

Balancing work and study at a Neo-Liberal University: Motivations and social effects of part-time employment among NU undergraduate students

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Abstract

Capstone project investigates the motivations of Nazarbayev University (NU) students for engaging in part-time work with their studies, within the consideration of the university as a neo-liberal institution. The study explores the influence of neoliberal policies shaped by Kazakhstan's post-Soviet political climate under President Nursultan Nazarbayev, which emphasize privatization, meritocracy, individualism, self-reliance, and competition. It assesses the effects of these policies on the educational system overall and thus students' academic performance, personal life, health, and career opportunities through seven semi-structured interviews. The project employs three main theoretical perspectives: Self-Determination Theory to evaluate personal motivations for work; The New Spirit of Capitalism to understand corporate expectations and self-exploitation; and Ecological Systems Theory to analyze socio-ecological influences on students' decisions. The findings aim to provide insights into how a neoliberal educational environment like at NU, which prioritizes corporate competitiveness and professional flexibility, motivates students to work and impacts their lives and career paths.

Introduction

This capstone project examines students' motivations in combining work and study, how the Nazarbayev university relates to the concept of a neo-liberal university and how it influenced their decision in taking a part-time job. Additionally, what consequences are observed in the lives of students, such as grades in studies, personal life, health and career opportunities. 7 semi-structured interviews were conducted among NU students.

Neoliberal policies, influenced by the country's politics led by President Nursultan Nazarbayev, have transformed higher education since the Soviet Union's collapse. There is a shift towards neoliberal principles like privatization, meritocracy, individualism, self-reliance, and competition in the university system that affected students' experience (Bayetova, 2021). Neoliberal university is defined by its emphasis on corporate competitiveness, and cultivating flexible professionals. Nazarbayev University fits this description, as it invests substantially in technology and research, and actively promotes career opportunities. According to Kucera (2010), NU has a special autonomous status and independence from bureaucratic governance and academic freedom. Moreover, as it is stated in official institutional documents "Nazarbayev University is committed to excellence in research and education; our institution's core values are academic freedom, institutional autonomy, and merit-based admission and progression system". This environment encourages students to pursue internships, enhance resumes, and develop skills during undergraduate studies, potentially impacting not only ambitions but also mental well-being.

To understand the motivations driving students to manage work and academic commitments, three main concepts will be applied. Firstly, to assess students' personal motivations, Self-Determination Theory will be applied to find out if jobs fulfill individuals' desires for autonomy,

competence, and belonging. As NU students may feel pressured to engage in work experiences for future career prospects. Secondly, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, characterizing the corporate landscape, suggests that NU students may see gaining practical experience as necessary to align with socially responsible corporate expectations and expose themselves to self-exploitation because of the corporate freedom in the workplace. Lastly, the Ecological Systems Theory by Urie Bronfenbrenner explores how socio-ecological factors, including family dynamics and peer influences, may influence a student's decision to work alongside their studies, and divides these factors into categories as macro and micro level influence, where the close people influence can be placed in micro group, whereas neoliberal environment and corporate market can be considered as macro influence.

Literature Review

The pursuit of higher education at neo-liberal universities is a journey with opportunities and yet, at times, considerable challenges. As students in their undergraduate studies at institutions like Nazarbayev University, often find it hard to balance between academic commitments and the necessity to work for various personal needs. This literature review focuses on the determinants that influence undergraduate students at Nazarbayev University to engage in part-time employment, and additionally, seeks to discover the potential effects of it on various aspects of life, including professional development, personal life, and academic achievements. NU is selected as the target community for this study as it can be classified as a Neo-liberal university, which places a high emphasis on competitiveness and the preparation of students for roles in the corporate world. This literature review will also explore broader societal and economic concepts, including *The New Spirit of Capitalism* and other theories that influence students' motivations and experiences in balancing work and study.

