



## EXPLORING COLLEGE LIFE TRANSITIONS ADJUSTMENT OF FRESHMEN STUDENTS IN OCCIDENTAL MINDORO STATE COLLEGE TOWARDS A STUDENT SUPPORT PROGRAM

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### ABSTRACT

The transition of adolescents from being a high school to college student pictures a composite challenge that often impact the way they deal their academic, social, and holistic well-being. This study determines the experiences of the freshmen students at the Occidental Mindoro State College (OMSC) in their adjustment period in order to develop a suited program for student support and services. Through the employment of an exploratory and sequential mixed-method design, the study has involved qualitative interviews and a survey through a stratified random sampling. The general findings of the study reveal that most of the students face a moderate level of challenges including their personal, academic, and social struggles. It has been noted that these students deal with personal challenges such as independence, financial issues, and stress. Through variations of coping mechanisms including self-efficacy, their adaptive strategies have somehow eased this burden. In the application of the Transition Theory of Schlossberg and relevant frameworks of psychosocial, it highlighted the significant roles of social support, institutional responsiveness, and the self-efficacy methods of the students. The results of the study also determines the importance of institutionalized interventions such as peer mentoring, mental health support services, and orientation programs. The study suggests through its findings to implement a comprehensive guidance program to enhance the engagement and the success of students as they transition in their college life.

**Keywords:** *Adaptive Strategies, College Transition, Coping Mechanisms, Self-efficacy, Support Programs*

## INTRODUCTION

Globally, the transition from high school to higher education is a widely recognized developmental path that comes with social, academic, and psychological implication. Across the world, students face challenges adapting with a new environment especially under unfamiliar social networks and a need for personal responsibility (Thompson et al. 2021). This transition pictures a crucial stage where students are expected to navigate through complex systems, cope with new expectations, and redefine their sense of self. While universities and institutions across various countries have found solutions in order to recognize and students along the transition from high school to college life, these challenges highlight the importance of localized understanding.

In the Philippine context, college transition also shows the various cultural, economic, and institutional forces that shaped student experiences. Filipino students face additional stressor that include family responsibilities, financial constraints, and geographical displacement from hometowns. The Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013 (Republic Act No. 10533) requires holistic development, including assistance in psychosocial and academic adjustment. Nevertheless, in spite of these policies, students mostly have difficulties in adjusting that affect their performance and well-being.

The diverse set of students from the Occidental Mindoro State College have experienced particular challenges as they are on the brink of adopting to the adjustments they need to adjust to both social and academic expectations set to them. The Philippine government explicitly requires the educational institutions to uplift and promote the holistic development of students, which serves as a guide for the OMSC on catering to the needs of the first year students especially in coping with the transitory phase. However, a range of adjustment difficulties encompassing social, academic, and personal aspects of students' lives can be seen by what they have experienced.

Life transitions including the rapid yet gradual change in the transitioning of the life of a student from high school to college has been considered to be one of the normative challenges in the eventual welcoming of a new educational environment. These transitions transition is not merely about moving to a new environment but also adapting to a more demanding and less structured academic system, which can overwhelm many students. Because of such transitions, adolescents who are undergoing these form of transitory phase in their lives will facilitate on their reassessment of the identification of their goals (Mitchell et al., 2021).

Moreover, most adolescents view this transition as stressors wherein they face increasing demands in academics, societal and economic changes, and emotional barriers during this period. At the same time, these periods also allow the students to be presented opportunities for growth and self-development (Lanctôt & Poulin, 2024). In this manner, it has been observed that some of the first-year students transitioning to college experiencing struggle with navigating the dual pressures of academic and social adjustment, which are crucial to success in higher education. The gradual yet developing concern regarding the said matter provides the utmost need for the conduct of further exploration. Therefore, this study aims to determine and understand the transitions and

adjustments faced by freshman college students of OMSC and its impact on academic excellence with emphasis on their experienced challenges and the factors that contribute to this including the coping mechanisms they use to deal with it.

