

CHALLENGES UNIVERSITY STUDENTS FACE WHILE BALANCING WORK, STUDY AND PERSONAL LIFE AND STRATEGIES USED TO CONFRONT THEM

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ABSTRACT

Aim. This study examined the challenges university students encounter when balancing academic responsibilities, paid work, and personal life, the strategies they consider effective, and the perceived usefulness of art-coaching techniques for goal setting and balance improvement.

Methods. A sequential mixed-methods design was implemented in two phases. Phase 1 combined quantitative and qualitative survey data from 204 students aged 18–25 years in India ($n = 130$) and Ukraine ($n = 74$); open-ended responses were analysed thematically using QDA Miner Lite. Phase 2 comprised a pilot goal-setting workshop with 30 Indian and 10 Ukrainian students using the Wheel of Life Balance and Drawing a Reward techniques.

Results. Indian participants more often described routine, self-discipline, and over-commitment as difficulties, whereas Ukrainian participants more often referred to war-related disruption and unstable schedules. Across both groups, time management, prioritisation, boundaries between study and personal time, rest, sleep, stress management, and reduction of digital distractions emerged as central strategies. Workshop reflections indicated that the visual techniques helped participants identify low-satisfaction life domains and formulate personally meaningful goals.

Conclusions. The findings describe common and context-specific work–study–life challenges and suggest short-term acceptability of art-coaching tools for reflection and goal setting. Because the intervention was small and uncontrolled, its effectiveness requires confirmation in larger controlled and longitudinal studies.

Keywords: work–study–life balance, challenges, art coaching techniques, creativity, goal setting, well-being.

INTRODUCTION

University life is frequently accompanied by academic load, personal commitments, and part-time employment, requiring students to manage competing demands on their time and coping resources. The pressure to succeed academically is often compounded by the financial need to work and the desire to maintain a meaningful personal life. Achieving work–study–life balance can therefore be challenging for students and may affect mental health, academic performance, and the overall university experience. This study examines the obstacles university students face when meeting the demands of intensive study, part-time work, and personal well-being and explores the strategies they use to address these challenges. Students who work part-time may experience emotional exhaustion, while conflict between work and study can contribute to anxiety and stress that affect academic performance and personal life. Common challenges include family responsibilities, unmet expectations from parents, peers, and society,

and pressures related to personal identity. In India, balancing paid employment, academic load, and personal life is particularly relevant in the context of rising living costs and increasing expectations that students acquire work experience before graduation. Many students take part-time or full-time employment to meet tuition fees, living expenses, or family responsibilities, which may add to their overall workload and affect academic performance, well-being, and social relationships.

RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

Research on work–study–life balance among university students remains uneven across non-Western settings. Evidence from India is concentrated in employee, medical-student, and international-student populations, while wartime Ukrainian research has focused mainly on educational disruption and mental health. Direct examination of simultaneous academic, employment, and personal demands remains limited in both settings.

The theoretical framework combines Compensation Theory and Inter-role Conflict Theory. Graham L. Staines (1980) described compensation as the tendency to counter dissatisfaction or resource deficits in one life domain through greater involvement or satisfaction in another, while distinguishing compensation from spillover between work and nonwork domains. Inter-role conflict is grounded in role theory, which explains strain when expectations attached to different roles are incompatible (Kahn et al., 1964), and in the work–family conflict model of Jeffrey H. Greenhaus and Nicholas J. Beutell (1985), which distinguishes time-, strain-, and behaviour-based conflict. Applied to university students, these perspectives explain both competition among study, employment, and personal roles and attempts to restore balance across domains.

The aim of this study is to answer the following research questions:

- RQ1. What challenges do university students face while balancing academic responsibilities, paid work, and personal life?
- RQ2. Which strategies do students perceive as most effective in achieving a balanced work–study–life routine?
- RQ3. How do students perceive the usefulness of art-coaching techniques for identifying priorities, setting goals, and improving work–study–life balance?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review links work–life theory with evidence on student work–study demands, contextual conditions in India and Ukraine, and visual or coaching approaches relevant to the pilot intervention.

