



Unleashing the Students' Experiences of MSRT Managing Work and Graduate Studies

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the lived experiences of Master of Science in Radiologic Technology (MSRT) students in balancing the demands of academic coursework and professional responsibilities. MSRT students often face unique challenges due to the rigorous academic curriculum, clinical practicums, and research projects required by the program, all while managing work obligations, particularly in healthcare settings. This dual role can lead to heightened stress, role conflict, and mental health challenges, which affect both academic performance and job productivity. Drawing on qualitative research, this study examines the coping strategies employed by MSRT students, including time management, resilience, and support networks. Additionally, the study investigates the personal and professional growth that arises from balancing work and study, focusing on how these experiences shape students' skills, resilience, and career trajectories. Through in-depth interviews and thematic analysis, the research aims to fill a significant gap in the literature, offering insights into the specific needs and challenges of MSRT students. The findings will inform educational institutions and employers on how to better support students in this demanding field, providing a foundation for targeted interventions and policy recommendations. This research contributes to a deeper understanding of the complexities of balancing academic and professional responsibilities in specialized healthcare education.

Keywords: Master of Science in Radiologic Technology (MSRT), work-study balance, Phenomenology design, Davao City

Introduction

Pursuing a Master of Science in Radiologic Technology (MSRT) poses an intricate challenge for students in the Philippines who juggle work and study. This is often caused by financial burdens and the need for advancement in self-development, especially in healthcare fields where clinical work is combined with academic study (Carnevale & Smith, 2018; Jacoby et al., 2020). More than 60 percent of graduate students worldwide are working, which adds to the challenges already facing the students in their demanding courses (Jacoby et al., 2020). In radiologic technology, students face several competing priorities, such as coursework, clinical rotations, and research, which can lead to significant strains, burnout, and even conflict between roles (Gonzalez et al., 2023; Torres & Carranza, 2022). There is, however, a lack of research on the MSRT student experience within the context of Philippine higher education.

In the Philippines, the socioeconomic context deeply influences the reality of MSRT students from work-study programs. Numerous students from the Mindanao and Davao City regions balance their studies with clinical work in poorly-equipped understaffed healthcare facilities (Cabigao & Feliciano, 2021; Tagalog & Morales, 2022). The absence of scholar grants, coupled with financial debt and familial responsibilities, monetarily obligates students during graduate studies (Garcia et al., 2019). The shift to online education during the COVID-19 pandemic, coupled with the already scarce clinical training provisions, has further intensified these challenges (Santos, 2020; Thompson & Cruz, 2023). There is an important gap in the literature regarding MSRT students that require further exploration, particularly on how dual-role academic and professional responsibilities are managed.

For MSRT students, work and study activities necessitate the use of coping strategies such as time scheduling and social support systems (Torres & Carranza, 2022; Lopez & Garcia, 2021). The development of organizational skills through the use of planners and digital tools mitigates stress and enhances academic performance (Ramirez et al., 2020). Strong familial and social networks, along with emotional and practical support from peers, family and mentors bolster resilience while reducing burnout, which in turn improves academic performance and strengthening motivation (Dela Cruz, 2020; Soria & Martinez, 2020). Support from the institution, including flexible class schedules, remote learning and academic counseling enhances the need for a controllable environment thus supporting the attainment of goals and enhances the feeling of success (Nguyen et al., 2020; Johnson & Reyes, 2021). Access to mental health services is crucial, as students with receiving support demonstrated stronger coping mechanisms and better academic performance (Verano et al., 2022; Thompson & Cruz, 2023).

The mental health of MSRT students is a major issue of concern as anxiety and depression, along with academic burnout, are reported quite often (Verano et al., 2022). Clinical rotations, research activities, and jobs add to the already existing psychological strain, which in turn lowers academic productivity (Thompson & Cruz, 2023). Guidance through mentorship programs and peer support networks have been documented as protective factors that help

students not only feel supported but also foster belonging (Dela Cruz, 2020; Soria & Martinez, 2020). Better student outcomes have been documented in relation to institutions with more responsive policies to the need of working graduate students, and these include flexible program designs and proactive mental health care services (Nguyen et al., 2020; Johnson & Reyes, 2021).

