sense, work–life balance may also be understood as a form of managing an individual's time and resources to achieve equilibrium between professional development and private life, including health, family, leisure, and personal growth (Elifneh et al., 2025; Lantsoght, 2025). It is important to emphasize that the concept encompasses three core dimensions: time balance (the allocation of time between work and private life), involvement balance (the distribution of energy and emotional engagement across these domains), and satisfaction balance (the attainment of a comparable level of satisfaction in both spheres) (Greenhaus, Collins, Shaw, 2003). From this perspective, work–life balance can be viewed as a continuum reflecting the multidimensional interactions between different areas of an individual's functioning (Sirgy, Lee, 2018). At the same time, contemporary socjety characterized by increasing professional and personal demands makes maintaining this balance progressively more difficult (Akanji et al., 2020). This raises important questions about how students manage to combine academic responsibilities with paid employment (Kanu et al., 2025). Research indicates that the impact of paid work on academic outcomes is not uniform. Negative effects on academic performance are primarily observed in cases of high-intensity employment, whereas part-time work especially when related to the field of study does not necessarily reduce academic achievement and may even support the development of competencies (Callender, 2008; Triventi, 2014). Furthermore, employment during studies may positively influence graduates' later position in the labor market, particularly through the development of human capital and general competencies, although its effect on the acquisition of specialized skills remains inconclusive (Ormiston, 2016). At the same time, the literature highlights the importance of contextual factors and the potential psychological costs arising from role conflict between being a student and an employee (Beerkens et al., 2011; Tur-Sinai et al., 2017).

In light of the above, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: A higher level of the negative impact of paid work on studying is associated with a higher level of academic stress.

H2: A higher level of work-life balance is associated with a lower level of academic stress.

H3: A higher level of the negative impact of paid work on studying is associated with a lower level of work-life balance.

3. Methodology of the Study and Presentation of Results

To achieve the main objective of the study, a survey was conducted among 156 respondents from the Faculty of Management at the Częstochowa University of Technology. An analysis of the sample structure (Table 1) indicates that the majority of participants were women (n = 96; 61.5%), while men accounted for 38.5% of the sample (n = 60). With regard to age, the largest group consisted of respondents aged 24-26 (n = 86; 55.1%). Participants aged 21-23 represented 27.6% of the sample (n = 43), whereas those over 26 years of age constituted 17.3% (n = 27). In terms of educational level, master's degree students slightly outnumbered undergraduate students (n = 83; 53.2% vs. n = 73; 46.8%). Regarding mode of study, full-time students comprised 55.8% of the sample (n = 87), while part-time students accounted for 44.2% (n = 69).

Table 1.
Characteristics of respondents

Variable	Category	n	%
Gender	Female	96	61.5
	Male	60	38.5
Age	21–23	43	27.6
	24–26	86	55.1
	>26	27	17.3
Level of study	Bachelor	73	46.8
	Master	83	53.2
Mode of study	Full-time	87	55.8
	Part-time	69	44.2

Source: own research.

Before proceeding with the main analyses, the reliability of the scales was assessed (Avadhani Menon, 2022). Cronbach's alpha coefficients were high for all three indicators: for the scale of the negative impact of work on studying, $\alpha = 0.915$; for the study–private life balance scale, $\alpha = 0.913$; and for the academic stress scale, $\alpha = 0.886$. The results indicate very good measurement quality and allow the scales used to be considered reliable indicators of the constructs under study. The data analysis utilized descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and nonparametric tests (the Mann-Whitney U test and the Kruskal-Wallis test) for intergroup comparisons. To verify the hypotheses, three composite indices corresponding to the analyzed constructs were created. The first referred to the subjectively perceived negative impact of paid work on studying and included aspects such as limited time for class preparation, difficulties with systematic learning, decreased concentration during classes, and fatigue resulting from work responsibilities (Ostoj, 2019; Neyt et al., 2019; Nidogon Višnjić et al., 2024). The second indicator concerned the balance between studies and private life and included the ability to manage time, opportunities for rest, maintaining harmony between different areas of life, and engagement in extracurricular activities (Bartlett et al., 2021; Abdilah et al., 2025). The third construct referred to academic stress and included feelings of psychological tension,

being overwhelmed by responsibilities, pressure to achieve, and a lack of time for recovery (Robotham, Julian, 2006; Drăghici, Cazan, 2022; Olson et al., 2025).

The results (Table 2) showed a positive correlation between the negative impact of paid work on studying and academic stress ($r = 0.330$; $p < 0.001$). This indicates that individuals who more strongly perceived the negative consequences of paid work on their studies also tended to report higher levels of psychological tension, overload, and stress related to academic responsibilities (Neyt et al., 2019; Drăghici, Cazan, 2022). This finding allows Hypothesis H1 to be considered confirmed. A significant relationship was also found between the balance between studies and private life and academic stress ($r = 0.292$; $p < 0.001$). However, the interpretation of the direction of this relationship requires methodological caution and consideration of how responses were coded in the questionnaire. Nevertheless, the existence of a significant relationship indicates that life balance is closely associated with students' psychological functioning (Sprung, Rogers, 2021). Therefore, Hypothesis H2 can be considered partially confirmed. The third hypothesis, stating that a higher level of the negative impact of paid work on studying is associated with a lower level of work-life balance, was also confirmed. The correlation coefficient was $r = -0.261$ ($p = 0.001$), indicating that an increase in the perceived disruption of the study process by paid work was associated with a decrease in the subjective sense of balance between academic responsibilities and private life (Grzywacz, Carlson, 2007).

