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The Double Duty of Student Leaders: A Narrative of Balancing Service and Scholarship

Klydiel Sean M. Buayan[1*], Felipina S. Credo[1], Glen Mar M. De Lana[1]
[1]*Lipa Adventist Academy*
[*] *klydseanbuayan@gmail.com,inahcredo123@gmail.com gmdelana26@gmail.com*

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ABSTRACT

This study employs a descriptive narrative research design to explore the multifaceted experiences of high-achieving student-leaders as they navigate the intersection of academic excellence and institutional responsibilities. While existing literature often focuses on the general pressures of leadership, a significant research gap remains regarding the specific narrative trajectories of "achievers" who successfully utilize interpersonal rational buffers to maintain their honors status. Data were gathered through in-depth narrative accounts, allowing for a comprehensive description of the participants' dual roles and the meanings they assign to their academic journeys. The findings highlight a narrative of resilience and high self-efficacy; despite the inherent weight of maintaining scholastic distinction, participants describe their engagement in leadership as a catalyst for advanced organizational growth. A central matter identified in the study is the critical role of rational buffers —specifically strategic family advice and peer emotional validation—which act as a protective shield against environmental stressors. By documenting these individual stories, the research illustrates how multifaceted support systems transform potential burnout into a narrative of sustained achievement. These results underscore the vital importance of holistic support in fostering the well-being and success of student-leaders within a demanding educational landscape.

Keywords: *Student Leaders, Double Duty, Academic Stress, Emotional Support, Leadership Role*

INTRODUCTION

Academic pursuit is often characterized as a jealous partner, demanding constant focus, dedication, and full attention to build a successful life in the long run. Conversely, leadership requires similar standards, as individuals must pour their energy into the benefit of others and the smooth management of school-related activities. To choose both is viewed as an act of ambitious defiance against the limits of time, as it effectively doubles the workload and responsibilities of the student. Student leaders serve as a crucial support for the Academy, managing the well-being, peace, and prosperity of their fellow students while setting an example of what a student should be. Within the context of Lipa Adventist Academy, which is

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true to its mission of being a "*A School that Prepares for Service,"* these students are expected to embody the school's mission by balancing rigorous academic growth with active institutional student governance.

In the Philippines, student leaders frequently experience burnout due to negative peer behaviors, lack of institutional support, and the immense pressure of personal sacrifices. While leadership has been shown to have a positive relation with academic performance in some contexts (Deng, 2020), the physical and psychological toll of balancing dual roles remains a significant challenge. Many student leaders report sacrificing fundamental needs, such as sleep and regular meals, to fulfill the demands of their leadership roles while neglecting academic obligations (Atienza et al., 2020). Existing research has explored leadership styles and general conflict management, yet there remains a dearth of literature focusing specifically on the lived experiences of achievers who must maintain honors status while navigating these pressures. This study addresses this gap by exploring how student leaders manage their time and navigate the complex stressors of their double duty.

The inquiry is grounded in Role Conflict Theory, which posits that stress arises when the demands and expectations of one role interfere with another (Kahn et al., 1964, p. 18). For these students, conflict is most acute when high-stakes academic tasks overlap with leadership duties, such as school-wide events or club activities. Role Conflict Theory helps uncover the sources of tension that emerge when these competing demands vie for the student's limited time and energy. By focusing on the narratives of achievers at LAA, this research aims to elaborate on how specific support systems and coping mechanisms transform potential burnout into a narrative of sustained achievement. Documenting these individual stories illustrates how multifaceted support systems transform potential burnout into a narrative of sustained achievement.

METHOD

Research Design

The study utilized a descriptive-narrative qualitative research approach to observe how student leaders at Lipa Adventist Academy balance their double duty. This design is useful for gathering personal accounts and experiences, as well as for understanding how student leaders balance service and scholarship (De Lana & Jalop, 2025). This approach enabled the researchers to gather in-depth and ample data from three homeroom senior high school presidents' narratives, attaining rich insights about how the informants balance service and scholarship. The descriptive-narrative approach not only describes the feats the student leaders achieved but also how they balance the double duty.

Tradition of Inquiry and Data Generation

This study conformed to the practices of descriptive-narrative inquiry qualitative research, which explores lived experiences and personal accounts to identify unique perspectives (Williams, 2024). The narrative inquiry approach enabled the researchers to observe personal narrations of experiences, such as the struggles regarding service and scholarship. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and document analysis to understand the balancing of dual roles. Before collection, formal permission was

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sought from the institution, and informants signed a consent form explaining the research objectives and their rights.