Methods

The study used a phenomenological approach to investigate the experiences of MSRT students managing several employment roles together with academic commitments. As defined by Creswell (2013), phenomenology is a qualitative approach focused on attempting to understand the essence of particular individuals' experiences. This approach was selected because it provided in-depth exploration concerning the participants' diversities and their coping mechanisms, illustrating how they navigate the challenges of graduate education alongside professional obligations. The study sought to analyze the patterns—often recurring, which were likely concealed pertaining to the individual and collective parts of their lives and education, contributing to the understanding of the intricate relationship between work and study within the healthcare sector.

The study was limited to the designated Davao City area with respect to its bordering workplaces and schools offering MSRT programs. This was because the researcher sought to understand the lived experiences of MSRT students balancing work and academic commitments within their local healthcare environment. The scope of the data collection was restricted by proof from students living and working within Davao City. The collection encompassed in-depth, semi-structured interviews, giving participants the option to voice their unique perspectives along with the difficulties they faced managing competing multiple responsibilities. Each interview was captured electronically, after which they were transcribed verbatim and subjected to meticulous analysis to confirm the rigor and precision of the information.

MSRT students who had full-time and part-time jobs were selected based on Palinkas et al.'s (2015) framework on purposive sampling in qualitative research. Participants were selected based on their enrollment in an MSRT program, current employment, and willingness to share concerning sociocultural experiences. Informed consent was provided, alongside ethical considerations such as the agency to withdraw at any point. The researcher sought approval from the Ethics Review Committee alongside relevant academic bodies, following ethical guidelines of the research praxis concerning participants' privacy and confidentiality as stated under the Data Privacy Act of 2012.

Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step thematic analysis was applied for data analysis which guided the researcher in crafting patterns, themes, and relevant excerpts from the participants' stories. Thematic analysis provided a framework to interrogate the data focusing on several themes which included time management, stress, coping mechanisms and others, the influence of work on scholarly performance. To ensure the study's trustworthiness, the researcher complied with the criteria set by Lincoln and Guba (1985) on credibility, dependability, transferability and confirmability. To enhance the rigor of the study, participant validation and triangulation of data sources were used, ensuring accurate representation of findings reflecting the lived experiences of the participants.

Reflexivity was important in this case, since the researcher's background as an MSRT student juggling work and academic commitments informed the possible biases. The researcher kept a balanced approach by taking this bias into consideration and was able to remain open and objective by seeking different viewpoints through a variety of reflective actions and striving to lessen the impact of personal encounters on the analysis. Such reflexive steps supported the balance between influence and experience, thus allowing the findings to encompass the participants' experiences reflexively rather than solely from the researcher's perspective.

This study provides important information about the role of MSRT students' coping with the dualistic nature of their roles, highlighting the urgency of institutional policy frameworks, accessibility of learning modalities, and availability of mental health resources. The data brought into focus the role that effective scheduling, systems of social support, and motivation play in maintaining academic productivity while employed. Addressing the needs of MSRT students enables institutions and policy makers to devise appropriate solutions that promote students' health and success within targeted graduate programs.

Results and Discussion

Table 1. Participants' Profile

Participant Number	Pseudonym	Gender	Years of Work Experience	Age
1	Grace Under Pressure	Female	5 years	44
2	Juggle Master Jay	Male	7 years	34
3	Balancing Bea	Female	3 years	39
4	Coffee-First Casey	Female	2 years	26
5	Deadline Dylan	Male	4 years	27
6	Hustling Harper	Female	4 years	36

7	Resilient Ruby	Female	2 years	29
8	Driven Daisy	Female	1 year	25
9	All-in Avery	Male	8 years	31

This study examined the lived experiences of nine Master of Science in Radiologic Technology (MSRT) students balancing multiple jobs alongside academic responsibilities, highlighting diverse profiles in terms of gender, years of work experience (ranging from 1 to 8 years), and ages (spanning 25 to 44 years). Through in-depth interviews and thematic analysis, key insights were categorized into themes that explored the challenges and strategies these students employ. The findings revealed that juggling professional and academic roles requires adaptability and resilience, with time management emerging as the most significant hurdle, often leading students to sacrifice social activities and rest. Coping strategies centered on task prioritization, support systems from family and peers, and self-care practices to sustain productivity and well-being. Participants also shared advice emphasizing perseverance, adaptability, and the importance of inspiring and supporting peers facing similar challenges. The study underscores the critical role of motivation, support networks, and effective strategies in helping MSRT students manage their dual responsibilities while fostering personal and professional growth.