Table 2.
Relationships between the variables under study

Variables	Pearson's r	p-value	Hypothesis test result
Negative impact of paid work on studying	0.330	< 0.001	**H1 confirmed**
Work-life balance	0.292	< 0.001	**H2 partially confirmed**
Academic stress	-0.261	0.001	**H3 confirmed**

Source: own research.

The findings also align with the broader context of contemporary research on academic stress. Recent studies indicate that academic stress is not merely a short-term reaction to educational demands but may function as a central mechanism leading to mental exhaustion. reduced cognitive performance. and difficulties in adapting to the university environment (Olson et al., 2025; Benítez-Agudelo et al., 2025; Zhang et al., 2024).

In the subsequent part of the analysis. we examined whether the levels of the constructs under study differed according to selected sociodemographic and educational variables. With regard to gender (Table 3). significant differences were found in both the negative impact of paid work on studying ($p = 0.003$) and the level of academic stress ($p = 0.026$).

Table 3.
Gender differences

Variable	Women M (SD)	Men M (SD)	Mann-Whitney U test	p-value
Negative impact of paid work on studying	3.12 (1.28)	3.89 (0.53)	2064.0	0.003
Work-life balance	3.12 (1.13)	3.06 (0.86)	2817.0	0.818
Academic stress	2.82 (1.02)	2.58 (1.05)	3482.5	0.026

Source: own research.

However. no significant differences were observed in the balance between studies and private life ($p = 0.818$). These results suggest that women and men differ in terms of the perceived burden associated with combining work and studies. as well as in their levels of academic stress. while no significant gender differences were identified in the reported level of life balance (Andrade et al., 2024).

The results regarding age were particularly noteworthy (Table 4). as age significantly influenced all three areas analyzed: the negative impact of paid work on academic performance ($p < 0.001$). the balance between studies and personal life ($p < 0.001$). and academic stress ($p = 0.038$).

Table 4.
Differences by age

Variable	Age 21-23 M (SD)	Age 24-26 M (SD)	Above 26 M (SD)	Mann-Whitney U test	p-value
Negative impact of paid work on studying	2.80 (0.89)	3.38 (1.13)	4.51 (0.34)	54.52	<0.001
Work-life balance	4.16 (0.63)	2.77 (0.93)	2.48 (0.51)	63.16	0.362
Academic stress	2.78 (0.72)	2.55 (1.24)	3.23 (0.42)	6.55	0.001

Source: own research.

This suggests that age should be considered one of the most important factors influencing students' functioning. This finding can be interpreted in light of research indicating that older students are more likely to navigate a more complex set of social roles. as working adults who are often burdened with additional family and financial responsibilities (Kulik, 2025).

Significant differences were also observed with regard to the level of studies (Table 5). It was shown that students at different educational levels differed significantly in terms of the negative impact of paid work on their studies ($p < 0.001$) and the level of academic stress ($p = 0.001$). However. no significant differences were found in the balance between studies and private life ($p = 0.362$). It can be concluded that master's students more frequently experience a stronger conflict between work and education. which is also associated with higher levels of stress compared to undergraduate students (bachelor's and engineering programs). This is consistent with the findings of Fentahun et al. (2025). which indicate that individuals at more advanced stages of education are more likely to take on more demanding forms of employment. combining their studies with more stable or intensive professional activity.

Table 5.
Differences by type of degree program

Variable	Undergraduate studies M (SD)	Master's studies M (SD)	Mann-Whitney U test	p-value
Negative impact of paid work on studying	2.93 (1.37)	3.85 (0.58)	1946.5	<0.001
Work-life balance	3.16 (1.30)	3.05 (0.72)	3284.5	0.362
Academic stress	2.44 (0.87)	2.99 (1.10)	2064.5	0.001

Source: own research.

With regard to study mode. the results showed (Table 6) that it significantly affects the level of work-life balance ($p < 0.001$) and academic stress ($p < 0.001$). but does not significantly affect the negative impact of paid work on studies ($p = 0.217$).

Table 6.
Differences by type of program

Variable	Part-time students M (SD)	Full-time students M (SD)	Mann–Whitney U test	p-value
H1	3.46 (1.31)	3.39 (0.96)	3346.5	0.217
H2	2.57 (0.78)	3.52 (1.02)	1307.5	<0.001
H3	3.04 (1.12)	2.48 (0.89)	4187.0	<0.001

Source: own research.

This finding appears particularly significant from the perspective of academic practice. Although the impact of work on studies may be experienced similarly by students in different modes of study, their overall mental well-being and sense of life balance differ significantly. This may stem from the fact that part-time students more often navigate a more complex web of professional, educational. and family responsibilities, whereas full-time students may experience different forms of pressure, primarily related to the intensity and organization of the teaching process (Di Paolo, 2022).

Summary

In summary, the results indicate that combining paid work with studies poses a significant risk to students' mental well-being. The study confirmed that the more strongly respondents perceive the negative impact of work on their academic performance, the higher their stress levels and the lower their sense of balance between studies and personal life. At the same time. it has been shown that this experience is not uniform but varies significantly depending on factors such as gender, age, type of study program, and mode of study. The obtained results align well with current findings in the literature, according to which academic stress, role conflict, and task overload are among the most important factors influencing students' well-being and their educational functioning. From a practical perspective, these results point to the need for universities to develop solutions supporting working students, such as flexible class

schedules, psychological support, psychoeducation on time and stress management, and initiatives aimed at enhancing recovery and life balance. In the reality of contemporary higher education, where students taking on paid work is becoming increasingly common, these measures seem not so much an add-on as an essential element for supporting the effective and healthy functioning of young adults.

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