Research Context: Neo-liberal University and Student Employment

Kazakhstan, a former Soviet republic, shifted from a planned to a market economy in the early 1990s, and that significantly impacted its higher education system. The study by Bayetova 2021 explores how these policies, influenced by the country's political landscape and led by President Nursultan Nazarbayev, have transformed higher education since then. Using grounded theory and analyzing policy documents, the study reveals a shift towards neoliberal principles like privatization, meritocracy, individualism, self-reliance, and competition. The study shows that the case of Nazarbayev university aligns with the concept of neoliberalism in the educational system as this community positions itself as a merit based institution with equal opportunities.

The existing literature provides valuable insights into the dynamics of balancing work and study among undergraduate students. Startseva and Bryukhova (2016) conducted a study that aimed to uncover the essence of the student employment phenomenon and evaluate how it influences students' professional growth. The investigation identified students work primarily not only out of

financial necessity, in fact, 25% of students note the need to gain experience before graduating from university in order to further have an advantage when applying for a job. About 70% of respondents work in their specialty and it was they who highlighted the following points among their motivation: 1) acquiring a professional skill 2) gaining work experience for further employment 3) adapting to the work environment. Also, it is worth noting that the desire to obtain the necessary professional skills among 4th year students is higher than among 2nd year students. Furthermore, Clements and Kamau's research in 2018 wrote about what motivates students to engage in proactive career actions, using the perspectives of goal-setting theory and the job demands-resources model. The results indicate that students who participate in part-time employment during studies are more likely to perceive improved adaptability, primarily due to their proactive career efforts such as working on their skills and expanding professional networks. This study provides valuable insights into the motivations behind students' employability in a competitive job market for recent graduates. In 2021 research, Kukla et al. studied the experiences of more than 400 students from Poland and Ukraine and came to the conclusion that career experience is necessary for students in the era of globalization. According to respondents, the labor market has changed and now at work it is not so much academic knowledge that is valued, but rather practical experience, social competence and other soft skills. The paper addresses challenges that graduates encounter and explores strategies for institutions in the face of a dynamically changing job market. The authors argue that the current education system also needs to adapt and introduce as much practice as possible for students and job opportunities to work while studying.

These studies offer valuable insights into the motivations and social effects of student employment at a neo-liberal university and how the NU community relates to it. They provide a foundation for further research and offer a comprehensive view of the needs, challenges and opportunities faced by undergraduate students.

Research Context: Motivation and Social Effects

While previous studies focus on trends in students' employment, these studies now analyze students' motivations to work and how it affects their lives. In the study by Curtis (2007), the primary focus is on British university students who undertake employment during their academic semesters to cover their educational expenses due to rising debts and diminished parental financial support. The research underscores that while a significant number of students see benefits in working, there are also reservations and inconsistencies regarding the negative consequences. This study has shown that working while studying negatively affects academic performance and students are asking universities and other stakeholders to help solve this work-study balance problem. In a related study, Ostoj (2020) explores the significance of motivations and effects associated with student employment during full-time studies, focusing on an Economics study program in Poland. Using survey data collected from 2014 to 2017, the research identifies a correlation between factors such as how well a job aligns with the major at university, gaining necessary skills for future career, and opportunity to get a job offer from the same employer after

graduation. Moreover, this paper reveals connections between the students' work experience and their further skills and openness to change and adapt. Authors also found a connection between the level of job difficulty and students' ability to balance jobs with personal and academic lives. Summer et al. (2023) in their recent study reveal the unseen consequences of student employment. They unveil four effects associated with student employment, including challenges on schedules and planning, more complicated financial decision-making, potential negative impacts on students' social interactions with peers and other communities, deteriorated psychological well-being, and the level of compensation students get from their work. From these results we see that studying social effects may lead to new insights on students' employment and may help to construct more comprehensive questions for qualitative research. Mussayeva's 2020 research investigated the experience of full-time undergraduate students in Kazakhstan universities who combine their studies with part-time jobs. According to the results, this dual students' dedication is based primarily on financial need for personal goals or paying debt for studies. Author states that the main impact of having a job was on students' personal development. Most respondents claim that they have better time management skills, become more creative and hard-working, yet more adapted to changing labor markets. While the study shows mostly advantages, it also brings notable challenges, especially with academic life. Additionally, the study emphasizes the significance of support from universities like financial programs or in the curriculum. Tsvetkova and Lagvilava's research in 2022 provides insights on the values and beliefs of working and non-working students. The study reveals that, overall, both groups have similar levels of social values, but students with jobs tend to place slightly more importance on individual priorities. Likewise, the concept of "power" carries greater weight for working students, whereas non-working students place more emphasis on "independence". These findings give an insight on theoretical frameworks that might explain why some students work and others do not in the same circumstances, as their perspectives and priorities on conformity and accomplishments offer foundation for personal motivations.

