

Lived Experiences of Student-Dancers In Managing Time And Balancing Academics: A Phenomenological Study

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Abstract

This phenomenological study examined how student dancers manage their time and balance academic demands with intense dance commitments. Students often balance two responsibilities, which can lead to stress affecting both their well-being and academic performance. Through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with the University of Mindanao Tagum College student dancers, this study aims to capture the essence of their daily struggles and successes. Thematic analysis will help identify patterns and themes related to time use, stress management, academic performance, social life, and the effects of dance on their overall student experience. The expected findings will highlight student dancers' strategies to maintain balance, such as careful planning, time management, setting priorities, reducing social activities, or seeking specific support systems. The study also highlighted the mental and physical demands of balancing academics and dance and the satisfaction that comes with it. Overall, this research aims to provide detailed insights into the student-dancer experience. This understanding can lead to better resources and policies that create a healthier and more balanced environment for these dedicated individuals.

Keywords: Balancing Academics, Physical Education, Student-Dancers, Time Management, SDG #3: Good health and well-being , Philippines

1. Introduction

Focusing on achieving academic success and extreme dance training brings a significant challenge for students, especially those involved in dancing. Some research suggests that the demands of dance schedules can lead to more serious issues with time management, affecting students' academic performance. Spending long hours dancing alone may take away time from schoolwork, resulting in stress and possibly lower grades. Some studies, such as those by Wilson et al. (2021), provide further evidence that a student's academic performance can decline when they do not have sufficient study time due to their involvement in dance practices and their commitment to the art form. Due to these conflicting demands on dancing and schooling, students struggle to find sufficient time to study, negatively impacting their GPA (Grade Point Average) and performances. Another study by Calonia & Pagante (2023) noted that university students frequently report difficulties balancing their extracurricular activities with their academic work, which may lower their academic performance as they lack sufficient time for homework and study sessions. To help student dancers balance their love for dancing and their commitment to academic achievement, this study highlights the tension between dance training and practices, academic activities and deadlines. This study will also underscore the critical need for effective time management strategies.

To support this study on an international scale, a study conducted by Aeon et al. (2021) in Spain examines the effectiveness of time management as a strategic approach. The authors assert that time management

encompasses various techniques, such as prioritizing, scheduling, and goal setting, to assess their impact on performance in both personal and professional domains. After analyzing data from numerous studies, they concluded that effective time management significantly enhances student performance and productivity. However, the study also indicates that while time management can alleviate underlying stress, the benefits may vary depending on individual personality traits, work conditions, and the specific methods.

In further support of this research, Alyami et al. (2021) investigate how time management skills influence academic performance among students in Saudi Arabia. Their findings reveal that students who excel in time management—prioritizing tasks, organizing their studies, and adhering to deadlines—tend to achieve greater academic success. Additionally, their study highlights the importance of effective time management in maintaining a healthy balance between personal and academic activities, which can help reduce stress and improve focus. Furthermore, students who adhere to structured schedules and thoughtfully plan their studies typically outshine their peers who lack the organization to manage their workloads.

Balancing academics and training is particularly challenging for students, especially those with a dual commitment to dancing due to the significant time and energy required for physical training. Academic resourcefulness suggests that students, more importantly, those with multiple commitments, who manage their responsibilities, will remain focused in school despite the challenges of juggling both roles. Another study by Kerrigan & Manktelow (2021) highlights the importance of extracurricular activities in enhancing university students' academic success and professional growth. This study is especially relevant for student-dancers, as their involvement in various extracurricular activities, such as dancing, requires physical effort, mental focus, careful time management, and academic responsibilities.

Effective time management remains a significant challenge for students balancing their studies with extracurricular activities. These experiences suggest that, despite the students' efforts to organize their schedules, achieving balance remains an ongoing challenge. This study highlights the need for increased institutional support and guidance in managing time effectively. According to Klinkenberg et al. (2023), students who were deeply involved in academics and extracurricular activities, such as dancing, also experienced burnout, high levels of emotional fatigue, and pressure in academic and dance performances. These findings suggest the reflective reality for students who often face intense training alongside their school demands.

