

## *The Juggling Life: Investigating Work-School Conflict Among Thai Graduate Students*

Siripreeya Chaiboonma, Chulalongkorn University, Thailand  
Kanit Sriklaub, Chulalongkorn University, Thailand  
Siwachoat Srisuttiyakorn, Chulalongkorn University, Thailand

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### **Abstract**

Working students often face challenges in balancing their responsibilities between workplace and school. While the primary focus and goal of students are to complete the school program and earn a degree, they are still required to accomplish the objectives of their daily job tasks. However, when demands between both focuses become unbalanced, work-school conflict (WSC) arises. Thus, this study aims to develop a WSC instrument for graduate students and analyze it using qualitative and quantitative data. A two-phase exploratory sequential mixed methods design was employed. In the qualitative phase, semi-structured interviews were conducted online with 19 working graduate students, selected through purposive sampling, and were analyzed using conventional content analysis. The findings revealed three key components found in the development of a 13-item questionnaire: time-based conflict, strain-based conflict, and behavior-based conflict. Content validity was assessed using the content validity index (CVI) from five experts. In the quantitative phase, the questionnaire was refined based on experts' feedback and tested for reliability with 32 working students. The data were then collected from 160 working students for construct validity testing. The results showed that the instrument achieved I-CVI scores above .60; the S-CVI/UA was .62, and S-CVI/AVE was .86, and both indicated acceptable validity. Cronbach's alpha values for internal consistency were .89 for time-based conflict, .89 for strain-based conflict, and .86 for behavior-based conflict, respectively. The measurement model presented the acceptable construct validity: Chi-square (1, N=160)=1.831,  $p=.176$ , RMSEA=.072, SRMR=.015, CFI=.996, TLI=.989. Most participants were master's students (69.38%). Overall, students reported a medium WSC level ( $M=2.682$ ,  $SD=2.613$ ), with strain-based conflict being particularly prominent. Therefore, enhancing self-regulation skills and providing faculty support systems could help mitigate WSC for working students.

Keywords: Work-School Conflict, Graduate Student, Thai University

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## **Introduction**

Graduate education is often seen as a gateway to enhance ones' career opportunities as well as personal growth, especially those working college students. However, their objective may not be completely fulfilled provided that they do not balance their academic responsibilities and professional tasks well, leading to a delicate juggling act - the challenge to cope with things at the same time.

According to Lindner (2024), in recent years, while the proportion of working students has increased up to 75% worldwide, their academic performance has slightly been lower than non-working students since they are required to manage a dual role, a student and a businessperson. Thailand is also unexceptional. Whereas graduate students are employed either part-time or full-time, they still need to govern other roles, such as a business entrepreneur and a parent. Nonetheless, the inter-role conflict occurs when they fail to accomplish all duties since they are studying and working simultaneously (Sheikh, 2015; Lui et al., 2001). The work-school conflict (WSC) is, therefore, a result of their inability to juggle responsibilities for both professional and academic tasks, eventually leading to the decreased level of well-being while academic stress increases (Rana, 2022).

While several international studies on WSC have investigated the experiences of students, the levels of WSC, the factors that influence it, and coping strategies for WSC, most of research papers in Thailand on the same topic have focused more on how to maintain and strengthen balance among work, life, and health. Based on Saengrotkittikhun and Choochom (2021), school work-life balance is significantly influenced by social support from work and family, problem-focusing coping, and conscientiousness. To support their statement, Sangnin et al. (2019) proposed different techniques to balance their work and life as follows: prioritizing tasks, adopting a positive attitude and behavior, promoting an organization's environment and atmosphere, establishing personal goals, and creating their happiness. Nevertheless, there are insufficient studies to elaborate the conflict between work and study of graduate students in Thailand. As a result, it is essential to broaden the scope of research in order to gain a deeper understanding of WSC in Thailand. Therefore, this paper aims to explore Thai graduate students' experiences of WSC and to develop its instrument based on their experiences.