Furthermore, the existence of external factors including the expectations of people, the financial stress and burden, and the differences in culture were also perceived to further the complications in the transition phase of the students. These challenges, when remained unaddressed might impact and result to another level of unmonitored stress and anxiety for students. According to the study of Purnamasari et al. (2021), the difficulties experienced by these students during the transitory period most of the time facilitate in negative and poor academic performance, decreased level of social engagement, and increased level of dropout rates among first year students. Because of the inability to efficiently cope with the diverse transitions faced by them, it undermines the cementing of institutional system support that highlights the establishment of self-efficacy of students and to provide them with the related coping mechanisms in order to thrive in their respected tertiary disciplines.

In relation to the adjustment period and needs of students, coping mechanisms are highly crucial and significant for their development. Coping is defined as the behavioral and cognitive strategies that are being used by individuals, such as transitioning students in order to manage and adapt stress and change (Chemagosi & Ajayi, 2023). These form of coping mechanisms such as adaptive coping including problem solving and seeking-support can uplift the total well-being of students. On the other hand, the maladaptive coping such as withdrawal and substance use often lead to exacerbation of stress in the transitory period. Those individuals who are positive in the integration of several coping mechanisms were reported to have a higher self-efficacy and can better adjust (Stapley et al., 2022).

The most significant concept under the transition phase among students is the need for social adjustment including the intrapersonal and social relationships such as several social mechanisms including peer involvement, interactions between the teachers and students, preferences of each individual, and the sheer influence of family dynamics. For such instance, some students may find it difficult to build a meaningful relationships because of a new and environment that is unfamiliar for them. It is found that the relationship between the teacher and student can be a cause of stress, particularly when they have difficulty in communication regarding their holistic concern and adaption to the teaching styles. The individual preferences of students also has an impact on how they cope with this transitions. Their preferred form of learning, social tendencies, and other internal factors can also influence with the demands of the academic setting that is new for them which might cause uneasiness and inadequacy.

In addition, dynamics in family also plays a pivotal role in shaping the transitory phase of students. Those students who have or form unsupportive families were often found to experience stress that are heightened and too much for them to handle leading to low self-esteem and motivation decline. These factors in total result in isolation, heightened anxiety, the feeling of burnout, which are all significant to be addressed.

Multiple students also display their personal difficulty in the navigation of social structures and their development of productive and meaningful relationships with peers, particularly those who are nurtured by their socioeconomic backgrounds. Supportive interactions in these instances, especially in students and teachers can also increase the motivation of students both socially and academically as positive engagement among peers' impact how well they handle their wellbeing and community belongingness. To further, support from family is also significant as they offer an emotional and mental shelter for their children which helps in reducing stress and difficulties caused by changes. According to Chen et al. (2020), peer interactions and the interaction within the family is significant in developing the social interaction and adaptiveness of students especially during their freshman year.

One present challenge in this instance is the academic adjustment these students should face. As they are now in their tertiary education, they will be faced with heavier workload, stricter deadlines, and heightened standards of studies than their previous academic years. Now, they are in need of more self-regulation techniques and an efficient time management. These form of self-regulatory skills and self-efficacy beliefs have a good effect in the betterment of their academic performance (Theobald, 2021).

Guidance and counseling services are essential for helping students adjust socially and academically. However, students continue to have low levels of understanding of and utilization of these services. Improving these services to handle personal and academic issues is essential. In order to help students transition to college life, Purnamasari et al. (2021) stated that extensive networks of support are essential.

The Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) of Bandura offers a perspective in understanding how these students will shift and adapt in these life transitions they are facing. The theory provides that learning is nurtured in social context found through the observational learning where these students often imitate behavior of their role models. For students, they might learn effective study habits on the observation they see on their peers or mentors. According to Cherry (2025), self-efficacy points out the reciprocal determinism where the environment and the cognitive and behavior of students dynamically affect and influence each other. In this instance, especially in the transitory period, a conducive learning environment can boost the engagement and confidence of students that would lead to improved interactions and learning environment. The understanding of the concepts of SCT are all important in the experiences vital to adjustment in the transition period.