Theoretical Framework

Boltanski and Chiapello's "The New Spirit of Capitalism" describes how the labor market has changed with capitalism and how companies and employers have changed their values and requirements for employees. This concept provides novel aspects in the corporate world like adaptability, self-reliance, and innovation, with a particular emphasis on values driven by market and profit maximization. The main idea is that workers today are given complete freedom in the workplace. That is, the boundaries of requirements and tasks are erased, there is only a goal and the employee can independently decide how to get there, based on his skills and experience. Thus, at this stage, not only knowledge, but also soft skills and creativity are important in a potential employee. In order to compete with others, one must also develop them. This concept can explain the competitive society that has formed and requires the student to work while studying. Della Porta et al (2015) propose that the idea of "precarization", characterized by rising job insecurity and instability in the job market, provides an explanation for working students. It shows how the

economic instability in the labor market can result in stress, mental health challenges among people and as a result motivate students to work. Hence, emphasizing the significance of attaining future employment security through part-time positions at early steps. Pyysiäinen et al. research in 2017 examine how neoliberal governance delivered "responsibilization" to individual actors. This concept is that society has changed its concept of responsibility with the advent of neoliberalism. In other words, if previously institutions were largely responsible for people's lives, now each person is responsible individually. Thus, people are given so-called freedom and a free market, where people themselves can choose what and how to achieve in life or at work or in school. The idea of Nazarbayev University is precisely based on giving students freedom in choosing subjects, majors, study schedules, interests and provides career opportunities through various news portals and events. This is how students become motivated to work because all conditions have been created for this and this is required by the current so-called freedom.

In Ryan and Deci's work from 2000, self-determination theory explores the environmental elements that either facilitate or weaken self-motivation and psychological state. It recognizes the need for core personal characteristics like proficiency in a particular area, independence, and interpersonal communications, which have a substantial impact on the people's lives. The essence of the theory is that within every person there is this need to become a personality in the eyes of other people. This theory can help explain how work helps students position themselves in a certain way in society and feel like they belong to a community. Furthermore, it explains why being unemployed can have negative consequences and feelings of alienation from society. Bronfenbrenner's in 2005 proposes the ecological systems theory that offers a structure for examining why students choose to engage in part-time employment, underscoring the connection between individuals and their surrounding environments. This theory acknowledges that students' motivations are based not solely by their individual traits or needs but also by the impacts of family, school, peer relationships, and broader societal and cultural elements. It is valuable for considering external forces like parental aspirations, peer pressure, and societal expectations that may contribute to students' motivations. There is another sociological theory that explains motivations proposed by Michener and DeLamater in 1999 called Reinforcement Theory of motivation. In general, this theory can explain the motivation of any human decisions, but in the sphere of work and study the concepts can be seen more clearly. The theory is based on the fact that there are always external factors that influence motivation; they can be both positive and negative. Factors refer to rewards and so-called punishments. Hence, in the case of working students, they receive money, experience and networking as a reward, while by refusing to work, they do not receive this and, moreover, may also lose, for instance, their position in comparison with other peers. This theory will also help design interview questions to gain deeper insight into your true motivations for working while studying.