## **Methodology**

In this study, an exploratory sequential mixed methods design was employed, and it consisted of two phases. The first phrase was conducted with a qualitative study, which graduate students were interviewed about their experiences of studying, while the second phrase was implemented with a quantitative study, focusing on developing a work-school conflict instrument and investigating the level of conflict among these students.

### ***The First Phase***

This phase aims to study work-school conflict experiences among Thai graduate students. 19 working students participating in this phase consisted of nine master's degree and ten doctoral degree students. Semi-structured interviews were used for data collection from these participants. Each student was individually interviewed through the ZOOM program, and their conversation was recorded. The recordings were transcribed, and their personal data and filler and/or repeated words were removed for valid results. Conventional content analysis was utilized, and its codes were directly developed from the actual data. Then, the codes were

categorized into three themes: time-based conflict, strain-based conflict, and behavior-based conflict. Following these themes, a 13-item questionnaire was developed and tested for content validity through the content validity index (CVI) from five experts. This instrument was adjusted based on experts' recommendation, and the refined instrument was implemented further in the next phase.

### ***The Second Phase***

This phase aims to develop a WSC instrument based on graduate students' experience. Reliability was first tested with 32 working students, using internal consistency based on Cronbach's alpha values. Construct validity was then assessed through confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) based on the online survey data, which was created through the Microsoft Forms platform and collected from 160 graduate students. To explore their level of conflict, the data were analyzed through descriptive statistics (i.e. mean, mode, standard deviation), along with visual plots to present the findings.

### **Findings**

This section presents the findings of the study with two main areas. The first one focuses on working students' experiences and the development of a WSC instrument based on their experiences, whereas the latter investigates the development of the instrument and evaluate it with an overview of its level.

#### ***Part 1: Studying work-school conflict (WSC) experiences among Thai students and developing a WSC instrument***

The 19 working students participating in this phase online consisted of nine master's degree and ten doctoral degree students. According to Figure 1, which demonstrates the characteristics of graduate students, the majority of participants in the master's degree group, from year one to year four, were professional teachers while the rest worked in other careers. However, most of them were full-time working students. In the Ph.D. group, students from year two to year four, most of them were both full-time working students and professional teachers.