Additionally, Cruz (2024) found that students overwhelmed with academic responsibilities often experience fatigue, irregular sleep patterns, and heightened stress levels. These factors collectively hinder students' ability to focus on their studies, reducing their academic motivation and possibly making it harder for them to complete even simple tasks efficiently. The ongoing pressure to meet school activity deadlines may lead to feeling overwhelmed, which in turn may lower the quality of their work. In turn, the pressure may affect the quality they must present in their dance performance and similar activities. If the student-dancers do not address these issues, they may face long-term consequences extending beyond their academic pursuits. This idea suggests that prolonged exposure to physical and mental exhaustion can lead to burnout, a state of chronic fatigue and disengagement that is likely to significantly decline overall performance and well-being. Furthermore, this ongoing stress can still interfere with their engagement and commitment to extracurricular activities, such as dancing, which is typically meant to be enjoyable and fulfilling. Instead of serving as a source of balance and self-expression, these activities may become an additional source of stress, leading students to withdraw, lose interest in a once-enjoyed activity, and experience decreased personal satisfaction and emotional resilience.

To further support this study, some research presents its significance. Murali & Avudaiappan (2024) support this by highlighting how stress, burnout, and anxiety limit students' involvement in school activities and dance training. These mental health issues serve as a challenge that not only impairs students' ability to function but can also lead to cognitive issues, such as reduced focus, poor decision-making, and even the most

common procrastination. Over time, these cognitive issues can erode academic performance and compromise students' emotional and psychological well-being. The collective impact of these challenges underscores the need for supportive institutional environments that provide resources for managing time, psychological support, and academic guidance. This is crucial because it will foster resilience and balanced involvement among student dancers, enabling them to thrive academically.

In the Philippines, Pedroso et al. (2023) investigate how Filipino students cope with the challenges they face in their careers and education. Upon their investigation, the report emphasizes the importance of educational institutions in helping students find a good balance, most especially through a flexible class schedule paired with open communication with the school, specifically with teachers. Their findings also highlight that self-discipline, self-awareness, and time management tools such as notebook planners and smartphone apps can help alleviate the underlying stress of balancing numerous commitments inside and outside the school. Their research indicates that a student's ability to balance work and school can be affected by both internal and external factors. Given that these students struggle with time management, they often experience high levels of stress. Therefore, these measures are crucial for improving academic success and overall well-being. If these are not addressed, not only are there going to be lasting consequences, but these conflicts may lead to psychological disorders, which will affect students in the long run, especially when they graduate and start a job.

In addition to this framework, the study is informed by Sweller's (1988) Theory of Cognitive Load. This theory posits that cognitive resources are limited, and optimizing their use can improve learning outcomes. By implementing time management strategies, students can avoid cognitive overload by designating specific periods for studying and dancing. Over time, this organization can help prevent conflicts between academic and dance obligations. Students are suggested to perform better academically when their schedules are well-organized, allowing them to focus on what is most important during study sessions and classes.

Furthermore, the study may also draw from the Self-Determination Theory proposed by Deci and Ryan (1985), which posits that individuals are motivated by the need to feel competent, related, and autonomous. Mastering time management skills enables student-dancers to balance their academic and dance commitments effectively, bolstering their sense of competence and independence. This equilibrium can reduce stress and enhance motivation, ultimately improving academic achievement. Additionally, efficient time management fosters the development of self-regulation skills, which are crucial for academic success.

Research examining the challenges encountered by student dancers remains sparse, particularly in light of the extensive body of literature focusing on student time management and the effects of extracurricular activities on academic performance. Most existing studies tend to either concentrate on broader student populations or emphasize athletic pursuits, leaving a significant gap regarding the specific issues faced by student dancers. The unique demands of simultaneous engagement in rigorous academic studies and the physically and mentally taxing discipline of dance necessitate a tailored understanding of these challenges.

Current literature on time management predominantly evaluates techniques such as prioritization and scheduling, yet rarely addresses the specialized interventions required for physically intensive activities like dance. Furthermore, there is a notable lack of research on how institutional support can be tailored to meet the distinct needs of students involved in the performing arts (Pedroso et al., 2023). The urgency of this inquiry is underscored by the expectation placed on students to excel in their academic pursuits while actively participating in extracurricular activities, such as dance.