This study aims to explore the personal, social and academic adjustment experiences of first-year students at OMSC. The academic transition to college poses various challenges that often hinder students' ability to adapt effectively. Key factors contributing to these difficulties include differences in academic expectations, time management, and study habits, the researcher seeks to provide practical recommendations to the OMSC administration and counseling services, aligning with the legal framework of Republic Act No. 10533. Addressing identified challenges will contribute to creating a supportive campus environment that nurtures students' growth, engagement, and overall success.

## Research Questions

The study aimed to determine the adjustment experiences and transition challenges of first-year students of Occidental Mindoro State College and to develop a guidance program based on their needs.

Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. What types of support do freshmen students perceive as essential to help them adjust during their freshman year?
2. What is the profile of the first-year college students in terms of:
  - a. age;
  - b. sex;
  - c. study program/course; and
  - d. distance from home
3. What are the personal, academic, and social challenges faced by freshmen students as they adjust to college life?
4. How do freshmen students cope with these challenges in their college environment?
5. What proposed guidance program can be developed based on the identified transition challenges and adjustment needs of freshmen students at Occidental Mindoro State College?

## METHODOLOGY

The study utilized an exploratory sequential mixed-methods design in order to comprehensively explore the transition of college students and their adjustment experiences as first year students at the Occidental Mindoro State College. Through this approach, it began with the qualitative exploration which then followed by the validation of the quantitative data, which were chosen in order to address the methodological gap in the existing research. As most of the prior studies, they heavily relied on the quantitative data alone in relation of the adjustment of students which often used pre-established research instruments without determining the context-specific experiences of the students.

On the other hand, the exploratory sequential design allowed the study to come up with insights that are grounded directly from the participants which ensured that their experiences are well-refined and aligned in the intervention programs. This is significant in the context of Occidental Mindoro as the sociocultural, economic, and academic factors differ abundantly from those who are in more urbanized regions. The initial qualitative phase of the study provides a contextual depth, while on the other hand, the quantitative phase measures the wider applicability and reliability of the findings.

This research design is more than relevant than using an explanatory sequential approach, which usually begins with the quantitative data then uses a follow-up data from the qualitative approach. As the goal of the study is to explore the lived experienced first

and then establish a program from the findings of the study, it helped fill the methodological gap by making it sure that both the tools of qualitative and quantitative were anchored in the realities and experiences of students (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

The study was conducted in San Jose District, lone district in southern part of Occidental Mindoro, specifically within the local state college of the said district. The institution included in the study was Occidental Mindoro State College.

First year college students of OMSC enrolled for the academic year 2024-2025 were the respondents of the study. Based on the data of enrollees from the office of registrar, the total number of first-year students were 2,817 from different colleges and from that, the sample size of 339 for quantitative phase was determined using raosoft calculator with 5% margin of error and 95% confidence level. Stratified random sampling technique using proportionate sampling and random selection was adopted to identify the sample size to be taken from each college.

In the qualitative phase of the study, participants were purposively chosen using certain criteria to ensure that their experiences were relevant to the study. The inclusion criteria required that the participants are first-year students who are currently enrolled and studying at OMSC Main Campus and had already undergone counseling sessions addressing school adjustment issues. The researcher made sure that students were willing to participate in interviews and describe their adjustment experiences.

Students were excluded if they did not finish the quantitative survey or were not able to participate in the interview because of cognitive, communication, and psychological impairments that might compromise the integrity of data gathered. The study also acknowledged the autonomy of the students by implementing a clear withdrawal policy. The participants were free to withdraw their participation from the study at any time with no penalty. Lastly, wherever emotional distress was observed during the interviews, they were given the choice to pause or discontinue to maintain high standards of psychological safety in ensuring ethical guidelines.

Purposive sampling was used for the participant selection in the qualitative phase. The criteria in choosing included: first year students, from different colleges, and willingness to be a participant in the study. There were 10 participants who were interviewed in order to gain in-depth relevant statements to understand the research problem more. On the other hand, a stratified random sampling was used for the quantitative phase of the study. A sample size of 339 was computed then proportionately allocated to different colleges based on their population. In order to ensure accurate and equal representation, random selection was utilized in each stratum. Both qualitative and quantitative approaches were integrated to further the reliability and precision of the study (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

In this study, the questionnaire was self-made based on insights gathered during the initial qualitative phase of the exploratory sequential design. The interview data guided the formulation of questionnaire items to ensure their relevance to the specific objectives of the study and their alignment with the participants' actual experiences. To enhance the

reliability and validity of the instrument, expert evaluations were conducted, and the items were revised as necessary to ensure cultural and contextual appropriateness.