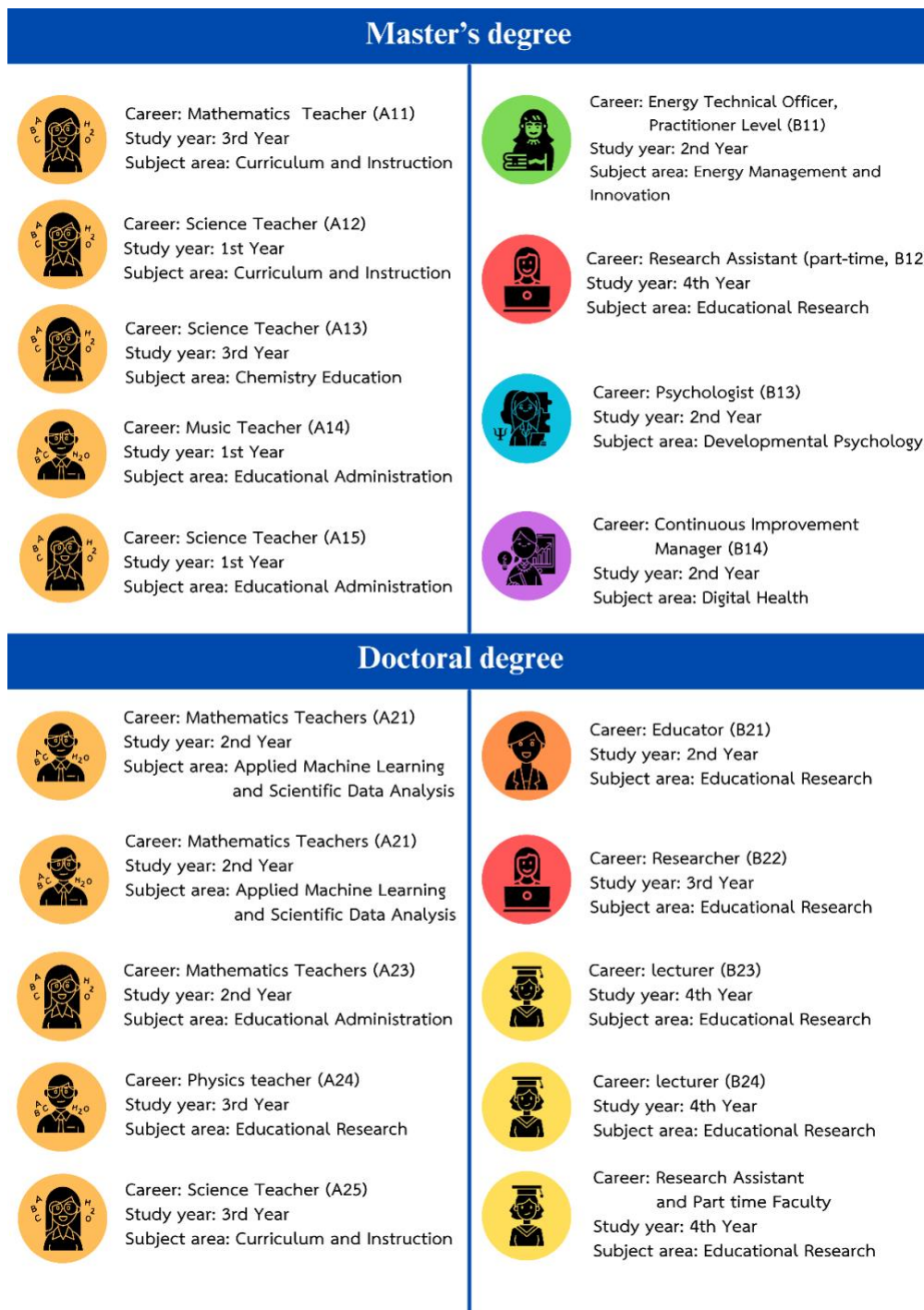


Figure 1: Participants Profile

The findings are summarized in Table 1 with the details of working students' experiences of studying and working.

Table 1: The Table of Theme, Category, and Code

Theme	Category	Code
Time-based conflict	Workload	Workload changed
		Schoolwork overload
		Organizing assignment
	Time management	Setting priority
		Using productivity techniques
		Working hours decreased
	Task management	Creating to-do lists
		Prioritizing the task
Strain-based conflict	Negative emotion	Anxiety / Distress
		Exhaustion
Behavior-based conflict	Preparing to learn	Lesson review
		Exam review
	Study and working behavior	Thesis related to work
		Multitasking
		Procrastination

### ***Theme 1: Time-Based Conflict***

A majority of participants mentioned having the limited amount of time for studying while working, and thus, it had been a challenge to maintain good balance between both tasks. In other words, time-based conflict occurred. Such a conflict fell into three categories: workload and schoolwork, time management, and goal setting.

#### ***Workload and Schoolwork***

Most full-time working students were provided with some support from their workplace for their further education. That is, when they attended graduate school, their workload decreased since they gained some help from their colleagues in some parts of the works. However, some other students did not receive any assistance or support at all. Some embarked on a new role with more challenging projects while studying hard at the same time. Following this, one master's degree student explained further, as follows:

“Before taking up a master's degree, I wasn't the head of the department, but when my colleague in that position resigned, I finally got promoted. Initially, I thought it wouldn't be much hectic, but once I became the head, everything ended up on me.”  
[A15]

In terms of schoolwork, most working students also reported being overloaded with many class assignments, particularly from technical subjects, after their first year of study. With tight deadlines, it was challenging to complete these assignments on time while also working. One Ph.D. student expressed about her schoolwork overload, as follows:

"When the second semester began, oh wow, it was even more like a battlefield. All the subjects were difficult! When I received assignments or group projects from multiple subjects, it turned into a lot of works.” [B21]

