

Navigating Dual Roles: The Lived Experiences of Student Entrepreneurs in a Philippine State University

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Abstract

This phenomenological study explores the lived experiences of Filipino student entrepreneurs who simultaneously manage academic responsibilities and operate legally registered businesses. Rooted in the context of a state university's entrepreneurship program, which mandates students to launch and register real businesses, the research investigates how these individuals navigate their dual roles. Using qualitative in-depth interviews with purposively selected fourth-year entrepreneurship students, the study identifies core themes reflecting their motivations, challenges, coping strategies, and personal growth. Findings reveal that student entrepreneurs encounter significant time management issues, emotional stress, and academic pressures, yet also develop resilience, discipline, and a strong entrepreneurial mindset. The dual-role experience fosters holistic learning, blending theoretical knowledge with real-world application. Despite the challenges, participants reported heightened self-efficacy and a deeper appreciation for entrepreneurial realities. This research contributes to the understanding of student entrepreneurship in the Philippine context and offers valuable insights for educators and policymakers in crafting supportive academic environments that balance rigor with entrepreneurial engagement. The study emphasizes the importance of mentorship, flexible academic policies, and mental health support in fostering sustainable student entrepreneurship.

Keywords: Entrepreneurship, Start Up, Higher Education.

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1. Introduction

The value of entrepreneurship in promoting national development has been acknowledged by academics and decision-makers (Content et al., 2019; Ordeñana et al., 2023; Schumpeter, 2017). With varying degrees of success, governments in developing nations have implemented initiatives to encourage business ownership in an effort to end poverty (Saridakis et al., 2021). Entrepreneurship has been incorporated into higher education curriculum in hopes of encouraging entrepreneurship (Issa et al., 2025; Liu et al., 2024, Suto et al., 2024). Many aspiring entrepreneurs still face significant barriers such as limited access to funding, mentorship, and technology (Virasa et al., 2022). Addressing these challenges is crucial for fostering a more supportive entrepreneurial ecosystem and driving sustainable economic growth.

Entrepreneurial education has been considered as a precursor for entrepreneurial development (Alfarizi & Herdiansyah, 2024; Issa et al., 2025). Entrepreneurial education helps foster entrepreneurial intentions and self-efficacy (Diepolder et al., 2025; Liu et al., 2024; Porfirio et al., 2022). Government programs that encourage entrepreneurial education can help the micro, small, & medium-sized enterprises sector in developing nations flourish (Saif et al., 2024). By encouraging the establishment of new companies and developing students' practical entrepreneurial skills, entrepreneurship education advances society and raises living standards (Bharti et al., 2024). By equipping students with the necessary skills, knowledge, and mindset, entrepreneurial education prepares them to identify business opportunities and navigate market challenges. Collaborative efforts between educational institutions, policymakers, and industry leaders are essential to maximize the impact of entrepreneurial education on the development of sustainable and competitive enterprises.

A learning theory called experiential learning places a strong emphasis on active engagement through hands-on activities and real-world applications (Villarroel et al., 2020). According to Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory, learning is most effective when individuals engage in concrete experiences, reflect on them, and actively experiment with new ideas (Kolb, 2015; Kolb & Kolb, 2005). Experiential learning is a multifaceted concept with four components: doing, observing, reasoning, and emotion (Issa et al., 2025). Concrete Experience, Reflective Observation, Abstract Conceptualization, and Active Experimentation are the four phases of the experiential learning cycle (Kolb & Kolb, 2005). The Experiential Learning Cycle consists of four phases: Concrete Experience, where the learner actively engages in an activity; Reflective Observation, which involves reflecting on effective strategies and challenges; Abstract Conceptualization, where new ideas and strategies are developed based on the analysis of the experience; and Active Experimentation, where these strategies are applied in future situations (Kolb & Kolb, 2005; Ruhi, 2016).