Methods

The reviewed literature consists of key resources that offer guidance and practical insights into qualitative research methods and the analysis of qualitative findings. In the book "Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences" by Berg and Lune (2012), guidance is provided for various aspects of qualitative research, starting from data collection to analysis and the presentation of findings. The book places a significant emphasis on the ethical considerations inherent in research, stressing the importance of conducting studies with consideration and responsibility. Additionally, it recognizes the Internet's role as a valuable resource for qualitative data, offering the opportunity to approach projects with heightened awareness and access to a diverse range of qualitative sources. Goldberg and Allen's article from 2015 focus on the art of crafting qualitative manuscripts and improving the quality of qualitative writing, the authors offer clear instructions for structuring key sections of a qualitative article, including the Introduction, Method, Results, and Discussion. By providing tangible posts, this reference helps with the tools to enhance writing and analytical skills in the qualitative research contributing to the study.

Research Design

Research Sample, Recruitment and Feasibility

The research design for this study uses a qualitative approach, employing semi-structured interviews among undergraduate students at Nazarbayev University with part-time employment experience. The semi-structured format of the interviews were conducted among 7 students. They were selected through purposeful sampling to ensure diverse perspectives from different majors and experiences. This design allows for in-depth exploration of the experiences, motivations, challenges, and outcomes associated with part-time employment among undergraduate students at Nazarbayev University. The semi-structured nature of the interviews provides flexibility, allowing respondents to express themselves freely while ensuring key topics are covered.

Purposeful sampling will be initially employed to select students with relevant part-time work experience, ensuring diverse perspectives. The research population comprises undergraduate students at Nazarbayev University who have engaged in part-time employment during their studies. The participants are selected based on their part-time work experience in a company during their academic pursuits. Only participants with work experience in the corporate sphere were selected, as they have insights not only on combining work and study, but also on labor market and company systems to investigate macro level factors. The chain referral or snowball method will be applied for participant recruitment. Interviews will take place on campus, in quiet locations such as individual rooms in the library. Each interview lasted 20-30 minutes. Interviews were recorded with the Iphone Recording app and transcribed via Microsoft Office Word with participants' written consent to maintain confidentiality.

The analysis follows an open coding approach with the help of Atlas.ti software platform, initially identifying and labeling concepts or themes. Recurring themes and variations related to the motivations for employment among undergraduate students at the Nazarbayev University were

analyzed. Furthermore, continuously compare data across different participants and categories. This involves going back and forth between the data and the emerging themes, refining the categories as needed. Lastly, considering the broader context of the Neo-Liberal University and how external factors might influence the motivations for employment among undergraduate students.

Findings and Discussion

The capstone research project is meant to reveal students' motivations in combining work and study, how the Nazarbayev university relates to the concept of a neo-liberal university and how it influenced their decision in taking a part-time job. Furthermore, what consequences are observed in the lives of students, such as grades in studies, personal life, health and career opportunities.

Participants' description table:

№	Major	Gender	Job description	Features
1	mathematics	female	Staff at International Audit and Accounting company from "Big4"	Started in her 3rd year of study and became staff during senior year, online work, flexible schedule, professional work experience
2	economics	female	Internship at construction company, business assistant	Paid internship, and also had experience of unpaid one at financial center, professional work experience, from 2nd to 4th year
3	computer science	male	Software engineer, middle level at IT company	Started internship during 1st year and became staff at 2nd year, hybrid mode, professional work experience
4	political science and international relations	female	Staff at ministry	Have experience of unpaid or low paid internships, professional work experience, from 3rd to 4th year
5	sociology	female	Staff at Hotel, HR department	professional work experience, started unpaid internship and became staff after 2 months, from 3rd to 4th year
6	world languages and linguistics	female	Internships at factory and audit company from	Have experience of low paid internships, hybrid mode of working, change of professional

			“Big4”	field, from 4th year
7	chemical engineer	male	Staff at consulting company	Change of professional field, having an unpaid internship and then becoming stuff, from 3rd to 4th year

7 interviews were conducted among working students. Several trends and themes have been identified that are expressed in this outline:

1. Personal motivations for Part-Time Employment
 - 1.1 CV Enhancement
 - 1.2 Financial Need
 - 1.3 Peer Pressure
2. Neoliberalism
 - 2.1 NU Community Influence
 - 2.2 Labor Market Trends
 - 2.3 Choice of Professional and Non-Professional Employment
3. Consequences
 - 3.1 Academic Performance
 - 3.2 Health and Mental State
 - 3.4 Student’s Life
 - 3.5 Personal and Professional Growth

1. Motivations for part-time employment.

1.1. Participants were primarily motivated by the desire to gain professional experience and enhance their CVs. One of the respondents with a major in computer science stated: “.. there is importance of work experience for programmers, it is more valued than academic qualifications in the job market”. Respondent 2 stated “Initially, the main motivation for working was financial independence. Later, it shifted towards gaining experience and building a strong CV to enhance future employability”. All of them mentioned the need to build the CV and they know how to do it, they mentioned the workshops conducted by Career Advising Center at NU. Moreover, they claim that most of their activities like volunteering, being part of student organization or sport club, also partly because it could contribute to building their personal representation later during the application process for a job or master degree. This argument can be explained by a few theoretical frameworks that examine the personal motivations and desires of individuals. First of all, it is Self-determination theory by Ryan and Deci's work from 2000. According

to it, individuals strive for autonomy and respect. Building a CV, posting it on social media and telling about personal achievements apart from academic ones, contribute to their social identity and fulfill their needs. Secondly, this need also relates to the concept of neo-liberal university described in the work by Bayetova (2022). Resume shows students individualism, which is part of neoliberal principles. Lastly, students' answers relate to the concepts introduced by Startseva and Bryukhova (2016) that students tend to have a need for professional growth and that 25% of students with experience before graduating have an advantage when applying for a job.

1.2. Financial considerations. According to Mussayeva's research about employment among undergraduates in different Kazakhstani universities, the financial need or rewards is considered as a crucial one for students. However, according to the Nazarbayev university respondents, the financial news was not a primary reason for employment. It was an additional motivation for students to take on part-time jobs, to support themselves financially during their studies. For instance, Speaker 3 "I initially took up jobs to become financially independent from their parents and gain work experience. Later, the primary motivation shifted towards gaining experience relevant to their field of study". Furthermore, more than half of respondents had an experience of internships for free or low paid jobs. One of the arguments: "Initially, the main motivation for working was financial independence. Later, it shifted towards gaining experience and building a strong CV to enhance future employability". Another respondent mentioned: "internship provided valuable insights into various aspects of business operations, which they deemed more important than just the financial compensation". This contradicts the study by Curtis (2007), which mentioned not only negative consequences for academic grades, but also financial need as a one of the primary reasons for employment among students. This argument justifies that NU differs from many other Kazakhstani and even international universities, as the neoliberal principles that institution employ, imposed students' professional, competition, capital values over materialistic at that point of academic journey. In addition, in the question about imagining another situation and environments, as being a student at another state university, respondents supposed that they would probably think less about future professional career that early, and could work in a non-professional field. For example, respondent 2 claimed: "Looking at my relatives, brothers and sisters from other universities, I believe that probably I would care less about working in a company and could go and work in services or be a freelancer. I mean, those relatives for now do not really care about future careers"

1.3. Social pressure. Apart from personal desires for professional identity or authority, students hugely experienced peer pressure and societal expectations, so that it also played a significant role in driving them towards part-time employment. One of the arguments was: "driven by both personal motivation and the influence of peers who were already employed in similar roles". This supports Ryan and Deci's work from 2000 on self-