Furthermore, in the establishment of the validity of the research instrument both the survey and interview questions were reviewed by panel of expert by psychometrician, guidance counselor, and a statistician. The members of the panel have evaluated the clarity and appropriateness of the research instruments. The collected data were measured using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Each corresponding numerical value was assigned an equivalent value verbal description.

For the appropriateness of the questionnaire, this pace ensured the quality and reliability of the questionnaire. The researcher acquired advice and help from their experts in the field, one registered psychometrician, one registered guidance counselor, and one statistician to confirm their alignment with the study's objectives and their ability to elicit comprehensive and relevant responses from participants. The suggestion from the validators were considered in the revision and finalization of the questionnaire before conducting and reproduced the final copy.

Using the six-step thematic analysis framework (Braun and Clarke, 2006), the interview transcripts and the responses of participants were analyzed guided by the Schlossberg's Transition Theory. In determination of the veracity and credibility of the qualitative data, the shared summarization of the responses were checked by several members for a more in-depth interpretation. Participants were also allowed to validate the transcribed data through clarification and review processes.

Furthermore, the triangulation method was also employed in the comparison of the qualitative themes and the survey results from the quantitative data to align and make it consistent with the conclusions of the study. To gather and extract more data, follow-up interviews were recommended for the participants who willingly desired to give more answers or give clarity to their earlier response.

The reliability of the quantitative instrument was assessed to ensure consistency and internal stability of the scales measuring various dimensions of college adjustment. A pilot test was conducted with 30 first-year students from the target population prior to full data collection.

According to conventional reliability thresholds commonly referenced in psychometric research (e.g., Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994), Cronbach's alpha values above .80 are considered indicative of good to excellent reliability for psychological measures. The results from the pilot study confirm that the questionnaire is a reliable tool to assess first-year college students' adjustment experiences.

Each scale of the quantitative research instrument: Personal, Social, and the Academic Challenges was computed using the Cronbach's Alpha, a statistical coefficient tool which determines the status of items in a set on how correlated they are with one another which then measured the internal consistency of the research instrument.

Through the utilization of the SPSS software, it analyzed the responses of the participants from the pilot test which then generated the reliability coefficients of each subscale of the instrument.

The full questionnaire, consisting of 30 items, achieved a Cronbach's alpha of .919, indicating excellent internal consistency across all variables. Considering that all subscale alphas of the quantitative part of the study exceed .80. It is considered that the research instrument had a good internal consistency and reliability with one another following the psychometric standards that alpha values of 0.80 or higher indicate a good and positive level of reliability. This high alpha suggests that the items collectively measure a coherent construct related to college adjustment and coping experiences.

Through the employment of an exploratory sequential design, the data gathering of the study began with the qualitative phase then followed by the quantitative phase. The qualitative phase served as the foundation for data collection. It involved 18 purposively selected first-year students from Occidental Mindoro State College - Main campus who met these inclusion criteria: currently enrolled as first-year students, first-year students who have undergone counselling session relating to school adjustment challenges and willing to participate in interviews. These participants were contacted individually, provided informed consent, and engaged in semi-structured interviews conducted in a private campus setting. The interviews, lasting 30 to 45 minutes, were audio-recorded with permission and focused on their academic and social adjustment experiences, coping strategies, and perceptions of support services. After transcription, thematic analysis was performed to identify key themes and patterns. Insights from this qualitative phase guided the development of a structured questionnaire, which was then administered to a larger sample of first-year students.

Before data collection, formal permission was obtained through a request authorized by the Dean of Graduate Studies and forwarded to college administrators. The researcher personally facilitated the questionnaire administration, explaining its contents and allowing students approximately 30 minutes to complete the paper-and-pencil Likert scale instrument. The questionnaires were collected immediately after completion to maintain data integrity.