The importance of experiential learning in entrepreneurship education is becoming more widely acknowledged. It provides insightful information about how these learning experiences can affect social entrepreneurial intentions which is a promising topic for further study (Anwar & Abdullah, 2021). A study used an experiential learning lens to suggest a pedagogical framework that includes a

variety of teaching strategies and course activities in order to address the need for an enhanced approach to enterprise systems education in university business programs (Ruhi, 2016). The findings of Kim et al. (2025) highlight the value of experiential learning as a vital instrument for fostering the development of critical abilities in intricate corporate settings, especially for MBA students aiming to assume leadership positions in the future. Kim and Park (2023) emphasize the concept of absorptive capacity, which refers to the ability to recognize, assimilate, and apply new knowledge to entrepreneurial settings. This capacity allows students to gain practical skills, make informed decisions, and innovate within their ventures. The success of experiential learning in entrepreneurship education prompted the researchers to incorporate it to business implementation courses in a state university in the Philippines.

The researchers applied experiential learning in a state university in the Philippines. Fourth year entrepreneurship students were asked to conceptualize and register a business under their names as a requirement for business plan implementation courses. This initiative stemmed from the growing literature on experiential learning in entrepreneurship and business education (Anwar & Abdullah, 2021; Kim & Park, 2023; Ruhi, 2016). Universities are able to teach students entrepreneurial knowledge and skills by letting students create business plans and acquiring resources (Zhang et al., 2013). This initiative is due to the fact that entrepreneurship is a dynamic process of change that requires inspiration in order to generate and execute innovative ideas in entrepreneurship education (Motta & Galina, 2022). Yi (2020) emphasized that it is the duty of universities to encourage student motivation and give them the assistance they require; therefore, the researchers have integrated such a requirement in the business implementation courses.

1.1 Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded on Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (Kolb, 2015; Kolb & Kolb, 2005). The theory explains that students learn through experience; therefore, the students were required to establish, register, and run their own businesses. The theory describes the learning process in four phases - concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation.

Concrete experience - In the first phase, students actively participate in running their own businesses for two semesters.

Reflective observation - In the middle of running a business, the course instructor constantly asks for feedback regarding their experience allowing students to reflect on their daily business operations.

Abstract conceptualization - In this phase, students should be able to develop new ideas, theories, and strategies based on their actual experiences as entrepreneurs.

Active experimentation - In the last phase, students should be able to apply the new knowledge acquired to future experiences, testing whether they lead to better outcomes.

The participants of the study are expected to undergo the four cycles of experiential learning theory.

This study was conducted to explore the learning and overall experience of the students who juggled both business and academic responsibilities. The results of this study aim to further enhance the experiential learning of the fourth year Entrepreneurship students taking business implementation I and II courses. Moreover, the results may also be used to enhance the curriculum of the BS entrepreneurship program.

2. Methodology

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of the students who underwent the business implementation I and II courses. The study addressed the following research questions:

- R1: What are the experiences of student entrepreneurs in the Philippines in managing the dual roles of being a student and a business owner?
- R2: What challenges do student entrepreneurs face in managing their academic and business responsibilities?
- R3: What strategies do student entrepreneurs use to balance their studies and business operations?

2.2 Setting

The study took place in a state-owned university in Eastern Visayas, a region in Eastern Philippines. The state university produces an average of 80 BS Entrepreneurship graduates every year. There are 15 groups that have registered their own businesses and each group has 5 to 6 members. Each group has a designated leader who has registered the business under his or her name. The groups were given two semesters to operate their registered businesses under the courses business implementation I (first semester) and business implementation II (second semester).

2.3 Participants

A purposive sampling technique was used to determine the participants. Data were collected from eight participants. Students who met the inclusion criteria and consented to participate in the interview signed the interview consent form. The researchers formally invited those who had signed the consent form and met the criteria for an interview. The inclusion criteria were as follows: (1) fourth year BS Entrepreneurship student, (2) enrolled in business implementation I and II courses (3) own a registered business under their name (4) currently running the business.