The anticipated findings of this study aim to equip academic institutions with insights necessary to provide enhanced support for student dancers, thereby mitigating the risk of burnout and improving both extracurricular and academic performance. Additionally, this research contributes to the existing literature by shedding light on the time management strategies, well-being, and academic challenges student dancers face. It seeks to bridge the knowledge gap regarding how students successfully navigate the demands of rigorous

coursework alongside extracurricular activities, offering fresh perspectives on the interconnections between mental health, personal development, and academic achievement within the realm of student life.

This research addresses the identified gap by exploring how student dancers can implement effective time management interventions tailored to their specific requirements, in parallel with their intensive dance training. Furthermore, it will investigate the role of institutional support in fostering a harmonious balance between extracurricular obligations and academic responsibilities. The implications of this study could extend to influencing subsequent research, developing targeted interventions, and initiating policy reforms designed to provide student dancers with a holistic educational experience that nurtures their creative, intellectual, and personal growth.

2. Purpose of the Study

It specifically aims to answer to the following questions: (a) What are student-dancers' experiences in managing their time and balancing academics? (b) How do student-dancers cope with managing time and balancing academics? (c) What are student-dancers' insights about managing time and balancing academics that can be shared with others?

3. Method

Research Participants

This phenomenological study was participated in by 14 Student-Dancers from the UM Tagum College, Davao del Norte, Philippines. Among the 14 participants, seven (7) underwent in-depth interviews, while the other seven (7) were subjected to Focus Group Discussion (FGD). This study supported the hypothesis proposed by Alhazmi & Kaufmann (2022) that a phenomenological study with five to twenty participants is suitable for conducting qualitative research and that the sample size is adequate to meet the study's information needs. The researchers used non-probability sampling to choose the participants. According to Nikolopoulou (2022), "purposeful sampling" is a collection of non-probability sampling techniques that select units according to the characteristics you need in your sample. Stated differently, "on purpose" unit selection is a component of purposive sampling. To ensure rich, detailed qualitative data, the study's participants were needed to meet the following inclusion criteria: (a) Must be enrolled in the UM Tagum College for the school year 2024-2025; (b) actively participate in a dance program, group, or team; and (c) be willing to participate in the study.

4. Research Instrument

In this study, the researchers utilized a researcher-made interview guide as the research instrument. This primary tool allowed a detailed analysis of student-dancers' experiences, coping strategies, and distinctive viewpoints. These discussions would be guided by open-ended questions, allowing participants to explore unique tales and points of view. Before the interview guide questionnaire could be used in the study, it was reviewed by a panel of experts and examiners to ensure that it was free from issues related to relevance, clarity, and accuracy. To thoroughly analyze the interviews, participants' answers were recorded using an audio recording device to ensure accuracy for further detailed analysis.

5. Data Analysis

To identify and analyze patterns among their answers, Thematic analysis was employed within the qualitative data, thereby capturing a holistic view of the coping experiences and providing an in-depth understanding of

the participants' insights and experiences. About this, Naeem et al. (2023) stated that Thematic analysis offers a specific technique designed to anchor scholars' written discourse into real-life contexts. These processes include theme interpretation and selection of keywords and quotations. Thematic analysis is centered on a particular problem or question, and it involves devising a plan to gather participants' answers, flagging qualitatively important responses, organizing these responses into themes, and refining these themes until they accurately represent the study.

6. Results and Discussion

6.1 Experiences of Student-Dancers in Managing Their Time and Balancing Academics

6.1.1 Time management

Many participants emphasized the importance of allocating specific time slots for various tasks, such as attending dance practices in the evening, studying or working on projects in the afternoon, and attending classes in the morning. They can maintain their academic and extracurricular obligations thanks to this methodical approach. Using scheduling and other tools to keep track of schedules was stressed in some comments, particularly when juggling dance training and homework. Managing one's time effectively also entails focusing entirely on one task at a time, like studying.

With this theme, Anna (pseudonym) stated that:

(I organize my time with my work and always limit my workloads to balance them correctly.)

Jake (pseudonym) also conveyed that:

(I manage my time to do some of my activities, for example, an assignment in the evening after practice. I just finished my homework, so that tomorrow I will be ready to pass.)