determination theory as well, as the employment during studies became a criteria for raising authority and social status. This shows that in order to get a certain social status or to fit into the university community, they had to be employed by a company and declare it on social media or at least be able to say it during networking sessions. In addition, social media platforms like LinkedIn or Instagram also influenced career decisions. "I observed others' achievements on LinkedIn, which sometimes led to feelings of comparison but also served as motivation to strive for success". As well as the influence of student clubs: "...student clubs not only for personal interest but also to network with ambitious peers and future leaders in various fields. There's a sense of necessity to make connections for future career advancement". So therefore, besides personal motivations for individualism, students also experienced social pressure and need. According to Bronfenbrenner's 2005 proposed ecological systems theory, friends and family play a significant role on micro level. In the cases of respondents, in the motivation to take a job, peers more influenced their decisions, whereas family did less. Respondent 5 even mentioned that "parents on the other hand discouraged me from working and told me to focus more on studies, as I am a student for now, however, were very proud when I was accepted to work as a student". Tsvetkova and Lagvilava's research discovered that groups tend to have common social values, but at the same time place more importance on individual priorities. It could also be seen from answers that it is a common priority for most NU students to be employed, however, at the same time, they choose their own path, company, position, department etc.

2. Neoliberalism.

2.1. Role of the university community. University resources, such as career advising centers (CAC) and student clubs, contributed to motivating students to seek part-time employment. The university culture emphasized career readiness and provided opportunities for networking and skill development. One of the points was: "Being a student at Nazarbayev University, known for producing skilled professionals and may indirectly influence career decisions and opportunities". Most respondents highlighted guest lectures with alumni like "The university provided support through various means, including mentoring programs, networking events, and seminars with alumni". And overall need to be a specific type of student to fit the community: "feel a sense of accomplishment and validation from being part of a high-achieving community". Further, one of the speakers mentioned that being an NU student privileged to be employed, because of the brand and reputation: "Being a student at Nazarbayev University, known for producing skilled professionals, indirectly influenced my career decision and opportunity". All arguments above contribute to the concept of neo-liberal university, as meritocracy, competition and individualism. First of all, we have meritocracy from the first steps in applying to university and then in getting into different students clubs or being eligible to participate in certain events at being a speaker at the conference or alumni talks. Secondly,

competition, from thousands of students only a few would be posted on NU official accounts on social media or placed on billboards in skywalk. Even though it does not directly motivate respondents, it serves as a daily reminder of achievements, goals and competition.

2.2. Labor Market Trends. Most of the students agreed that there is a market demand in their field for the experience. “Soft skills gained from employment, such as communication and teamwork, were recognized as essential in the competitive labor market”, this support argument in the 2021 research by Kukla et al. that with globalization, there is a shift in market trends, so that companies are more looking for workers with experience. So, respondents’ ambitions align with a need for gaining unique expertise to stand out in the job market. “focus on gaining unique expertise to stand out in the job market. I prioritize professional growth and learning over higher-paying but less fulfilling job opportunities”. In addition, one of the respondents suggested the idea that this trend is prevalent in finance, economics, consulting fields as there are no major requirements for these positions and thus more competition, in comparison to, for example, chemical or civil engineering. This proves the new trends in the job market of freedom by Boltanski and Chiapello's "The New Spirit of Capitalism". Free schedule for SSH students allows them to combine work and study, and the online education mode for computer science students also provides flexibility. Environment at work also changed, for instance, interviewees from mathematics majors and working at Big4 company emphasize the project based work system, as well as computer science students with employment in IT, highlight the project based tasks, where they have freedom of place and approach. So, in that way, students work overtime and are able to combine it with studies with sacrifices in student life. Della Porta et al (2015) in a paper about the "precarization" concept describes nowadays job insecurity and instability in the job market, that contributes to the necessity for students to already build their background and their concerns and worries are depicted in this phenomena. As well as Pyysiäinen et al. research in 2017 introduced "responsibilization" and how today each person is responsible individually for their life, work and study. Respondents feel this change, if before, their parents already knew their future profession, job positions, responsibilities overall, these generations in the new Kazakhstani environment face instability and need for self-reliance. Therefore, taking their own steps towards an ambitious future.