2.4 Data Collection

Key informant interviews were conducted to eight participants. The participants were interviewed separately by the researchers. The researchers established rapport with the participants

before starting the actual interview. A semi-structured interview guide was used during the conduct of the interview. Additionally, the interview guide was validated by two expert faculty members in the state-owned university. The interview guide explored the following experiences of the participants: (1) managing a registered business while being a student and (2) financial and operational challenges faced in running a business. All data collected will be kept confidential and securely stored. Then the data will be properly disposed after five years.

2.5 Data Analysis

The study employed Colaizzi's strategy in phenomenological research (Colaizzi, 1978). The process involved seven steps: (1) carefully listening to and transcribing the recordings into verbatim transcripts to capture participants' experiences; (2) identifying significant statements from the transcripts as the primary data for analysis; (3) extracting meaning units from these significant statements; (4) grouping meaning units with similar characteristics into subthemes and broader themes; (5) integrating these themes to develop a comprehensive description of participants' learning experiences; (6) constructing a detailed explanation of the fundamental structure of these experiences; and (7) employing member checking with four participants to review and verify whether the identified meaning units, subthemes, and themes accurately reflected their actual experiences.

2.6 Ethical Considerations

The researchers discussed the description and rationale of the study to the participants. Furthermore, the researchers also elaborated on the risks and benefits of the study to the participants. The researchers sought informed consent from the participants and they made the participants be aware of their rights to withdraw from the study.

3. Results and Discussion

Theme 1: Experiences of student entrepreneurs managing the dual roles of being a student and a business owner

The experiences of student entrepreneurs in this study show that managing academic and business responsibilities is a multifaceted journey, filled with emotional highs and lows, creative problem-solving, and real-world encounters. Through academic inspiration, institutional hurdles, and personal initiative, students not only navigated but also transformed their limitations into learning experiences, shaping their entrepreneurial identities along the way. Therefore, this theme was narrowed down to 5 subthemes:

1.1 Mixed Feelings at the Onset

The initial reactions of the student entrepreneurs upon learning that starting and registering a real business was a course requirement were a mixture of excitement, fear, surprise, and doubt. Several respondents mentioned that they expected only a business plan submission and so the requirement to operate an actual business came as a shock. The surprise created anxiety for some but it also served as a powerful motivator that instills a sense of authenticity and real-world engagement.

One participant shared, “When I found out that starting and registering a real business was part of the course requirement, I felt thrilled and excited. It sounded like a real challenge, full of learning and hands-on experience. At first, I was surprised—I honestly thought we’d only be making a business plan and that would be it. - (Respondent 4, R4)”. This emotional turbulence highlights how experiential learning can provoke strong personal reactions, yet also catalyze student growth through immersion in real entrepreneurial practice.

1.2 Idea Formation Rooted in Academic and Personal Experiences

Most of the respondents derived their business ideas from prior academic subjects, particularly food processing, or from their personal interests and skills. The academic setting acted as a fertile ground for idea incubation with some leveraging projects they had already developed in earlier classes. For instance, multiple participants mentioned they built on food-related products they had previously created while the others pivoted from less feasible business ideas to more practical ventures based on their passions.

One student said “Originally, we planned to start a sewing-related business based on our business plan subject, but we didn’t have the professional skills for that. So we shifted and explored something we were passionate about—fragrances and perfumes. That’s how we came up with the idea of "Kinaiya," which is actually unique in Tacloban. The main challenge was figuring out how to make the products and where to get supplies. We overcame that by watching tutorials and doing a lot of online research to learn the process. - (R2)”. Another team drew inspiration from their internship involving clay products, while others used YouTube videos and customer insights to refine concepts. These stories underscore that student entrepreneurs are capable of synthesizing formal learning, personal curiosity, and real-world exposure to create viable business ideas.

1.3 Balancing Limitations and Resourcefulness

The students faced substantial constraints related to time, finances, and skill availability, which they had to balance with academic responsibilities. Many of them juggled production schedules with schoolwork, while others had to train their team members to ensure operational efficiency. In response to these challenges, the student entrepreneurs demonstrated impressive levels of resourcefulness and leadership.