Work–life balance concerns the distribution of time, energy, and involvement across life domains so that participation in one domain remains compatible with functioning in others

(Kirchmeyer, 2000). Staines (1980) conceptualised compensation in contrast to spillover: negative experiences in one domain may be offset through greater involvement in another or may transfer across domains. The present study focuses on compensation as a mechanism of restoring perceived balance while recognising spillover as a complementary explanation for the transmission of stress between study, work, and personal life.

Role-conflict theory provides the second foundation. Robert L. Kahn et al. (1964) linked incompatible role expectations to tension and impaired functioning, while Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) specified time-, strain-, and behaviour-based forms of conflict across major life roles. Later work–life balance reviews place compensation, spillover, and inter-role conflict within a broader family of theories describing the work–nonwork interface (Bello & Tanko, 2020; Le et al., 2020).

According to the definition of work-study-life (WSL), work-study-life balance (WSLB) can be defined as a balance that combines a student’s three ‘categories of responsibility’: professional responsibilities, academic demands, and personal life (Vokić et al., 2021). The typical issues arising when students around the world try to balance study, work responsibilities with personal life are introduced in Table 1.

Table 1
Challenges in Balancing WSL Among University Students Around the World

Region	Typical challenges	Representative studies
Europe	- Higher dropout risk when work hours are high (esp. more than 10–15 hours/week). Negative impact on academic success. - Work had a negative impact on students’ academic achievement and engagement and could create tensions in their educational and social lives. - International students faced a range of social and personal challenges, including family expectations, relationships, and adaptation to social life in the host country. Lack of time contributed to social isolation and feelings of alienation.	(Lessky & Unger, 2022; Pusztai & Kocsis, 2019; O’Mahony & Jeske, 2019)
United States	- Large shares of students combine study with paid employment; working more than 20 hours per week is associated with lower grades, slower progression, and lower retention. - Financial need is an important reason for employment during study. - Work–school conflict and poor work–life balance are associated with stress, anxiety, depressive symptoms, and poorer health outcomes.	(DeSimone, 2008; Perna & Odle, 2020; Park & Sprung, 2013; Sprung & Rogers, 2020)
Australia	- Financial stress and living-cost pressures push many students to combine paid work with study. - Low income & precarious jobs correlate with poorer academic success and wellbeing.	(Gair, 2018)

Region	Typical challenges	Representative studies
Asia	- Combining study with professional and personal responsibilities creates competing demands on students' time and energy. - Intensive study requirements may disrupt work–life balance and contribute to stress and burnout. - Effective management of study, work, and personal roles is particularly important for working and professionally engaged students.	(Mylavarapu et al., 2024; Sharma et al., 2023)

Source. Compiled by the authors based on the studies cited in the table.

Across regions, paid employment and financial pressure repeatedly coincide with time conflict, weaker academic outcomes, and poorer well-being.

Based on the EUROSTUDENT project, which surveyed a substantial portion of the European Higher Education Area, 69% of students engage in paid work at some point during their studies, either during the semester or during breaks. Countries with particularly high proportions of working students include Norway, Estonia, Iceland, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, and Croatia (Gwosc et al., 2018). Michaela Prokes and Jan Klusacek (2025) reported that heavier academic demands were associated with more depressive symptoms among Czech university students. Financial necessity is also an important driver of student employment, as observed in the Scottish further-education context (Lowe & Gayle, 2007; 2014). In a survey of 1,188 business-school students, physical health, psychological well-being, and family relationships were among the most important factors associated with quality of life; excessive workloads were also linked to stress, burnout, and reduced time for hobbies and family (Szegegi et al., 2024).

Evidence specifically addressing work–study–life balance among Indian university students remains limited. Existing Indian research includes studies of workplace work–life balance (Sharma, 2024) and work–life balance among medical students (Mylavarapu et al., 2024). Broader higher-education evidence shows that time-consuming employment is not explained by financial necessity alone: working more than 10 hours per week is associated with a higher risk of early university exit, while the search for work experience is an additional predictor of intensive term-time employment, particularly among business students (Lessky & Unger, 2022). These findings indicate that student employment should be interpreted in relation to both economic pressures and programme-specific demands.