Moreover, some students were required to complete many of their assigned projects or homework; as a result, they needed to manage the tasks with their classmates properly. They would meet with their classmates online or onsite to divide the tasks among group members by interest. Another Ph.D. student explained how she responded to group projects, as follows:

“I usually volunteer to do the part that I want. I’m afraid that if I don’t, some other classmates will take that part, and I have to complete the other part instead without my full potential and attention.” [B24]

### ***Time Management***

Graduate students were questioned about how they normally balanced their time between studying and working. The majority of them mentioned that they employed the “Eisenhower Box”, a task management tool, aiming to prioritize their tasks based on importance and urgency. Through this method, they considered their job duties a priority over their academic responsibilities because they were concerned about the problem that may occur with their coworkers if the work results would not be achieved successfully. A master’s degree student disclosed her Eisenhower Box techniques, as follows:

“My technique is like taking notes. I create a table with four components. I place things that aren't immediately important in one section, and the others that need to be done in another. It's now very clear which jobs in each of the four parts should be done first.” [B11]

Furthermore, most of students managed their flexible schedule between their education and career tasks and endeavored to adhere to it. Despite so, they were urged to adjust their plan in case any unexpected assignments from work or school may occur. A graduate student who works as a teacher explained below how she would execute her time when the job and school tasks must be completed simultaneously.

“When my school assignments and works overlap, I decide whether to spend the rest of the night working on teaching preparation or finishing homework. The fact is that I have to choose what the most priorities are. In the end, however, I have to always put aside my school project and focus on my responsibilities towards my students.” [A25]

On the other hand, some students were required to maintain a work-life balance by managing both tasks between two roles as students and employees. They reduced their working hours while refusing to participate in some of the company’s activities and/or leaving work early on some days. A Ph.D. student shared her experience concerning this issue, as follows:

“Before I started my graduate school, I worked extra hours on weekends and earned a lot of money, but finally, I decided to stop that and give full concentration to my study for my future career.” [B21]

### **Task Management**

Working students demonstrated their task management skills for both studying and working in several ways. Most of them applied a simple method of implementing a to-do list while some only memorized things without taking notes. For the first group, a few techniques had

been employed - using paper (i.e., notebooks desk calendar), using electronic devices (i.e., tablet, telephones) by assigning colors to each task, and writing tasks on post-it notes and sticking them on their desk. Some Ph.D. students explained below how they usually create the lists.

“I always have my planner with me, and I also use a desk calendar at my home and workplace to note my to-do list. I keep writing notes to remember.” [A25]

“I note down everything, otherwise, I would mess up tasks. The calendar app on my iPad works great for me. For each job, I use different colors: orange for work assignments, green for schoolworks, and purple for other tasks.” [A22]

For the other group, one Ph.D. student who works as a Deputy Director of School pointed out that she tried to memorize all her tasks instead of employing any techniques. She expressed her thought as follows:

“To be really honest, there is one disadvantage. I really want to take notes even if I rely too much on memory. That is a horrible habit, I know. Anyway, I have a team, and they also remind me of the tasks. But I really wish I could be better at note-taking.” [B23]

In addition, the students explained further about their decision making when dealing with their tasks. Although they tried to maintain balance between their responsibilities, they ultimately decided to focus on the task that was nearly due for submission. Nevertheless, despite the fact that they were aware of the due date for each task, some students continued procrastinating their assignments until the last minutes before the deadline. A master’s degree briefly commented on this issue, as follows:

“I chose the most important thing to do first. I have homework due in two or three days, so I’ll start working on it today.” [A12]

## ***Theme 2: Strain-Based Conflict***

Most working students expressed some negative emotion towards their current situation, studying while working. It was a mix of two feelings: anxiety or distress and exhaustion. Since they were extremely concerned about their unfinished tasks, they encountered stress and strain during the exam period due to the fact that they were unable to concentrate on their take-home exams as they desired. A Ph.D. student shared her feeling, as follows:

“During the exam periods, when there are many things to do on a daily basis, I feel worried all the time about whether I have time to study for the tests or finish my final project and turn it in on time. I think about it all the time.” [B21]

Anxiety arose even more when the tasks overlapped, and students could not handle them. Consequently, they felt too overwhelmed by the strong demand of all tasks that need to be completed within the timeline. One master’s degree student mentioned as follows:

“In my mind, I just want it to be over. It’s quite disruptive to my daily life, and I’m always worried. They are part of my study, so I have to keep doing them. I had to change the plan for the experiment several times, which took more time and cost a lot of money.” [A13]

Apart from the above, students failed in their task and time management since they could not control all demands, and even worse, they gained unsupportive communication with their lecturers or advisors. As a result, they expressed being extremely exhausted and discouraged. Another master's degree student shared her feeling as follows:

“Most of the time, I felt extremely exhausted with all these never-ending things. I couldn't even take a holiday over the New Year period because I needed to continue some part of my thesis and submit it to my advisor. However, he didn't review it right away, so I had to keep waiting. Again, there was another time that I had to work on the research tools part and skipped the break. Then, I submitted it, but there was still no comment back from him yet. This is really protracted! So, when I got his feedback, I was already busy with my job.” [A13]

### ***Theme 3: Behavior-Based Conflict***

Most working students were questioned about their preparation for learning and their approach towards the way they balanced their work and study.

#### **Learning Preparation**

In terms of class preparation, some students studied their lessons, as part of class assignments, before the class, whereas some reviewed the lessons, especially previous ones, on their own. However, some spent even a day or two studying before the examination date. A Ph.D. student revealed below how she prepared for the exam.

"I reviewed the lesson a day before the class or the test date. Also, I may have more time to go over the lesson during the break or holidays.” [A24]

In addition to the above, the instructors may assign them to read some research papers for the next class. Even so, some of them may complete this assignment just an hour before the class. One working student shared their experience on this matter, as follows:

“In one subject, the lecturer assigned me to study around 10 research papers in English, but I cannot finish them all on time. Reading an English article is pretty challenging for me.” [A21]

#### **Study and Working Behavior**

Another important relevant factor is about students' performances on both professional and academic aspects, particularly when they needed to perform both tasks in parallel. It was always a challenge for them to succeed with both. One student working as a teacher revealed her thought, as follows:

“There was a time when I had to conduct the class virtually online while attending the online class at the same time, using my iPad with the camera off. Then, the professor started the activity, requesting all students to join breakout rooms for a group discussion, but I didn't pay much attention to her instruction, so I didn't join the room. After my own class, the teacher texted me asking where I was. So, I told her the truth. She was very nice and fine with it.” [A11]



Several students also mentioned about temporarily disconnecting with their advisor, leading to the delay of their thesis completion. A master's degree student disclosed her thesis progression, as followed:

“In my second year during the pandemic, I couldn't meet with my professor in person. So, with no personal interaction, I lost focus and didn't pay much attention to my thesis. It wasn't until the following year that I started concentrating again. Somehow, it caused delays to my thesis.” [A13]

Referring to the qualitative data, a 13-item questionnaire was developed based on working students' experiences and assessed through the content validity by five experts from Educational Research Methodology, Educational Measurement and Evaluation, and Psychological Counseling and Guidance. Following their recommendations, the instrument measured WSC sufficiently. The results of CVI are as follows:

- The I-CVI ranges from .60 to 1.00. Eight items shows an I-CVI equals to 1.00, one item is equal to .80, and five items is equal to .60. The majority of items are considered relevant.
- The S-CVI/UA across all items is equal .62. The Universal Agreement method indicates moderate content validity.
- The S-CVI/AVE is equal to .86. The Average approach presents high moderate content validity.