One participant shared “We encountered a lot challenges but production and operations were the biggest challenges for us. Only 2 out of 5 members were trained in production during the internship so our products were inconsistent in terms of quality. - (R7)”. Another recounted the burden of limited finances, especially when ingredients and equipment were needed, leading them to coordinate financial contributions and adjust timelines. These strategies show how students creatively managed their dual roles by maximizing existing resources, building teamwork, and adopting flexible, problem-solving mindsets.

1.4 Bureaucratic Barriers and Navigational Learning

A recurring difficulty among participants was the complexity of the business registration process, especially in dealing with government agencies such as DTI and BIR. Common issues included long lines, system downtimes, repetitive visits, and lack of guidance, all of which led to delays and frustration.

One student shared “We made a mistake by getting our barangay clearance before registering with DTI. Then DTI told us the name we wanted was already taken, so we had to go back and fix everything—registering with DTI first, and then reapplying for barangay clearance. - R4”. Despite these obstacles, participants adapted by seeking advice from guards, classmates, or experienced peers. This theme illustrates the development of civic competence and resilience because students navigated real-life administrative systems and learned to comply with bureaucratic procedures.

1.5 Leadership and Initiative in Managing Dual Roles

Amid the operational and academic pressures, many participants stepped up as leaders and decision-makers, guiding their teams and making critical contributions to the success of their ventures. Whether it was training members, handling paperwork, or leading communication, students took ownership of their roles, often beyond what was expected of them.

One participant shared “Since I was the business owner, I handled it all alone. I had to wake up and line up at the BIR as early as 5:00 AM just to make progress. - R6”. Others described leading discussions like making production decisions or negotiating roles among team members. These experiences revealed early entrepreneurial maturity as essential traits for managing dual roles effectively like students developing leadership capabilities, communication strategies, and initiative.

Theme 2: Challenges that student entrepreneurs face in managing their academic and business responsibilities

The challenges faced by student entrepreneurs in the Philippines extend beyond academic stress involving emotional endurance, financial constraints, operational learning curves, and complex time management demands. Their stories reflect a microcosm of entrepreneurial life with gritty, unpredictable, and full of learning. Therefore, this theme was narrowed down to 4 subthemes:

2.1 Time Management as a Daily Struggle and Skill

One of the most dominant challenges that emerged was the difficulty in managing time between academic requirements and business operations. Students had to juggle production schedules, selling activities, and class deadlines that often leads to sacrifice rest or leisure to meet their obligations.

A participant recounted, “It was tough trying to balance what needed to be done first—school tasks or business tasks—because both were important and time-consuming. – R2”.

2.2 Financial Limitations

Financial challenges were consistently raised by the participants, especially during the startup phase. Most of the businesses were funded through pooled member contributions, and some had to rely on family support or even borrow money to continue operations. A few students noted that not all members could contribute equally which led to internal adjustments and a need for financial compromise.

One respondent shared, “At first, we funded the business from our own pockets. Eventually, we had to borrow money to keep going. We were struggling with sales, so we ended up paying the borrowed money from our own funds. – R3”. Another mentioned, “We each contributed ₱1,500 as starting capital. However, one of our members wasn’t able to contribute, which created a bit of a financial gap we had to work around. – R7”.

2.3 Operational Difficulties in Real-Life Conditions

Students encountered unexpected operational challenges that include problems with logistics, weather, product quality, negative customer feedback, and communication breakdowns within teams. Some businesses lacked a fixed location, others struggled with sourcing consistent raw materials, and still others had to adjust due to personal life events, such as health concerns or family duties.

One student described having to return to production shortly after childbirth, “After I gave birth, I wasn’t able to help much at first. But a few weeks later, when we needed to do free taste tests and production, I pushed myself to get involved again—even though I was still recovering. - (R3)”. While another shared, “We faced issues such as inconsistent income, packaging supply problems (specifically cups), marketing limitations, unpredictable weather in the San Jose area, and transportation. – R1”.

2.4 Psychological and Emotional Pressure

The dual responsibility often led to mental fatigue, burnout, and emotional strain. Many participants admitted to moments when they considered giving up due to exhaustion, stress, and the repetitive nature of their work.