Selection of India and Ukraine was purposive at the contextual level rather than based on an assumption of cultural equivalence. Both groups consisted of university students aged 18–25 exposed to the same three role domains academic obligations, paid work where applicable, and personal responsibilities which provided a common structure for analysis. The surrounding conditions differed in factors directly relevant to work–study–life balance. In India, cultural, economic, and institutional conditions shape the work–life interface in Asian settings (Le et al.,

2020), while intensive study demands and restricted non-study time have been documented among Indian students (Mylavarapu et al., 2024). In Ukraine, displacement, disrupted educational routines, power interruptions, and wartime psychological strain affect study and daily functioning (Tsybuliak et al., 2023; Polovko & Glotov, 2023; Korda et al., 2025). The contrast permitted recurrent challenges to be distinguished from context-specific pressures. Country groups were analysed separately and compared descriptively; nationality was not treated as a causal factor. The feasibility of examining these two contexts was additionally supported by the composition of the research team, which included researchers affiliated with institutions in both India and Ukraine. This cross-context collaboration provided direct familiarity with the respective higher-education environments, facilitated context-sensitive recruitment and interpretation of the data, and supported parallel implementation of the study in both settings. Institutional access therefore contributed to the feasibility of the study but was not the sole rationale for country selection; the primary analytical rationale was to examine common work–study–life demands across two contrasting social and institutional contexts.

Researchers Natalia Tsybuliak et al. (2023) examined the challenges faced by the education system in Ukraine during the war, highlighting the significant losses of students and teachers due to displacement. The authors, being a part of the academic community themselves, stress the immediate intervention and research needed to develop strategies to protect the rights of staff and students. Another study (Korda et al., 2025) examines the psychological well-being and academic performance of Ukrainian medical students in safer regions of the country during the Russian-Ukrainian war. While focusing on psychological well-being, the paper directly links this to academic performance. These mentioned mental health challenges affect balancing the work–study–life, because students confront the emotional burden of war.

The authors (Polyvianaia et al., 2025) examined the risk and protective factors for mental health problems. They stated that symptoms of PTSD, anxiety, depression, and insomnia were reported in Ukrainian students during the full-scale of the Russian-Ukrainian war.

Olena Polovko and Sergei Glotov (2023) examined Ukrainian university students' experiences following the full-scale Russian invasion and reported that the transition to online learning was disrupted by power outages and airstrikes. Together, these studies illustrate the contextual pressures affecting students in Ukraine. Overall, the reviewed literature establishes the theoretical background of work–study–life balance and identifies challenges faced by students internationally and, more specifically, in India and Ukraine.

Independent evidence supports the use of visual and expressive activities as tools for emotional expression and self-reflection. Apoorva Shukla et al. (2022) reported potential benefits of art therapy for communication, mental health, interpersonal

functioning, and quality of life. Iryna Soroka et al. (2024), in a mixed-method study of 246 Indian university students, examined colour preferences and emotional and self-esteem responses to a colour-based activity. Although that study did not evaluate art coaching, it provides context-specific evidence that structured visual choices can engage emotional and self-reflective processes in Indian university students.

Two Indian scoping reviews address different levels of the evidence base. Devika Mehra et al. (2022) reviewed mental-health interventions for adolescents in India and identified school-based, coping, resilience, and other intervention approaches while noting the need for broader and more comprehensive provision. Vandana Pandey and Soroka (2025) focused specifically on art-therapy practices for adolescent well-being in India and mapped visual and expressive modalities used to support emotional expression, self-esteem, and regulation. Together, the reviews delineate complementary but distinct evidence bases: general adolescent mental-health interventions and art-therapy-specific approaches.

Evidence from workplace coaching indicates that coaching can support developmental outcomes such as personal growth and performance (Bozer & Delegach, 2019; De Meuse et al., 2009; Gavin & Bernardi, 2023), but these studies involve organisational populations and therefore provide only indirect support for a university art-coaching intervention. More directly relevant evidence comes from creative-arts and art-therapy research: Bo Zhang and Azizah binti Abdullah (2024) reported reduced academic burnout among college students, while systematic and scoping reviews have documented mental-health, social-behavioural, cognitive, and physical outcomes associated with visual and nature-based art-therapy approaches (Joschko et al., 2024; Gulbe et al., 2025). The intervention was therefore grounded primarily in evidence on visual and expressive methods, with coaching literature used to support the goal-setting and reflective components rather than to establish the effectiveness of art-based techniques.