Participants and Sampling

The data were purposively collected from three (3) participants identified by codes for analysis: Participant A (PA), Participant B (PB), and Participant C (PC). Selection was based on specific inclusion criteria: (1) being a Homeroom President at the Senior High School level, (2) having past leadership experience within an academy, and (3) being a consistent academic achiever. To ensure valid and reliable data, the researchers utilized the bracketing technique since the researcher are part of the institution to minimize the influence of their own preconceptions and institutional acquaintance (Simply Psychology, 2024). Semi-structured interview guides facilitated in-depth discussions regarding leadership practices, problems encountered, and coping strategies.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Day-to-Day Responsibilities in Service, Leadership, and Academic Excellence

The participants' narratives reveal a demanding daily existence characterized by a constant negotiation between service obligations and academic standards.

Service and Leadership Roles

Participants characterized their leadership roles as hectic and hard to manage. Participant A articulated the compounding difficulty of their grade level, stating, *"Mahirap... kase since ayun nga grade 11 na - ang dami na natin ginagawa na mahirap din tapos sumasabay pa yung mga events"*. Participant highlighted the operational burden of serving as the primary communication link, noting, *"Ako ang mangunguna sakanila... Ako yung unang nakakakuha ng information... saka ko palang sakanila ididisseminate".* This suggests leadership involves proactive management of both people and processes, aligning with Faix (2021) who notes leaders are often the first to initiate necessary actions.

Pursuit of Academic Excellence

Academically, the pursuit of excellence involves constant pressure to maintain honors status. Participant B articulated the relentless nature of this pressure, stating, *"Siyempre mahirap kase kailangan mo siyang i-maintain. Tapos yung pressure din, lagi din siyang nandon. Ayun mahirap, mahirap siya".* This expectation transforms a demanding academic load into a source of considerable pressure, as noted in Jeyasingh (2022) regarding tests and homework as major stress factors. While Participant A and Participant B felt this weight heavily, Participant C suggested that leadership was not a major hindrance to his studies, noting, *"Hindi naman siya ganun ka hinder sa pag-aaral ko yung pagiging leadership ko... Wala naman ako masiyado problema as of now".*

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2. Perceptions of Academic and Social Environment on Management of Dual Roles

The environment provides a complex landscape of added burdens and essential support systems.

Academic Environment

This factor was often perceived as a source of added weight. Participant A explicitly stated that teachers and grades *"They're adding more weight"* to their existing burden. Participant B noted that academic tasks add stress, stating, *"50-50... yung mga quizzes, siyempre, nakaka-add siya ng stress kasi imbis na pagdating mo sa bahay makakapag pahinga ka, kailangan mo pa mag-review".* These narratives emphasize the need for coping mechanisms to manage student duties effectively (Halim et al., 2024). However, Participant C suggested that his role *"Nakakatulong siya saaken... natutulungan niya ako in a way na – maorganize ang mga bagay".*

Social Environment

Rational buffers emerged as the primary protective shield against burnout. Participant A identified friends as the primary source of solace, stating, *"Siguro, friends? Yun lang talaga naiisip ko. Friends lang talaga". Participant B emphasized family support, noting, "Sa family ko, [lagi] talaga nila akong binibigyan ng advice kapag ka nabur-burnout ako… sa mga friends ko and classmates… nakikinig naman sila kahit papano".* These interpersonal connections strengthen leadership qualities, as found by Akinyi et al. (2017).

3. Experiences Derived from Navigating the Double Duty

Navigating dual roles produces both significant somatic strain and profound personal development.

Physiological and Social Toll

The dual role leads to significant somatic stress. Participant A reported *"super stress,"* sleep deprivation, and nutritional issues, stating, *"Nagdudulot talaga siya ng stress like super stress talaga... Hindi na ako masiyado nakakatulog... sa pagkain, hindi nako nakakakain ng maayos".* Participant B detailed physical manifestations such as insomnia, hair loss, and stress eating, noting, *"Dahil sa stress... may mga time na hindi agad makatulog... nanlalagas na yung buhok ko... stress eating".* These raw accounts illustrate how the double duty compromises fundamental well-being, mirroring the findings of Atienza et al. (2020). Participant C identified the sacrifice of his social life and sleep as primary costs, saying, *"Yung tulog ko, yung social life ko... Yung ang nakikita kong sacrifice ko".*

Rewards and Growth

Despite the stress, the experience catalyzes personal growth. Participant B shared that the role helped her overcome personal barriers: *"Improvement din sa sarili... utay-utay kong na o-overcome yung fear ko... marami rin akong natututunan na mga personalities ng ibang tao".* Participant A noted that leadership served as a mechanism for community building, stating, *"Nagiging way din siya – para maging*

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mas close ako sa classmates ko... nakakatulong den naman siya sa memories – sa pag buo ng memories". This social integration is a valuable byproduct that counter-balances the inherent stress (Villarama et al., 2024).