2.3. Choice of Professional and Non-Professional Employment. Location, company reputation, and work environment were key factors influencing students' decisions when selecting part-time jobs. The flexibility of remote work was highly valued by students, allowing them to balance work and study more effectively. Also, those who had more than 1-2 jobs, already know better what they want from future companies and highlight supportive work culture and colleges as a criteria. As Ostoj (2020) suggested, students now are more likely to choose a job related to their field of study, for instance, respondent with

major in political science: “with the last two years focused on jobs related to their field, including positions in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and international organizations”.

3. Balancing Work and Study

3.1 Academic Performance. Half of the respondents did not notice changes in their academic life, rather student or personal. “Balancing part-time work with academics presented challenges, with fluctuations in academic performance noted, although better time management skills were developed over time”. However, another part stated that they had to skip classes, miss deadlines and even be forced to use ghostwriting as a means to maintain GPA. One of the related quotes: “I noted a decline in the importance of academics due to the demands of their job”. This was related mostly to the IT sphere where the degree is considered nowadays less necessary than work experience. Overall, students experienced struggles with the academics like: “Balancing work with academics has led to challenges, including a decline in GPA due to time constraints and stress” which contributes to the Mussayeva's 2020 research on Kazakhstani students, however, there are a few cases, where students saved their grades and on opposite became more productive and developed better time management and soft skills.

3.2. Health and Mental State. Work commitments often led to sacrifices in social activities, hobbies, and mental well-being, impacting overall life balance. “Maintaining a healthy sleep schedule and managing physical and mental well-being were key challenges”. 2 of the male respondents highlighted that they gained 10-15 kilograms during busy time. “The demands of work and study have resulted in stress and a sedentary lifestyle, contributing to weight gain and decreased physical activity”. The speaker acknowledges the need for better stress management but hasn't actively sought solutions like therapy or medication. Also, there was 1 student who mentioned the stress before employment, as being left behind other students. Moreover, most respondents stated that they would rather choose stress from work than from regret. This contributes to the Della Porta et al (2015) findings that students tend to have stress from not working and not gaining experience. This “fear of missing out” that half of the respondents mentioned, can be explained by Michener and DeLamater Reinforcement Theory of motivation. This theory is based on the idea of punishment, which is stated in the answers as “if I do not find an internship while being a student, it will be an intern as a graduate, while my peers are already staff”.

3.3 Student's Life. “Balancing work and study leads to some sacrifices, such as reduced time for personal life and hobbies”. However, the respondents feel more sense of accomplishment and validation from being part of a high-achieving community. Some of the respondents notice minor changes in student life: “I actively participate in extracurricular activities, showing a commitment to holistic development beyond

academics and even a president of a student club”. While the respondents do not regret their decision to work during their student years, they: “acknowledge the need for better work-life balance and would make adjustments to their approach if given the chance, such as negotiating a more flexible work schedule”. One out of 7 respondents stated that they regret working instead of living student life.

3.4 Personal and Professional Growth. Part-time employment provided valuable soft skills development and practical experience, enhancing students' career readiness. Some participants expressed regrets about missing out on social experiences and university life due to work commitments, highlighting the trade-offs. Despite challenges, students generally viewed their part-time employment experience as worthwhile for its contribution to their professional development and future career prospects. One of the respondents answered: “.. the role as a business assistant and intern provided valuable insights into various aspects of business operations, which they deemed more important than just the financial compensation”. These arguments contribute to Clements and Kamau's results in research about improved adaptability and building networks after work experience. Moreover, some respondents mentioned that they became more organized and productive because of the full schedule: “if before i had free time and could spend it on TikTok or serial, with work i feel that I am being more efficient”. Ostoj (2020) mentioned this phenomena on other students and that indeed, job difficulty influenced and even helped some students' ability to balance jobs with personal and academic lives.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the study's findings offer several significant contributions on higher education, neoliberalism, and labor market changes. Firstly, it explains the concept of the Neo-Liberal University within Kazakhstan, as described by Bayetova. Showing Nazarbayev University's case of competitiveness, career opportunities, and a motivated specialist atmosphere to neoliberal values. Additionally, finding new labor market trends and the requirement for work experience, leading to self-exploitation among students, offers a practical application of Bolatski's theory of the New Spirit of Capitalism. Unveiling students' internal motivations, such as the desire for equality, status, and community integration contributes to the understanding of non-financial motivations driving part-time employment among university students described by Ryan and Deci's (2000). Furthermore, the observation of proactive career behaviors with the job-demand model proposed by Clements and Kamau (2018), suggesting that this model is important for university students' employment strategies.