Several scholars have investigated the challenges faced by students who engage in both extracurricular and academic activities. Specifically, Kennett et al. (2019) developed the University Life Experience (ULE). In their study, they examined the students' strategies for balancing their time between schoolwork and extracurricular activities. Their study highlighted that students' ability to balance their responsibilities significantly impacts their engagement and commitment in school. The researchers also emphasized that balancing multiple responsibilities simultaneously is particularly challenging because it requires a significant amount of time and energy to ensure everything works out as planned. Their study also emphasizes the importance of academic resourcefulness, as it shows that students who could manage their huge workload more effectively were more capable and able to focus on their studies, even when balancing every task they had, which felt very challenging.

6.1.2 Exhaustion

Many students claimed they could not study late at night, even when preparing for a test the next day. Some even stated that they fell asleep immediately after their practices, which eventually led to them missing the opportunity to review for their exams or quizzes. Due to this difficulty, their minds become overwhelmed with deciding whether to study, rest, or complete their projects and assignments.

By this theme, Anna (pseudonym) shared that:

(It is tough for me because I am lazy when I get tired. Also, a lot is going on in my

mind, which is why I cannot manage my time.)

Sarah (pseudonym) affirmed this, noting that:

(We have the same challenges with letter B. If it's time for practice, I only focus on my practice. Previously, our dance practice was from 5 to 6 pm, and then after returning home, I focused on my needs from 7 to 9 pm. Afterwards, I focused on my studies from 7 to 9 pm. Nevertheless, sometimes I fall asleep from exhaustion and miss my supposed schedule.)

Academic commitments that cause long-term stress can lead to emotional exhaustion, a decline in motivation, and a decline in academic achievement. Similarly, Cruz (2024) found that overloaded school activities lead to weariness, disrupted sleep habits, and increased stress among students, significantly impairing their academic focus and motivation, ultimately making it challenging for them to complete academic work efficiently. Students may experience long-term adverse effects on their general well-being and academic performance if these issues are left unaddressed. Burnout, low motivation, and decreasing academic performance can result from ongoing physical and mental exhaustion.

6.1.3 Mental health struggles

Students talked about how having several responsibilities, such as combining dancing chores and preparing for an oral recitation, could cause too much stress and confusion. Continually managing many responsibilities results in emotional exhaustion and a lack of motivation, which makes it difficult to concentrate, sleep, or even find the energy to continue doing both tasks effectively.

By the theme, Anna (pseudonym) shared that:

(What I have experienced is that it is very stressful and causes mood swings. It is hard to balance both practices and academics. For example, you have an oral recitation tomorrow, and at the same time, you are responsible for dancing. Anxiety increases as you do not know what to do first.)

Ethan (pseudonym) further shared that:

(It is very draining both physically and mentally. It is very tiring to think after class, as you have to train, so both mentally and physically, it is tiring. I need to endure it for I am committed to this.)

Burnout, stress, and worry may prevent students from participating in extracurricular activities, leading to cognitive impairment and procrastination, according to Murali & Avudaiappan (2024). These mental health issues impair general well-being and academic achievement, underscoring the necessity of supportive settings that promote involvement and resiliency. If not addressed, these mental health issues can lead to persistent anxiety, long-term emotional exhaustion, and poorer academic achievement. Students may start to lose interest in their studies and passions, which could lead to quitting extracurricular activities or a general decline in their well-being. In more extreme situations, untreated mental health conditions can result in persistent mental health disorders and have an impact on a student's future academic or career achievements.

6.2 How Student-Dancers Cope in Managing Time and Balancing Academics

6.2.1 Physical and Mental Rest

Some students even mentioned that getting enough sleep alone helps them feel refreshed. Others

chose quiet places, such as the university's gym bleachers or the outdoors. Even for others, praying, meditating, playing games, hanging out with supportive friends, and listening to music keep them going, which helps them further relax and think effectively about managing their time.

Following the theme, Anna (pseudonym) shared:

(For me, it's to rest. If I'm stressed about my work, I look for a place to rest, like at the gym bleachers or the mini forest.)

Leo (pseudonym) conveyed his experience:

(For me, sleeping relieves my stress and recharges my body. Also, the good relationship with my co-dancers relieves my stress.)