## ***Part 2: Developing a WSC instrument based on the graduate students' experiences***

### ***Reliability Testing***

The questionnaire was piloted with 32 working students, and its reliability was assessed by using the Cronbach's alpha values for internal consistency. The time-based conflict subscale consisted of 4 items ( $\alpha=.89$ ), the strain-based conflict subscale consisted of 4 items ( $\alpha=.89$ ), and the behavior-based conflict subscale consisted of 5 items ( $\alpha=.86$ ). According to the result, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient above .70 indicates the reliable level of internal consistency.

### ***Construct Validity Testing***

The WSC instrument was complete with 160 different working students from the reliability testing. The Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was used to investigate construct validity of the instruments. According to Table 3, the fit indices for the measurement model are  $\chi^2$  with one degree of freedom=1.831, RMSEA=.072, SRMR=.015, CFI=.996, and TLI=.989. These numbers indicated that the model fit the data accordingly. The construct validity testing is presented in Table 3 as below.

Table 3: CFA Fit Indices for WSC Instrument

Component	Factor loading		t	R <sup>2</sup>	Factor loading coefficient
	b(SE)	$\beta$			
Time-based conflict	1.000	.889	33.397	.790	.414
Strain-based conflict	1.016(.069)	.880	61.578	.775	.371
Behavior-based conflict	.707(.071)	.691	14.744	.477	.142
Chi-square(1, N = 160) = 1.831, <i>p</i> = .176, RMSEA = .072, SRMR = .015, CFI = .996, TLI = .989					

Chi-square (1, N = 160) = 1.831, *p* = .176, RMSEA = .072, SRMR = .015, CFI = .996, TLI = .989

According to Table 4, working students reported a medium WSC level ( $M=2.682$ ,  $SD=2.613$ ). The highest conflict level for both master's degree and doctoral students (was) occur from the Strain-based Conflict ( $M=3.119$ ,  $SD=1.166$ ), with master's students scoring an average of 3.146 ( $SD=1.165$ ) and Ph.D. students scoring 3.056 ( $SD=1.180$ ). The highest item in this category was WSEM1, where students were anxious about the unfinished workloads and schoolwork, with an overall mean of 3.556.

Next, students reported a medium time-based conflict level ( $M=2.748$ ,  $SD=1.128$ ), with quite the same level of master's degree and doctoral students. The highest item in this category was WSTM4, which indicated insufficient time to complete their tasks effectively while working and studying ( $M=3.063$ ,  $SD=1.335$ ).

Lastly, students presented a low behavior-based conflict level ( $M=2.279$ ,  $SD=1.026$ ), with master's degree students scoring an average of 2.238 ( $SD=1.010$ ) and Ph.D. students scoring 2.371 ( $SD=1.065$ ). The highest item in this category was WSBH5, which reported that students minimized their working standard to finish the tasks.

Table 4: Level of WSC's Items

WSC's items	Master's degree		Doctoral degree		Overall	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
<b>1. Time-based conflict (WSTM)</b>	<b>2.748</b>	<b>1.126</b>	<b>2.750</b>	<b>1.143</b>	<b>2.748</b>	<b>1.128</b>
WSTM1: When schoolwork and workloads overlap, I cannot set priorities for my jobs well.	2.613	1.389	2.673	1.329	2.631	1.367
WSTM2: I cannot manage time for all tasks while studying and working simultaneously.	2.775	1.305	2.776	1.212	2.775	1.274
WSTM3: I cannot complete workloads and schoolwork on time while studying and working simultaneously.	2.532	1.327	2.510	1.260	2.525	1.303