From a policy perspective, the study's insights can develop more supportive educational and labor market policies. Higher education institutions might consider integrating career development programs. This could include initiatives aimed at reducing the necessity for self-exploitation, such as more flexible curricula that allow for meaningful work experiences. Additionally, policymakers

could use these findings for labor market reforms that recognize the challenges of students, potentially leading to more sustainable employment practices. For university administrators this research can lead to more effective student support services. This might involve offering counseling and guidance that address both the practical aspects of job searching and the psychological needs.

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Appendix

Timeline of the stages of the research

8 January – 29 January – interviews 1-10

29 January – 5 February – transcription + identification of themes

5 February – 20 February – coding process and analysis

20 February – 1 March – full report (first draft) of data processed

17 March – preliminary final draft submission

Interview Guide

1. Can you please introduce yourself briefly, including your major, year of study, and overall experience at Nazarbayev University?
2. What are your academic goals and aspirations at NU?
3. Have you engaged in part-time employment during your studies at NU? If so, could you describe the nature of your work, including the industry and responsibilities?
4. What motivated you to seek part-time employment while studying at NU?
5. Have you encountered any challenges in balancing your academic and work responsibilities? (academic and personal life)
6. What outcomes do you perceive as a result of your engagement in part-time employment?
7. Have you experienced personal growth, skill enhancement, or any unexpected consequences?
8. Are there any lessons learned or valuable takeaways from your current situation?
9. What are your future plans regarding part-time employment and your academic pursuits?
10. How do you think your current experiences may shape your career goals moving forward?

Form of written consent

Introduction. You are invited to participate in a research study entitled Balancing work and study at a Neo-Liberal University: Motivations for employment among NU undergraduate students

Procedures. This research explores the motivations for employment among undergraduate students at Nazarbayev University, investigating the challenges and coping strategies associated with balancing work and study. Utilizing qualitative methods such as semi-structured interviews about your personal experience on this subject. The interview will take approximately 15 minutes to complete.

Risks. The potential risks of participating in this study are: psychological discomfort or stress for participants when discussing the challenges of balancing work and study, concerns about confidentiality and privacy.

Benefits. Opportunity for self-reflection as participants articulate and share their experiences, potentially gaining insights into their own challenges and coping mechanisms. Other benefits may arise from the potential for positive systemic changes within the university, like improved support services or policies addressing the needs of students balancing work and study.

Compensation. No tangible compensation will be given. A copy of the research results will be available at the conclusion of the study via email.

Confidentiality & Privacy. Any information that is obtained during this study will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by the law. All efforts, within reason, will be made to keep your personal information in your research record confidential but total confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. Data will be stored on NU Google drive and only researchers will have access to it.

Voluntary Nature of the Study. Participation in this study is strictly voluntary, and if agreement to participation is given, it can be withdrawn at any time without prejudice.

Points of Contact. It is understood that should any questions or comments arise regarding this project, or a research related injury is received, the Principal Investigator, Sofiya Shopanova +7 777 084 91 26 sofiya.shopanova@nu.edu.kz should be contacted. Any other questions or concerns may be addressed to the Nazarbayev University Institutional Research Ethics Committee, resethics@nu.edu.kz.

Statement of Consent.

I, _____,

Give my voluntary consent to participate in this study. The researchers clearly explained to me the background information and objectives of the study and what my participation in this study involves. I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary. I can at any time and without giving any reasons withdraw my consent, and this will not have any negative consequences for myself. I understand that the information collected during this study will be treated confidentially.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Researcher:

Signed _____ Date _____