One participant shared, “Yes, especially after everything I went through. There were times when I didn’t know what to do anymore. – R4”. Another said, “Yes, especially during Uruguayas week (Foundation Week) when we were preparing for the competition and still had to keep up with daily production. – R5”.

Theme 3: Strategies utilized by student entrepreneurs to balance their studies and business operations

Student entrepreneurs managed their dual roles by combining structured time management, adaptive flexibility, and collaborative teamwork. Their ability to delegate tasks, create personalized routines, and operate under pressure reflects not only practical strategy but also emotional intelligence

and entrepreneurial maturity. These strategies are not just survival tools—they are foundational habits that can shape their future as business professionals and lifelong learners. Therefore, this theme was narrowed down to 5 subthemes:

3.1 Strategic Time Management as the Cornerstone

The most prevalent strategy used by student entrepreneurs to balance academics and business was conscious time management. Students utilized various approaches such as creating daily schedules, plotting weekly tasks, and aligning school-free hours with business operations. This enabled them to maintain a sense of routine despite the demands of dual roles.

One student shared, “Creating a daily planner and setting alarms really helped. It kept me on track... - R4”, while another emphasized, “We maximized our vacant periods by plotting a schedule. - R1” These insights highlight how students used structure and routine to gain control over an otherwise unpredictable schedule, reducing stress and increasing productivity.

3.2 Role Specialization and Task Delegation

In group ventures, students managed dual responsibilities by dividing tasks based on availability and skillsets. This allowed individuals to focus on specific roles like some of them handled production, others managed finances or customer service, and others aligned operations with their academic free time. By practicing collaborative leadership and team coordination, students avoided overload and inefficiency.

A respondent noted, “Since I focused on production, the rest of the team handled the sales. – R6”. Another shared how group members scheduled conflict-free rotations to manage business operations during overlapping academic periods. This theme reflects how division of labor and mutual accountability served as effective coping mechanisms.

3.3 Adaptability and Flexible Scheduling

While structure was essential, students also recognized the importance of flexibility and adaptability, especially during peak academic seasons or business events. Participants adjusted their study and work times weekly or even daily, depending on their individual subject loads or upcoming deliverables.

One participant described alternating business and academic focus depending on the semester, saying, “Last semester, I used the mornings for business and evenings for academics. This semester, I reversed it. – R5”. This example shows how dynamic scheduling allowed students to realign priorities in real time, especially when academic deadlines and business demands clashed.

3.4 Using Pressure and Passion as Motivation

Interestingly, several participants reported that working under pressure sharpened their focus and decision-making, turning stress into a productivity tool. Others derived motivation from their

love for the business, the experience of real-world learning, or the validation from customers and teachers.

One student shared, “Pressure really makes your mind work differently—it pushes you to find alternative solutions fast. – R7”. And emphasized, “If I could’ve focused solely on the business, I think we could have improved it a lot more. – R7”. These statements underscore how purpose-driven engagement and resilience under stress acted as fuel for balancing dual responsibilities.

3.5 Supportive Teamwork and Communication

While individual discipline was essential, effective group communication and mutual support emerged as vital strategies. Students worked around each other’s class schedules, shared responsibilities equally, and ensured transparency in decision-making and logistics.

A participant said, “Our schedules were manageable because we came from different sections, which allowed us to create a conflict-free rotation. – R1” This reflects how relational strategies such as trust, communication, and shared planning enhanced their ability to meet both academic and entrepreneurial goals.

The findings of this study reveal the dynamic and multifaceted nature of student entrepreneurship as experienced by BS Entrepreneurship students in a state university in Eastern Visayas. The emerging themes vividly illustrate how their experiences are transformed into business ventures by examining real-world challenges, uncovering insights and strategies, testing these approaches, and building confidence in ways that align with experiential learning processes.

The first phase of Kolb’s Experiential Learning Theory (ELT)—Concrete Experience—is exemplified in how student entrepreneurs actively engaged in real-world business operations during their two-semester implementation courses. This stage was rich with “mixed feelings at the onset” (Theme 1.1) and “idea formation rooted in academic and personal experiences” (Theme 1.2), illustrating how experiential immersion evoked both excitement and apprehension.