A remaining gap concerns mixed-methods research in which context-sensitive survey findings are used to structure a small art-coaching pilot within the same investigation.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

A sequential mixed-methods design was implemented in two phases. Phase 1 combined descriptive quantitative survey data with thematic analysis of open-ended responses. Phase 1 findings were then used to structure the Phase 2 pilot art-coaching workshops conducted independently in India and Ukraine.

Phase 1 included 204 university students aged 18–25: 130 from O. P. Jindal Global University in India and 74 from the National Technical University of Ukraine “Igor Sikorsky Kyiv Polytechnic Institute”, Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, and Kyiv National Economic University named after Vadym Hetman. Country selection was purposive at the contextual level, whereas recruitment within participating institutions was non-probability and based on institutional access. The sampling design was not intended to produce nationally representative estimates.

Data were collected through a 15-item Google Forms questionnaire containing categorical or ordinal workload items, five-point rating items on perceived work–study–life balance, stress, time-management skills and related perceptions, multiple-choice items, and open-ended questions. The complete English and Ukrainian versions are presented in Appendix A.

Quantitative responses were summarised descriptively. The two open-ended prompts used for thematic analysis addressed challenges in balancing personal life, study and work and suggested improvements in work–study–life balance.

Descriptive statistical analysis was used for the quantitative data, and thematic analysis was used for the open-ended responses. The students’ responses were analysed using QDA Miner Lite software and the six-phase approach proposed by Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke (2006). First, the researchers familiarized themselves with the data by repeatedly reading the students’ responses and recording initial observations. Second, initial codes were generated by highlighting relevant text fragments and assigning appropriate labels to them. Third, potential themes were developed by grouping related codes according to their similarity and relevance to the research question. Fourth, the themes were reviewed and compared to ensure that they accurately represented the data and did not substantially overlap. Fifth, each theme was clearly defined and named. Finally, the findings were organized into a coherent report and supported by illustrative excerpts from the participants’ responses.

Indian and Ukrainian results were summarised separately. Cross-group comparisons were restricted to clear descriptive patterns and were not used to infer national or cultural effects because the groups differed in size and gender composition. Phase 1 findings guided the domains addressed in the pilot intervention.

Phase 2: Pilot Intervention (The Goal-Setting Workshop). Phase 2 included 30 Indian participants purposively selected from the Phase 1 sample while enrolled in the elective course “Personal development and self-care through arts” at O. P. Jindal Global University and 10 Ukrainian participants recruited from Kyiv National Economic University named after Vadym Hetman. Separate 3-hour workshops were conducted in person.

Instruments. A single-session workshop incorporated two art coaching techniques: 1. The Wheel of Life balance for reflective diagnosis, and 2. The Drawing Reward technique (modified from Buchalter, 2017) for motivational goal setting.

Low-satisfaction life domains identified in Phase 1 and during the Wheel activity were converted into short-term goals supported by personally relevant resources and actions.

Reflection notes were used only to assess immediate feasibility, perceived usefulness, and relevance to goal setting; no estimate of intervention effectiveness was attempted.

The original concept of the Wheel of Life Balance is attributed to Paul J. Meyer, who founded the Success Motivation Institute (Strain & Hudson, 1988; Elsey, 2024). In this pilot study, the Wheel of Life Balance and Drawing a Reward were used as reflective and motivational tools intended to support self-reflection, emotional expression, and clarification of personal goals.

During the Wheel activity, satisfaction with eight life domains was rated from 0 to 10, one area for improvement was selected, and available resources and actions were recorded. The Drawing Reward activity required a visual representation of a personally meaningful reward followed by brief reflection on its motivational relevance.

Ethical considerations

This study received ethical approval from the relevant ethics committee at O. P. Jindal Global University for research involving human participants. Before data collection, students were informed that participation was voluntary. Pseudonyms were used to protect participants' identities, and all data were stored in encrypted, password-protected files accessible only to the researchers. Participants provided consent for the use of their artworks for research purposes. To address potential emotional risk, participants were offered referral to campus counselling services, and the contact details of a licensed practising art therapist outside the university were provided if additional support was required.