Lived Experiences of MSRT Managing Work and Graduate Studies

Emergent Theme 1: Juggling Professional and Academic Roles

Balancing professional and academic responsibilities is a central challenge for MSRT students. The need to simultaneously manage full-time work, part-time roles, and academic commitments demands meticulous time management and adaptability. Studies confirm that time management is a key determinant of academic success and stress reduction (Barker & Mota, 2021; Bahrani & Soltani, 2020). Respondents shared that while the juggling act was demanding, it also fostered growth, discipline, and the ability to prioritize tasks effectively. The strain of exhaustion, as highlighted in Baker et al. (2019), is common among students balancing these roles, underscoring the need for self-regulation and effective planning.

Time Management and Prioritization. For MSRT students, time management proved to be the most significant challenge. Effective scheduling, hierarchy creation within activities, and optimum workload assignment (Gupta & Sharma, 2022; Ahmed & Ibrahim, 2023) is critical not only for work-life integration but also for balancing academic requirements and professional obligations. In order to sustain academic and professional standards, active trade-offs must be made between personal time and time for activities that need to be done. The shared experiences demonstrate the extent to which time management alleviates cognitive burden stemming from fulfilling numerous responsibilities.

“Balancing work and academics as an MSRT student was a constant juggling act. Working full-time as a Radiologic Technologist and part-time as a clinical instructor while pursuing graduate studies required me to carefully allocate time for work, family, and academics. There were moments of exhaustion, but the desire to excel in all aspects kept me going.” (Respondent 2)

Adaptability and Resilience. Adaptability and resilience are essential for managing the unpredictability of academic and work demands. Research shows that students who develop adaptability can better navigate challenges, while resilience helps them maintain motivation despite obstacles (Koehler et al., 2020; Bieler & Kottman, 2019; Gonzalez & Valenzuela, 2022). Respondents shared that perseverance and flexibility were critical to sustaining their efforts. The capacity to shift strategies and maintain a positive outlook under pressure helped students continue pursuing their goals.

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Work-Life Balance Struggles. Maintaining work-life balance is a persistent challenge, with students experiencing high stress and fatigue from juggling multiple roles. Studies by Kim and Lee (2020), Choi and Kim (2021), and Parker and Griffin (2022) illustrate how this imbalance can negatively affect mental health and lead to burnout. Respondents acknowledged the difficulty of finding time for personal life, often sacrificing social interactions and rest to meet work and academic demands. These sacrifices can diminish well-being and hinder long-term success.

“It’s quite challenging since I have to juggle multiple responsibilities at once. The workload can be overwhelming, and finding time for everything is not easy.” (Respondent 6)

Emergent Theme 2: Personal and Professional Growth

The experience of balancing work and academics has contributed to the development of resilience, discipline, and lifelong learning in MSRT students. They reported that managing demanding schedules while juggling multiple responsibilities has fostered both personal and professional growth. This aligns with studies showing that managing dual roles strengthens adaptability and self-efficacy (Miller & Thomas, 2021; Griffiths et al., 2020; Hernandez & Parker, 2022).

“These experiences have impacted my personal growth by teaching me to never stop learning and always pursue higher goals. Professionally, I’ve learned that balancing work and education is achievable, and it’s helped me grow in my career.” (Respondent 1)

Resilience and Discipline. Balancing multiple responsibilities has built resilience and discipline among MSRT students, helping them maintain focus despite challenges. The need to persevere through obstacles while staying committed to long-term goals has strengthened their determination. This mirrors

research emphasizing the connection between resilience, self-control, and academic success (Miller & Thomas, 2021; Griffiths et al., 2020; Hernandez & Parker, 2022).

"Balancing work and academic responsibilities as an MSRT student has significantly contributed to my personal and professional growth. The demanding schedules have instilled in me a strong sense of discipline and focus." (Respondent 7)

Time Management and Focus. Effective focus and time management skills have been acquired due to the rigorous schedules of MSRT students. To fulfill both academic and professional roles, avoiding burnout requires prioritization, planning, as well as sustained attention. This is corroborated by research indicating that strong time management skills enable students to balance competing priorities (Carter et al., 20201; Roberts & Lee, 2022).

"The demanding schedules have instilled in me a strong sense of discipline and focus." (Respondent 7)

Professional and Personal Development. Managing both work and academic commitments provides opportunities for students to grow personally and professionally. The process enhances critical skills such as time management, adaptability, and self-discipline while improving academic knowledge and practical expertise. Studies emphasize how balancing work and study fosters career readiness and lifelong learning (Sullivan & McGuire, 2021; Khan & Patel, 2022; Evans et al., 2023).