WSC's items	Master's degree		Doctoral degree		Overall	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
<b>1. Time-based conflict (WSTM)</b>	<b>2.748</b>	<b>1.126</b>	<b>2.750</b>	<b>1.143</b>	<b>2.748</b>	<b>1.128</b>
WSTM4: I have insufficient time to complete workloads and schoolwork efficiently while studying and working simultaneously.	3.072	1.353	3.041	1.306	3.063	1.335
<b>2. Strain-based conflict (WSEM)</b>	<b>3.146</b>	<b>1.165</b>	<b>3.056</b>	<b>1.180</b>	<b>3.119</b>	<b>1.166</b>
WSEM 1: I worry about unfinished workloads and schoolwork while studying and working simultaneously.	3.622	1.280	3.408	1.257	3.556	1.273
WSEM 2: I worry about incomplete workloads and schoolwork, and thus, I cannot concentrate.	3.270	1.286	3.306	1.294	3.281	1.285
WSEM3: I am worried that I will fail this semester.	3.018	1.465	2.755	1.422	2.938	1.452
WSEM4: I feel like a failure because I cannot reach my goals for working and learning.	2.676	1.453	2.755	1.507	2.700	1.466
<b>3. Behavior-based conflict</b>	<b>2.238</b>	<b>1.010</b>	<b>2.371</b>	<b>1.065</b>	<b>2.279</b>	<b>1.026</b>
WSBH1: I am unable to apply my knowledge from one setting to another.	2.099	1.213	2.163	1.328	2.119	1.246
WSBH2: My study or research topic is not related to my work.	2.126	1.329	2.408	1.471	2.212	1.375
WSBH3: I am unable to employ my problem-solving techniques from one setting to another.	2.144	1.212	2.184	1.202	2.156	1.206
WSBH4: I am unable to utilize working strategies from one setting to another.	2.162	1.140	2.224	1.212	2.181	1.159
WSBH5: I attempt to complete homework and workloads on time by reducing my working standard.	2.658	1.358	2.878	1.495	2.725	1.401

## Conclusion

This study conducted the development of a questionnaire to determine work-school conflict (WSC) of working graduate students in the context of Thailand. The WSC 13-item questionnaire was generated based on three main challenges: time-based conflict, strain-based conflict, and behavior-based conflict, and the instrument was undergoing psychometric testing for validity and reliability. According to the survey data, strain-based conflict was the highest among other WSC categories, especially when students were concerned about incomplete tasks and could not concentrate on both of their work and class assignments.

## Discussion

As the study of work-school conflict (WSC) in the Thai context was limited, this study would allow further investigation of working graduate students' experiences in WSC through the development of its instrument reflecting the Thai culture. The 13-item questionnaire was

developed based on the study by Greenhaus and Beutell (1985), which focuses on work-family conflict. According to students' overall experiences, the items were generated and validated; the psychometric analyses indicated that the instrument demonstrated good psychometric properties. The Cronbach's alpha values of all the subscale proved that the test achieved a high level of internal reliability, and the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) supported the original three components of the measurement model.

Moreover, the questionnaire consisted of 13 bi-directional items, which enabled this instrument to evaluate the level of conflict that may arise during their studying and working at the same time. On the contrary, other studies employed the 5-item scale which was developed by Markel and Frone (1998), focusing only on one direction of conflict from work to school. Although this scale is widely recognized and most frequently used to assess WSC in other studies (e.g., Butler, 2007; Headrick & Park, 2023; Peng et al., 2022; Wan et al., 2021), it could not present the level of WSC in two ways.

Finally, graduate students who focused on their education and employment reported a medium WSC level ( $M=2.682$ ,  $SD=2.613$ ), with strain-based conflict being particularly prevalent. The previous literature revealed that working students had emotional sensitivity to develop academic burnout when the WSC is on the rise (Lingard, 2007; Shahzad et al., 2021). Therefore, this study recommends that graduate students ought to develop self-regulation skills to deal with conflict situations. Since such skills had an impact on academic achievement (Afandi & Asdalifa, 2022; Rahayu, 2024), Afandi and Asdalifa (2022) found that the level of role conflict was controlled based on how efficient working students could regulate their responsibilities. Furthermore, the support from the university is beneficial to help reduce the impact of WSC on working students. The study of Raboca and Cărbunărean (2024) suggested further that this should proceed together with both functional and psychological support for them to maintain their academic motivation. In the end, graduate education is a temporary phase of life; it is important to be patient, consistent, and mindful in order not to begin juggling.

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