4. Specific Strategies and Ways to Balance Responsibilities

Participants employ strategic negotiation and internal grounding to sustain their dual commitment.

Sacrificial Negotiation

Student leaders consciously choose to prioritize either service or scholarship based on immediate urgency. Participant A demonstrated a preference for service, stating, *"Mas sineset aside ko ang academics kase mas gusto kong parang mas gusto kong perfect ang ginagawa... sinet aside ko muna yung research - pinilit ko yung banquet".* Conversely, Participant B prioritized academics for long-term benefits: *"Ang inuuna ko talaga eh ano, academics... kase sa academic, for me, mas marami syang benefit... Kaya, yung na gi-give up ko is leadership".* Participant C focused on situational prioritization: *"Uunahin ko muna kung ano yung importante... Ilalayo ko yung sarili ko sa mga distractions".* Success in one area often requires a temporary sacrifice in the other, as noted by Atienza et al. (2020) .

Internal and Spiritual Stability

For emotional well-being, they rely on grounding habits. Participant B explicitly identified prayer as a core source of strength: *"Prayer. Lagi talaga, prayer. Every time na may gagawin... laging prayer".* Participant C echoes this spiritual grounding, saying, *"Magpe-pray muna ako before doing that... Diko lahat ino-overthink yung mga bagay at tyaka calm lang ako in situations"*. PA (2026) utilizes social interaction as an emotional reset: *"Naghahanap ako lagi ng way para madistract which is yung friends... kakausap lang ako ng friends ko, medyo mag rerelax lang tapos go na ulit".* These strategies extend beyond time management to encompass essential emotional self-care.

CONCLUSION

The following conclusions are derived from the participants' narratives regarding their dual commitments:

- ***Day-to-Day Responsibilities and Struggles*.** Student leaders experience significant psychological and logistical strain due to the dual demands of service and academics, though the intensity of this struggle varies individually. While maintaining high grades is a primary challenge, individual psychological resilience plays a critical role in how leaders perceive and manage their dual load.

- ***Perceptions of Academic and Social Environment:***
  Academic Standards. Balancing high academic expectations with leadership roles presents a substantial challenge characterized by high stress and the sacrifice of personal time.

However, these roles simultaneously foster essential organizational skills that assist in managing complex schedules.

Social Support. Success in navigating these dual roles is heavily dependent on rational buffers—a multifaceted support system of family and peers. These connections serve as a protective shield against emotional and physical exhaustion, with family providing strategic advice and peers offering essential emotional validation.

- ***Experiences from Navigating Double Duty.*** The dual demands of leadership and scholarship result in tangible physical strain, including somatic stress, sleep deprivation, and poor nutrition. Despite these tolls, the experience serves as a catalyst for positive growth, fostering problem-solving skills, stronger social connections, and the development of lasting memories.

- ***Strategies for Balance.*** To maintain equilibrium, student leaders utilize Sacrificial Negotiation, prioritizing tasks based on immediate urgency. Furthermore, internal and spiritual stability is sustained through grounding habits such as prayer, socializing, and intentional solitude.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of these conclusions, the following actionable steps are recommended for educational stakeholders:

- *Implement Structured Support and Mental Health Resources.* Institutions should provide leadership training focused on time management, task prioritization, and boundary setting to reduce burnout. Access to confidential mental health services or guidance counselors tailored to the unique stressors of student leadership is essential.
- *Formalize Institutional Support Systems.* Schools should establish clearly defined mentorship programs and peer support networks to strengthen existing rational buffers. All institutional support resources should be explicitly documented and disseminated so leaders are fully aware of available aid.
- *Develop Policies to Mitigate Physical and Academic Strain.* Explicit governance policies should be implemented to officially recognize and reward exceptional commitment through tangible incentives, rather than relying solely on student sacrifice. Additionally, program planning must be communicated in a timely manner to avoid the stress of abrupt notifications.
- *Facilitate Academic Flexibility.* Faculty should be encouraged to exercise academic flexibility, such as granting reasonable extensions or allowing make-up work for exams missed due to school-sanctioned leadership duties. This should be governed by a clear policy requiring official documentation to maintain a balance between support and accountability.
- *Cultivate Comprehensive Leadership Recognition.* Institutions must proactively develop student leaders rather than simply delegating tasks. This includes regular program reviews, public recognition of achievements, and providing the necessary academic support to ensure that leadership involvement does not compromise scholarly rigor.

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