"Professionally, I've learned that balancing work and education is achievable, and it's helped me grow in my career." (Respondent 1)

Emergent Theme 3: Challenges of Time Management

Balancing work, academics, and personal life remains a major challenge for MSRT students. The struggle to meet deadlines and fulfill responsibilities often results in stress, fatigue, and sacrifices in social life. Research shows that overlapping deadlines and constant role-switching contribute to burnout and reduced well-being (Rosen et al., 2021; Nguyen & Haskell, 2022).

Time Pressure and Deadline Management. Respondents consistently reported the intense challenge of managing overlapping deadlines for academic and professional tasks. The pressure to complete assignments while fulfilling work responsibilities often leads to heightened stress and exhaustion. This theme highlights the constant juggling of roles and the struggle to meet both academic and work-related obligations. The issue was particularly acute for those working full-time while pursuing graduate studies, as the need to meet multiple demands simultaneously placed them under significant pressure. Studies by Rosen et al. (2021) and Nguyen and Haskell (2022) support these findings, emphasizing the strain that concurrent responsibilities place on students' well-being and performance.

"Time management has been a constant struggle. I recall a specific instance where I was attending a seminar for my full-time job, while trying to participate in the seminar and complete graduate study assignments simultaneously." (Respondent 3)

Sacrificing Rest and Social Time. The respondents frequently sacrifice rest and social time to manage their workload. Missing out on social activities and relaxation often leads to exhaustion, stress, and a decline in mental and physical health. Studies highlight how a lack of personal time contributes to burnout, emphasizing the importance of rest and social connections for well-being (García et al., 2022; Smith et al., 2021).

"The most significant challenges included time constraints, fatigue, and the mental load of switching between roles." (Respondent 2)

Coping Strategies for Balancing Work and Study

Emergent Theme 1: Task Prioritization and Planning

Respondents emphasized that effective task prioritization and planning were essential in managing their dual responsibilities. They described using structured schedules, setting clear goals, and utilizing tools like digital planners and to-do lists to organize tasks and maintain focus. This strategic approach to time management helped them avoid feeling overwhelmed and stay on track with both academic and work demands. Studies support the role of prioritization in reducing stress and improving performance among students balancing multiple roles (Yıldız & Çakır, 2021; Boulos et al., 2020).

Time Organization and Efficiency. Time organization allows MSRT students to allocate specific time blocks for their tasks, enabling them to fulfill academic and professional obligations without neglecting personal needs. Structured time management reduces missed deadlines, prevents burnout, and fosters a sense of accomplishment. Research shows that students who plan and structure their time are better able to maintain productivity while minimizing stress (Yıldız & Çakır, 2021).

"I relied heavily on creating structured schedules and sticking to them. Setting clear, attainable goals for each day helped me stay focused." (Respondent 2)

Digital Tools for Task Management. Digital tools such as planners and task managers play a vital role in organizing and prioritizing tasks, providing reminders, and enhancing overall productivity. They allow MSRT students to track deadlines, visualize workloads, and manage competing demands effectively. Studies affirm that using digital tools supports task management and reduces cognitive load, helping students sustain focus and balance (Boulos et al., 2020).

"I use a digital planner and create to-do lists to organize my tasks and manage my time effectively. This helps me stay on track and ensures I can balance everything without feeling overwhelmed." (Respondent 6)

Emergent Theme 2: Self-Care and Resilience

Self-care and resilience were highlighted as crucial coping strategies for sustaining productivity while balancing work and academics. Respondents shared that taking breaks, ensuring rest, and maintaining a positive mindset were essential to avoid burnout and sustain long-term engagement. Research supports the importance of self-care and resilience in reducing fatigue and fostering well-being in high-pressure environments (Kato et al., 2021; Lee et al., 2019).

Rest and Recovery. Respondents stressed the importance of taking regular breaks and ensuring adequate rest to maintain focus and prevent burnout. Breaks allow them to recharge and return to tasks with renewed energy, aligning with research emphasizing the need for rest to sustain cognitive performance and reduce stress (Kato et al., 2021).

"I make sure to take short breaks during my work and study hours. This helps me recharge and come back to my tasks with more energy and focus." (Respondent 3)

Resilience Through Adversity. Resilience was developed through overcoming the challenges of managing work and academics. Respondents reported learning to adapt, persist, and maintain a positive outlook even in difficult circumstances. This mirrors findings that resilience is cultivated through adversity and is essential for long-term success in demanding environments (Lee et al., 2019).