In related studies, Blevins et al. (2021) noted that students must take a physical and mental break, which involves managing stress to perform better. Some recovery techniques shared by the participants are crucial for maintaining overall well-being and preventing stress while balancing multiple tasks. Additionally, Wright & Layman (2020) confirmed that mental health programs for students should be combined, focusing on the physical and mental aspects. Furthermore, one participant emphasized zoning out. Bhanji (2023) supported this act as a valuable strategy for refocusing and resetting. This study is most instrumental in high-performance demands. Intentional sleep is not a means to procrastinate, but rather a way to achieve beneficial mental rest. While mental rest strengthens emotional resilience, physical rest helps prevent injuries that are common in demanding activities, such as dancing.

6.2.2 Social Support

Many student-dancers also seek help and guidance, not just emotional support, from their families. Others even find it comforting to talk with their mentors, friends, and partners who would offer them another perspective, advice, and listen to them without judgment.

Under the theme, Jake (pseudonym) stated that:

(So when I'm struggling in both academics and as a dancer, and with my finances, I turn to my family for support or motivation to handle my situation. We should put it in our minds that we have nothing but our family.)

Mia (pseudonym) further noted that:

(I seek support from my family, mostly from my mother. She is my comfort; I even cry in front of her. Whenever I talk to my mother, it relieves my stress and freshens up my mind, and motivates me.)

These findings were supported by Vetrivel et al. (2024), noting that it can reduce the overall stress levels of students. Additionally, Wongtongkam (2019) noted that emphasizing this aspect will help students manage every challenge, even if it doesn't immediately alleviate their mental distress. With this, students who learn to ask for help and share their struggles develop strong social skills and emotional intelligence, which are essential for building good thinking skills and managing stress as they grow up. Additionally, each participant varies in their sources of support; however, it is essential to note that social support plays a crucial role in preventing isolation. Having someone to rely on nurtures relationships among people and offers guidance, support, and accountability throughout their lives.

6.2.3 Time Management as Key Strategy

Creating personalized schedules for their tasks is essential, as both their dance and school duties are

relevant. By planning their time wisely and applying adaptability and emotional awareness, they can shine through as they shift between dance and academic responses to deadlines or stress. The participants realized that both fields demand commitment and planning, so they must prioritize them to ensure both are accommodated efficiently. Academic tasks require constant attention, just as practices often extend beyond scheduled times.

Following the concept, Anna (pseudonym) shared:

(It's about time management, and also knowing how to handle things effectively. When I feel stressed at work, I turn to dancing because I enjoy it, and it helps me unwind and relax. Then, when I get tired from dancing, I shift back to academics because we don't want to fall behind on school activities.)

Chloe (pseudonym) further shared that:

(As a student and a dancer simultaneously, it is crucial to balance your time. Dance practices are not as easy as people might think, and they also take up personal time. Practices do not just end on schedule; you still need to practice at home.)

Romero-Pérez and Sánchez-Lissen (2022) assert that efficient time management is crucial for students, especially those engaged in dance, as it allows them to balance their artistic endeavors with their academic responsibilities. These studies indicate that students acquire vital life skills through effective time management, such as organization, discipline, stress management, and prioritization. As they face increasingly challenging tasks in their higher education or professional journeys, these skills foster a stronger work ethic and reduce the risk of burnout. Furthermore, achieving a balance between academic pursuits and artistic activities, such as dance, encourages overall development, facilitating intellectual growth, artistic expression, and emotional well-being.

6.3 The Insights of Student-Dancers about Managing Time and Balancing Academics that can be shared with others

6.3.1 Being mindful and setting priorities

In this context, mindfulness refers to making thoughtful decisions about allocating time, energy, and commitments while being aware of one's present physical, mental, and emotional states. On the other hand, setting priorities entails determining what is most important at the time, such as attending a crucial dancing rehearsal or achieving an academic deadline, and then acting accordingly.

By the concept, Anna (pseudonym) shared:

(My advice to other student-dancers is to do mind management. Think before you do some things. Then, time management is essential to organize your tasks.)