This sequential approach ensured that the quantitative phase was grounded in rich, context-specific insights from the qualitative phase, providing a comprehensive understanding of first-year students' adjustment experiences at OMSC.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Support to College Students in Adjusting to Freshman Year**

In terms of support to college in the adjustment to the freshman year, the thematic analysis has resulted into four major theme including self-support, family support, peer and social support, and the faculty and institutional support. Self-Support is also considered as Self-Care Strategies. Family Support is divided into four sub-themes such as Emotional Support, Practical Guidance, Financial Support, and Logistic Support. Peer

and Social Support is divided into two sub-themes which are Friendship Support and Mentoring and Networking. Faculty and Institutional Support is divided into five sub-themes which are Faculty Encouragement, Teaching Practices, Student Services, Policies and Environment, and Co-Curricular Groups.

They manage challenges by organizing tasks, seeking academic help, regulating emotions through distraction or positive thinking, and relying on peers for support. Students also make use of institutional and financial resources and practice self-care, perseverance, and personal growth.

**Table 1**  
**Support to College Students in Adjusting to Freshman Year**

Theme	Sub-theme	Code
1. Self-Support	Self-Care Strategies	Self-Implemented Coping
2. Family Support	Emotional Support	Encouragement & Affirmation
	Practical Guidance	Advice & Reminders
	Financial Support	Parental Allowance; Scholarship Facilit
	Logistical Support	Transportation Assistance
3. Peer & Social Support	Friendship Support	Close Peer Support
	Mentoring & Networking	Mentorship & Gatherings
4. Faculty & Institutional Support	Faculty Encouragement	Positive Feedback
	Teaching Practices	Inclusive Teaching Style
	Student Services	Counseling Services
	Policies & Environment	Anti-Bullying & Facilities
	Co-curricular Groups	Clubs & Organizations

### Profile of the Respondents

Majority of the first-year students are female students at 56.9% followed by male students at 43.1%. Most of the students are taking Business Administration at 49.9%, followed by

criminology and ISM students at 20.6%, and Development Communication at Social Work students at 14.5%. The least of the first-year students are hospitality management students at 9.4% and Engineering and Architecture students at 5.6%.

The age distribution indicates that the majority of first-year students fall within the typical college-entry age range of 18 to 20 years. This aligns with findings from a study by Cuervo (2023), which reported that 55% of Filipino college students were between 18 and 20 years old.

In dealing with the gender distribution among the participants, there were 56.9% of female students of the total population of enrollment. According to the Commission on Higher Education (CHED), the enrollment among female students in tertiary education is relatively higher and increased over the years outnumbering the enrollment of male students in the country. In the CARAGA Region, for the Academic Year 2022-2023, there were at least 5 to 57% of total population of enrolled students accounted for female students which reflected the growth and development for the pursuit of women in higher education. This developing pattern describes the changing dynamics in access to education and the gender roles in the country. It is now seen that women are active in shaping the academic field once dominated by men.

Dominantly, it has been seen that Business Administration is amongst the most popular chosen program by the respondents which mirrored the tertiary enrollment patterns. The data of CHED indicated that this program and business-related fields have gained the highest number of college student enrollees in the Philippines.

The popularity of the program is relatively attributed to several related factors. First, it can be seen that a lot of students were tied with the business program as it constantly offers a diverse range of knowledge and skills which are applicable for the various industries both locally and internationally catering management, finance, commerce, and entrepreneurship. Because of the versatility of the program, it creates a welcoming opportunity and option for students especially to those who opt for a flexible and reliable career path with multiple opportunities.

In addition, perception regarding the program that it usually leads to stable job and multiple opportunities and development potentials in the economic world appeals to the incoming and current students especially in prioritizing financial security of oneself and family. However, the choice to enroll in BSBA is not always purely driven by interest or passion. In many cases, students may end up in the program because it serves as a fall back option when they do not pass the entrance exams for more competitive or specialized courses. This “second choice” phenomenon means some students find themselves in BSBA not out of a strong preference, but because it offers a practical alternative to continue their higher education without delay.