"I've gained a profound appreciation for the importance of planning and adaptability. These experiences have reinforced that resilience is built through overcoming challenges." (Respondent 4)

Insights and Advice for Fellow MSRT Students

Emergent Theme 1: Importance of Perseverance and Time Management

MSRT students highlighted that for managing the competing professional and academic responsibilities, perseverance and time management are key. While time management enables the functioning of efficacy through goal setting, planning, and prioritization of tasks, perseverance aids in maintaining motivation and focus through challenges. Both, alongside overwhelming stress, promote well-being as well as successful outcomes in the long-term. This supports research concerning the significance of effective goal-setting, as well as assessing and managing one's commitments to mitigate burnout in the span of career and academic advancement.

Goal Setting and Commitment. This essential theme highlights how setting clear, achievable goals helps MSRT students manage their responsibilities effectively. By breaking down long-term objectives into smaller, manageable tasks, students can focus on what matters most and avoid feeling overwhelmed. Staying committed to these goals allows them to persevere through challenges and maintain steady progress in both academic and professional roles. Research supports this, with Martin et al. (2021) emphasizing the positive impact of goal setting and commitment on academic and work performance.

"I found that setting realistic goals and sticking to them helped me stay focused. Having a clear target for the day or week allowed me to manage my responsibilities more effectively and make steady progress." (Respondent 2)

Boundaries and Overcommitment Management. This theme underscores the importance of managing commitments and setting boundaries to avoid overextension. Respondents shared that learning to say no and limiting the number of tasks they take on is crucial for protecting their mental health, reducing stress, and preventing burnout. Research by Anderson et al. (2020) confirms that setting boundaries supports better stress management and overall well-being, particularly for those juggling multiple roles.

"Learning to say no was one of the most important skills I've developed. It's easy to get caught up in wanting to help everyone or take on more responsibilities, but I've realized that I need to focus on my priorities to avoid getting overwhelmed." (Respondent 6)

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study's findings have critical implications for the practice of radiologic technology, especially regarding the support provided to Master of Science in Radiologic Technology (MSRT) students who are both deeply engaged in work and study. Accomplished and productive professionals in any field have mastered the art of time management, prioritization, and productivity systems. Graduate level educators should consider developing dedicated courses that teach effective time management, prioritization of tasks, and use of modern productivity applications relevant to academics. With regard to academic performance, teaching the use of digital planners and scheduling tools can assist students in dealing with multiple overlapping deadlines. Mental health resilience and response adaptability are equally important and can be fostered through supportive systems for mental health, mentorship, academic accommodations, and an equitable distribution of workloads where students have clearly defined limits on how much work they are expected to do. Together these strategies can foster the ability to balance work and academic demands, helping to mitigate burnout and enhancing holistic wellness.

This research underscores the importance of developing a growth mindset for MSRT students, encouraging them to embrace challenges for further personal and professional growth. Institutions need to cultivate a culture where failure is an opportunity to learn, fostering grit and a sense of self-efficacy. Supervisors and program coordinators make important contributions by being flexible with deadlines, empathizing with students' situations, and providing anticipatory guidance. If educators and practitioners actively engage MSRT students on the topics of time management, resilience, and growth mindset at the policy level, these students will be better supported in the navigation of the intricate realities of graduate education and clinical work.

This study's findings should be further explored with follow-up research. For instance, longitudinal studies could examine the impact of MSRT students' coping strategies on their academic achievement, mental health, and career advancement over time. Such research may help identify which enduring

practices contribute to continuous academic and career advancement, thereby strengthening the justification for refining support programs in radiologic technology education. There is also a need for an exploratory sequential design that begins with qualitative elements and is followed with quantitative aspects to identify prevailing trends, challenges, and successful interventions. This would deepen understanding of the experiences and needs of MSRT students and enable more precise educational interventions.

It is equally important to broaden the geographical scope of the study. This research concentrated only on Region XI of the Philippines, but studies incorporating MSRT students from other regions or even other countries could demonstrate how culture, the healthcare system, and education as a whole impact students' experiences. Moreover, additional studies may address particular problems within the curriculum for radiologic technology, such as how clinical rotations, fieldwork, and certain courses help or hinder students' ability to fulfill multiple roles. Understanding faculty support, mentorship, and alternative teaching supports customizable instruction can offer valuable data to enhance academic performance and holistic well-being among MSRT students in diverse contexts.

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