Lily (pseudonym) also stated that:

(My advice is that whenever you want to give up, always think why others did not and if they can, you can do it too. Provided that you stick to a schedule, you will not panic.)

Kandhal et al. (2021) highlighted that many college students struggle with time management, underscoring that prioritization is as vital as daily preparation. By setting clear goals, students can improve their performance and balance academic responsibilities with extracurricular activities. Furthermore, Marais et al. (2020) observed that mindfulness-based programs can significantly enhance students' academic

flexibility. As a result, if these students adopt these habits, they are more likely to become emotionally mature and develop the decision-making skills that are essential for adulthood. They would be better prepared to handle complex tasks and are less likely to feel overwhelmed when they properly learn how to assess situations like this.

6.3.2 Between Teachers and Students, communication is the Key to Prevent Misunderstandings

Many noted that these issues often go unnoticed by some teachers. Participants highlighted that requesting a flexible schedule or simply informing their subject teachers about scheduling conflicts could greatly alleviate stress and tension, fostering better understanding between both parties. This realization highlights the importance of establishing a communication channel fostering a supportive environment where academic responsibilities and dance commitments are equally valued.

Noah (pseudonym) further stated that:

(Some teachers understand because they see this as our work, and there are also strict teachers, which is understandable since schoolwork is important. However, if a teacher prioritizes the well-being or health of their students, they should give them time or a chance to enjoy what they love doing.)

Lucas (pseudonym) stated that:

(Especially for student dancers, you can raise concerns with higher authorities. Although not everyone can take these opportunities, like when someone fails because they did not have time to study due to overtime practice.)

The theme aligns with the findings of Leek et al. (2024), who investigated how teachers and students understand and utilize time in classroom activities. Their research indicates that open communication between the two is crucial for effective management and mutual understanding. Valente et al. (2024) investigated the relationship between reducing procrastination and effective time management in school settings to support this educational sustainability.

If practiced, this will have a significant effect as encouraging open communication builds a culture of respect, trust, and teamwork between teachers and students. Students will feel productive and recognized if teachers listen to and guide them. It will also boost their motivation to perform well and give their best. By listening to the experiences of these students, teachers can develop more thoughtful practices, policies, and workload distribution.

6.3.3 Create an admirable character

They frequently cited traits like responsibility, humility, self-discipline, empathy, and accountability as essential character attributes that enabled them to manage their simultaneous duties successfully. These principles in the classroom and dance studio influence how students tackle problems, deal with failures, and relate to others. They motivate their classmates and provide a good example by aiming to become successful students, performers, and well-rounded people.

By the theme, Lily (pseudonym) shared:

(Do not neglect your responsibilities, because in the end it is you who will suffer.)

Max (pseudonym) also shared his experience:

(Everybody has their crowded schedules, as a student and a classmate, always remain

kind and understanding with and among others.)

Effective time management is intimately related to self-regulation, which includes goal-setting, progress monitoring, and maintaining self-discipline (Wolters & Brady, 2021). Furthermore, a variety of strategies used by students to navigate their path to academic success were investigated by MPremchander et al. (2024). The student-dancers' study highlights the value of goal-setting and self-awareness by showcasing their use of self-discipline, time management, prioritization, and consistent effort qualities.

Early development of admirable character aids in developing resilient, considerate, and grounded people who can successfully traverse their personal and professional lives. These characteristics add to emotional intelligence, which is becoming more and more important in relationships, the workplace, and leadership positions. Those with good character are more likely to be respected and trusted by others, make wise choices under duress, and be good role models in their communities.

7. Implications for Educational Practice

This research study strongly emphasizes time management skills, highlighting the need for educational institutions to recognize and address the diverse challenges faced by students who are balancing multiple tasks simultaneously, including scheduling when to prioritize one task over another. Schools should consider implementing a more flexible academic system to support students facing various demands. Several options include asynchronous learning, flexible deadlines, and academic counseling tailored to high-achieving students.

The highlighted themes in this study, particularly those related to communication and character development, have emphasized the need to develop soft skills in educational environments. Teachers should be encouraged to maintain an ongoing communication with their students, all while promoting openness, adaptability, and empathy. Training sessions on faculty lecturing help raise awareness of the challenges that these students face and encourage a more accepting and compassionate classroom environment.

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