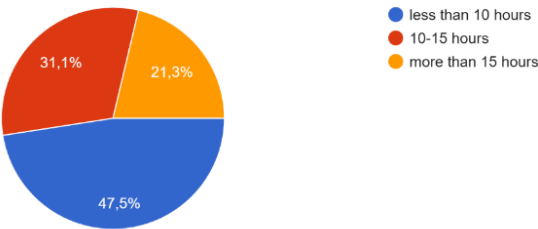
RESULTS

The study was conducted from September to December 2025. Within Phase 1, quantitative and qualitative survey data were collected concurrently to explore the challenges and coping strategies of university students from Indian and Ukrainian contexts. A total of 204 students aged 18 to 25 years participated in the study, including 130 from India and 74 from Ukraine (mean age = 20.4 years). The questionnaire was completed via Google Forms by 95 women and 35 men from Indian universities and 69 women and 5 men from Ukrainian universities.

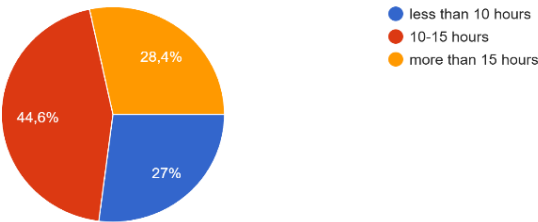
The results showed that 31.1% of Indian students spent 10-15 hours per week on academic work outside of class, and 21.3% of students spent even more than 15 hours, indicating a very high academic workload (Figure 1).

Figure 1
Academic Load of Indian and Ukrainian Students

1. How many hours do you spend on academic work per week?
61 ответ



1. How many hours do you spend on academic work per week?
74 ответа



Note. The upper chart presents data for Indian students; the lower chart presents data for Ukrainian students.
Source. Own Research.

Among Ukrainian students, 44.6% reported spending 10–15 hours per week on academic work, while 28.4% spent more than 15 hours. Overall, 71.5% of Indian students and 63.5% of Ukrainian students reported prioritizing their studies. Regarding part-time employment, 38.5% of Indian students and 32.4% of Ukrainian students worked up to 10 hours per week, whereas 10.7% of Indian students and 35.2% of Ukrainian students worked 11–15 hours per week. Correspondingly, 41.5% of Indian students and 59.5% of Ukrainian students reported having insufficient time for hobbies and recreational activities. On a five-point Likert scale, where 1 indicated an extremely poor balance and 5 indicated an excellent balance, the mean work-study-life balance score was 3.07 among Indian students and 3.04 among Ukrainian students. On a separate five-point scale, where 1 indicated very low stress and 5 indicated very high stress, the mean work-study stress score was 3.66 among Indian students and 3.32 among Ukrainian students. To cope with stress, students from both countries commonly sought support from family members or used self-help strategies. Only 11.5% of Indian students and 9.5% of Ukrainian students

reported using psychological counselling services, suggesting that professional psychological support was used relatively infrequently by the surveyed students.

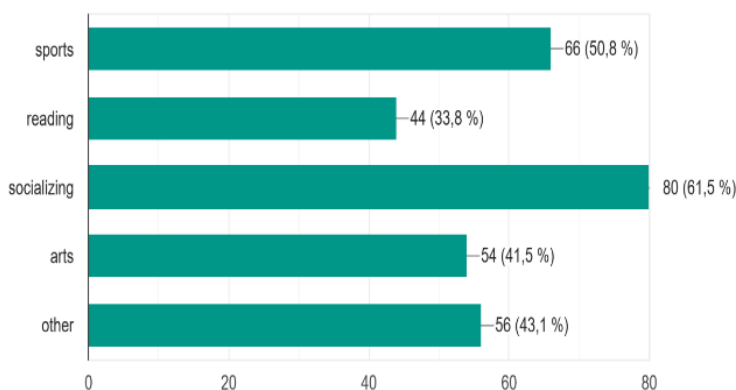
90.1% of Indian respondents and 93.2% of Ukrainian students felt overwhelmed with responsibilities. Indian respondents gave a mean satisfaction score of 3.03 (on a Likert scale, 1 being very low and 5 being very high) for their current time management skills, while Ukrainian respondents gave a mean score of 2.96. Figure 2 shows some of the activities that students engage in for leisure outside of studies and work.