This supports Anwar & Abdullah (2021), who emphasized the importance of real-life engagement in fostering entrepreneurial intention, and aligns with Issa et al. (2025), who noted that experiential learning evokes emotional engagement crucial to entrepreneurial development. Kolb (2015) posits that real experiences form the foundation for meaningful learning—a view confirmed as participants navigated startup uncertainty and transformed classroom theories into practical ventures.

Kolb’s Reflective Observation phase emerged in students’ ability to make sense of their entrepreneurial challenges. The themes “balancing limitations and resourcefulness” (1.3) and “bureaucratic barriers and navigational learning” (1.4) represent how students paused to reflect on the gaps between expectations and real-world practice.

Students' experiences mirror findings by Kim & Park (2023) and Ruhi (2016), who emphasized that experiential learning environments require students to observe, decode, and reflect on bureaucratic systems and leadership decisions. The participants, through trial and error, began to internalize the bureaucratic demands of entrepreneurship in the Philippine context, gaining practical civic competence—evidencing Kolb's reflective component.

From reflection, students entered Kolb's Abstract Conceptualization phase, where they crafted strategies to deal with persistent challenges. The challenges outlined in Theme 2—including time management struggles, financial limitations, and emotional burnout—led to the development of coping mechanisms, which matured into strategic actions in Theme 3.

The integration of role specialization, adaptive scheduling, and leveraging pressure as motivation supports the idea that students began theorizing and systematizing their behavior (Themes 3.1 to 3.4). This resonates with Diepolder et al. (2025), who suggested that entrepreneurial learning enables students to convert their observations into structured approaches, enhancing both their efficacy and intentions. Similarly, Liu et al. (2024) emphasized that self-efficacy and entrepreneurial intention grow as students abstract insights from lived experiences.

Finally, Kolb's Active Experimentation phase is seen in how students implemented teamwork systems (3.5), reorganized schedules, delegated roles, and experimented with decision-making structures. Their actions reflect a feedback loop where theory meets practice—testing whether their time-saving measures, teamwork strategies, or resilience approaches yielded better academic and business results.

This supports Kim et al. (2025) who asserted that experiential learning strengthens critical thinking and strategic intuition, especially when students are allowed to iterate and test solutions. In line with Motta & Galina (2022), entrepreneurship education thrives when students are given dynamic, iterative experiences to trial their own solutions to complex problems.

The findings of this study and Kolb's framework reveals that students progressed through the experiential cycle multiple times, deepening their entrepreneurial identity and self-efficacy at each stage. Their experiences reflect Kolb's holistic learning process on experiential learning as a mechanism for transforming academic knowledge into market-ready competencies.

Furthermore, the emotional, cognitive, and strategic maturity they developed reflects a "whole learner" transformation (Kolb & Kolb, 2005), indicating that entrepreneurship education, when structured around authentic implementation, fosters not just business acumen but personal growth, civic understanding, and leadership capability.

4. Conclusion

This study explored the lived experiences of fourth-year BS Entrepreneurship students navigating the dual roles of student and entrepreneur within the context of experiential learning. Using

Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory as a lens, the findings revealed that students progressed through the learning cycle by engaging in actual business operations, reflecting on their challenges, conceptualizing adaptive strategies, and testing these in real-time scenarios.

The results demonstrated that the integration of business registration and operation into the academic curriculum offered a transformative learning experience. Students encountered emotional, financial, operational, and bureaucratic hurdles, but these were met with remarkable adaptability, leadership, and teamwork. These real-world challenges catalyzed both entrepreneurial maturity and personal growth, allowing students to develop time management skills, resilience under pressure, and civic competence in navigating public systems.

Ultimately, this experiential journey not only honed their entrepreneurial intentions and competencies but also reinforced their identity as capable future business leaders. The study affirms that structured, experience-based education enhances both the academic and practical facets of entrepreneurship education.

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