Figure 2

Free-Time Activities of Indian and Ukrainian Students

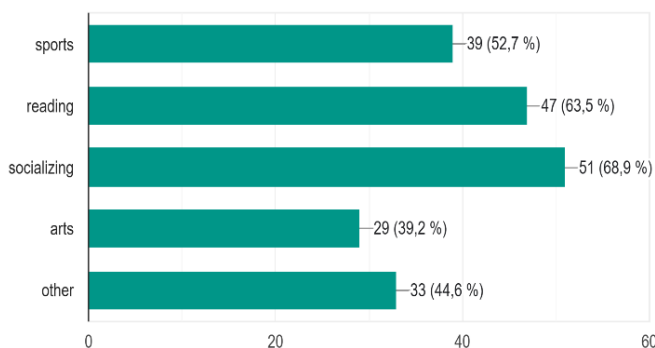
3. What activities do you engage in to relax? You can select several answers.

130 ответов



3. What activities do you engage in to relax? You can select several answers.

74 ответа



Note. The upper chart presents data for Indian students; the lower chart presents data for Ukrainian students.

Source. Own Research.

Socialising and sports were common free-time activities in both groups (Figure 2). Adequate university support for work–study–life balance was reported by 39.2% of Indian and 40.5% of Ukrainian respondents.

Responses to two open-ended questions - “What challenges do you face in balancing your personal life, studies, and work?” and “What improvements do you think could help students achieve a better work-study-life balance?” - provided textual data suitable for thematic analysis.

The data were analysed using QDA Miner Lite software in accordance with the six-phase approach proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). Country-group comparisons were exploratory and descriptive because the Indian and Ukrainian samples differed in size and gender composition. Similarities and differences were therefore reported only where patterns were sufficiently clear in the quantitative and qualitative material, without attributing them solely to national or cultural context.

Table 2

Challenges Faced by Indian and Ukrainian Students in Achieving Work–Study–Life Balance

Theme	Codes	Illustrative Quotes
1. Time management & overload (Indian students)	Too many tasks; scheduling difficulties; overlapping deadlines	“I feel like I have to lose sleep if I want good grades, a job, and extracurriculars.”
Time management & overload (Ukrainian students)	Work–study overload; insufficient time; activity sacrifice	“To do everything thoroughly, you constantly have to sacrifice one thing or another.”
2. Stress & emotional strain (Indian students)	Anxiety; guilt when resting; mental exhaustion	“Stress and anxiety are another challenge in itself.”
Stress & emotional strain (Ukrainian students)	Burnout; emotional overload; war-related pressure	“The war significantly affects the level of difficulty.”
3. Boundary issues (Indian students)	Work spilling into personal time; difficulty switching off	“Constantly thinking about work even during leisure time.”
Boundary issues (Ukrainian students)	Blurred priorities; multitasking pressure; personal activity sacrifice	“I go to extremes, either work or rest.”
4. Sleep and routine problems (Indian students)	Late sleep; unstable routine; long-hour exhaustion	“Late classes make me stay awake and mess up my schedule.”
Sleep and routine problems (Ukrainian students)	Insufficient rest; long-day tiredness; energy depletion	“Sometimes I feel too tired to enjoy my personal life.”
5. Distraction & procrastination (Indian students)	Phone use; social distraction; low concentration	“Trying to manage my time... procrastination.”
Distraction & procrastination (Ukrainian students)	Phone use; stress-related motivation loss; deadline overload	“I struggle to stay focused because of too many deadlines.”

Theme	Codes	Illustrative Quotes
6. Relationship strain (Indian students)	Limited time for relationships; reduced personal time; low privacy	"I don't think I have had much me-time recently."
Relationship strain (Ukrainian students)	Relationship effects of exhaustion; conflicting roles	"Sometimes after studying I feel emotionally drained and seem distant to my partner."
7. External pressures (Indian students)	University workload; family expectations; continuous activity	"Familial pressures with work are hard to manage."
External pressures (Ukrainian students)	War; unclear academic expectations; combined work and study	"A heavy workload and need to provide for myself."

Source. Authors' own elaboration based on Phase 1 survey data.

The thematic synthesis identified several common patterns across both groups: difficulties with time management, sustained workload, stress and exhaustion, limited personal time, blurred boundaries between academic responsibilities and personal life, and sleep-related fatigue. Descriptively, Indian respondents more often referred to routine, self-discipline, and overcommitment, whereas Ukrainian respondents more often described war-related disruption, unstable schedules, and family or financial responsibilities. Given the differences in sample size and gender composition, these contrasts are treated as exploratory rather than as country- or culture-specific effects.

Table 3

Student-Suggested Strategies for Improving Work–Study–Life Balance

Theme	Indian Students – Codes	Indian Students – Quotes	Ukrainian Students – Codes	Ukrainian Students – Quotes
1. Time Management & Scheduling	Prioritising; fixed routines; realistic goals	"Set more realistic goals."	Daily planning; time allocation; realistic deadlines	"You need to reconsider your priorities."
2. Boundaries & Focus	Work–leisure boundaries; focus; fewer distractions	"Setting clear boundaries between study/work and personal time is essential."	Fixed stop time; less phone use; avoid multitasking	"Set clear times for work and rest."
3. Rest, Sleep & Energy Management	Sleep schedule; breaks; fatigue management	"Take short breaks."	Rest; sleep; burnout prevention	"You need more rest to recharge your batteries."
4. Institutional & Workload Support	Lower workload; class scheduling; university support	"Better class schedule."	Flexible hours; fewer written tasks; flexible deadlines	"More flexibility in deadlines."

Theme	Indian Students – Codes	Indian Students – Quotes	Ukrainian Students – Codes	Ukrainian Students – Quotes
5. Self-Discipline & Structure	Discipline; deadlines; structured routines	“Having a structure for all the assignments helps a lot.”	Discipline; focused work; reduced multi-tasking	“Good discipline.”
6. Self-Care & Stress Reduction	Exercise; relaxation; hobbies	“Yoga, meditation and jogging.”	Rest; sports; hobbies	“Find a hobby for the soul.”
7. Emotional Awareness & Social Support	Introspection; workload awareness; balance	“Journaling and introspection.”	Diary; support networks; partner communication	“Open communication with my partner helps.”

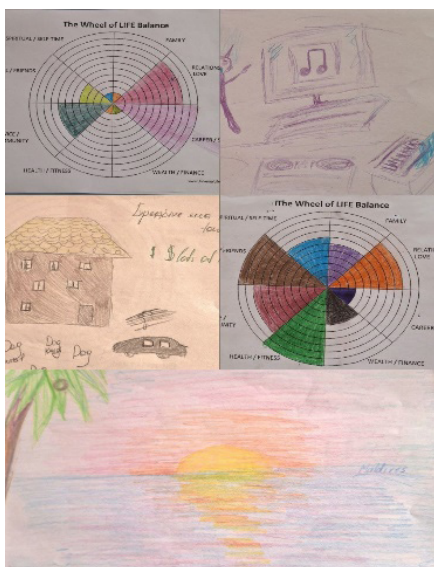
Source. Authors’ own elaboration based on Phase 1 survey data.

Across both groups, proposed improvements centred on time planning, boundaries, sleep and recovery, stress management, and reduced digital distraction. Indian responses more often stressed self-discipline and procrastination control; Ukrainian responses more often stressed recovery under unstable conditions and flexible educational arrangements.

Phase 2. Pilot Intervention (The Goal-Setting Workshop).Phase 2 comprised separate 3-hour workshops with 30 Indian and 10 Ukrainian participants. The Wheel of Life Balance was used to identify low-satisfaction domains; one near-term goal was then selected, available resources and actions were considered, and a reward drawing representing goal attainment was produced.

Figure 3
Students’ Drawings Produced During the Art-Coaching Intervention





Note. The figure presents examples of drawings produced by Indian and Ukrainian participants during the pilot intervention.

Source. Own Research.

Reflection on the reward drawing focused on its personal meaning and potential relevance to goal-directed motivation.

DISCUSSION

Inter-role Conflict Theory explains strain that emerges when demands associated with different roles cannot be fulfilled simultaneously (Kahn et al., 1964). Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) further distinguished time-based and strain-based conflict, both of which are directly relevant to students who divide finite time and psychological resources among study, paid work, and personal life. Stress or fatigue generated in one role may therefore constrain functioning in another.

Reported overload, stress, fatigue, limited personal time, and blurred study–life boundaries were consistent with time- and strain-based inter-role conflict. The high proportions reporting feeling overwhelmed in both groups further indicated pressure across competing roles.

The Wheel activity made perceived imbalance across life domains visible and directed attention to areas requiring change. Participant reflections linked low satisfaction in study or career domains with stress and described the activity as useful for clarifying where additional time and attention were needed.

Compensation Theory offers a complementary interpretation: strain, dissatisfaction, or resource deficits in one domain may be counterbalanced by greater involve-

ment or satisfaction in another (Staines, 1980). In the present study, students' reports of socialising, sport, reading, rest, exercise, yoga, and other forms of self-care are consistent with this compensatory pattern, although the cross-sectional and qualitative evidence does not establish the direction of the relationship. The reward drawings likewise represented anticipated sources of restoration or personal value, including a relaxing spa, a romantic evening, a new dress, a seaside journey, and food-related rewards. One female student explained: "After I achieve my goal of better health, I'll reward myself with a solo trip to the beach, somewhere peaceful like South Goa. The water brings me peace and calm and I truly believe this trip would rejuvenate me". Another participant wrote: "I can imagine a lot of things, 'rewards' – some of them being dancing and sleeping and I believe these will and are currently motivating me to do self-care techniques regularly". Further reflections included: "I think I deserve this reward because this semester has been the most for me. Moreover, also because I have been saving up for this for a very long time and it will motivate me to work harder, as it will be symbolic of me taking care of myself. I will wear it (diamond) every day as a symbol of my work, and to motivate me more. If I have a constant representation of what I can do, it will motivate me more". Another participant noted: "The 'Wheel of Life balance' activity helped me understand how much time I am devoting to each component of life in terms of family, relationships, health, socialising, etc. Overall, this activity made it easier to list down things and create an understanding of things that need more time to be devoted to and balance."

The findings are also consistent with evidence that the consequences of student employment depend on work intensity. Franziska Lessky and Martin Unger (2022) reported that working more than 10 hours per week was associated with a higher risk of early university exit, while Prokes and Klusacek (2025) likewise linked heavier work–study demands with less favourable student outcomes. The present results point in the same direction: the central issue is not paid work itself but the cumulative demands it places on time, recovery, and academic participation. Time management, realistic goal setting, and access to emotional support therefore remain relevant strategies for managing work–study–life demands (Istikhomari et al., 2023).

Universities can support students' WSLB through flexible schedules, mental health services, and time-management training. Students' suggestions are consistent with key findings from previous research, including the importance of flexible schedules (Martinez et al., 2013), online and distance learning opportunities (Lowe & Gayle, 2014), and work-life balance as an important condition for the emotional well-being of working students (Vokić et al., 2021).

The art-therapy and art-coaching activities used in the pilot intervention received positive immediate feedback and were consistent with themes identified in Phase 1. Neethu Prakashan and Bidisha Banerjee (2024) similarly reported that expressive art therapy with adolescents may facilitate rapport, self-awareness, and expression. The present pilot findings should therefore be interpreted as evidence of feasibility and perceived usefulness rather than proof of intervention effectiveness.

CONCLUSIONS

Inter-role Conflict Theory provided a coherent interpretation of recurrent time pressure, fatigue, and blurred study–personal boundaries in both samples. Moderate balance and stress ratings coexisted with limited use of professional counselling. Descriptive contrasts indicated stronger emphasis on routine and self-discipline in Indian responses and on war-related disruption and unstable schedules in Ukrainian responses; these differences cannot be interpreted as national or cultural effects.

Suggested responses converged on prioritisation, boundaries, rest, and reduced digital distraction. Immediate workshop reflections indicated acceptability and perceived usefulness of the visual techniques, while the small uncontrolled pilot did not establish effectiveness.

RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

Further research can test creative and coaching-based supports under controlled and longitudinal designs. Brief reflective activities may be considered as an adjunct to university support or counselling services, subject to evaluation in larger and more representative samples.

LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Interpretation is constrained by institution-based non-probability recruitment, modest non-representative samples, and unequal gender composition: women comprised 95 of 130 Indian participants (73.1%) and 69 of 74 Ukrainian participants (93.2%). Because analyses were not adjusted for gender, India–Ukraine differences may reflect sample composition rather than national or cultural effects. The pilot included 30 Indian and 10 Ukrainian participants without a control group and cannot support causal claims. Larger, more gender-balanced samples, multivariable or stratified analyses, and controlled longitudinal replication across additional settings are required.

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