Regarding the distance from home to school, the fact that over half of the students travel more than 6 kilometers suggests potential challenges related to commuting. While specific studies on commuting distances for Filipino students are limited, it's widely

acknowledged that longer travel times can impact student well-being and academic performance.

In provincial areas traffic may be less of a factor, but the physical and financial costs of commuting remain significant barriers for many students. Many rely on walking long distances due to limited transportation options, while others bear the financial strain of daily fares. This daily travel can cause physical exhaustion and stress, leaving less time and energy for studying and rest.

**Table 2**  
**Profile of the respondents**

Profile	Grouping	Frequency	Percentage
Age Mean = 19.28 SD = 1.53	18 yrs old and below	97	28.6
	19 yrs old	144	42.5
	20 yrs old	55	16.2
	21 yrs old	22	6.5
	22 yrs old and above	21	6.2
Sex	Female	193	56.9
	Male	146	43.1
Program	DevCom and Social Work	49	14.5
	Business Administration	169	49.9
	Criminology and ISM	70	20.6
	Engineering and Architecture	19	5.6
	Hospitality Management	32	9.4
Distance from Home	0 - 2 km	35	10.3
	3 - 5 km	112	33.0
	6 km and beyond	192	56.6

## Personal, Academic, and Social Challenges Faced by Freshmen Students

This result suggests that while first-year students are indeed facing a fair amount of adjustment issues, many are managing these challenges relatively well. The dominance of personal challenges points to the emotional and mental shifts students go through as they transition from high school to college life.

This result is strengthened by Conley et al. (2014), which highlights that the transition to college often brings increased levels of stress, especially in personal areas such as independence, identity formation, and coping with new responsibilities. The relatively uniform experience among students, as shown by the low standard deviation, may also reflect common transitional struggles faced by most freshmen, regardless of their background. This brings to light the importance of providing mental health support and guidance programs during the first year of college to help students navigate these personal and academic pressures effectively.

**Table 3**

**Personal, Academic, and Social Challenges Faced by Freshmen Students**

<b>Indicators</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>	<b>Description</b>
Personal	3.15	.60	Moderate
Academic	2.75	.43	Moderate
Social	2.74	.43	Moderate
<b>Challenges</b>	<b>2.88</b>	<b>.27</b>	<b>Moderate</b>

Scale: 1.00-1.50 Very Slight; 1.51-2.50 Slight; 2.51-3.50 Moderate; 3.51-4.50 Strong; 4.51-5.00 Very Strong

The study found that students face a range of personal struggles when entering college life. Table 3 presents the freshmen students experienced moderate personal challenges with mean of 3.15 + .60. Literature indicates that individual personal transitions tend to trigger homesicknesses, which can lead to social isolation and increases anxiety if not remedied (Flett et al., 2021; Purnamasari et al., 2021). This shows that the students are experiencing considerable number of personal challenges and they are able to manage them. The low standard deviation of .60 indicates that the students experience almost similar number of personal challenges.

Chronic anxiety and stress have been associated with diminished academic performance unless buffered by interventions that build resilience, like grit training or mindfulness (Duckworth & Seligman, 2022; Heinrich, 2020). The personal challenges experienced most by the freshmen students are feeling pressured to meet expectations from family and professors (3.53 + 1.16), finding it challenging to balance personal time with academic demands (3.49 + 1.08), adjusting to a new environment has been emotionally challenging (3.47 + 1.14), experiencing stress due to the pressure of becoming

independent (3.43 + 1.18), and having had difficulty managing my finances since living away from home (3.43 + 1.19).

The personal challenges experienced least by the freshmen students are feeling uncomfortable seeking emotional support when I need it (2.68 ± 1.00), unsatisfied in handling personal challenges in college (2.46 ± 1.05), personal growth has not improved despite the challenges (2.45 ± 1.03), believing less resilient through college experiences. (2.40 ± 1.01), and transitioning to college has made them feel more dependent (2.18 ± .91).

These results show that many freshmen are going through a demanding adjustment period, especially in terms of internal pressures and life changes. Poor sleep habits and loneliness further diminish well-being; sleep-improvement courses have proved to be effective in lessening these outcomes (Walker, 2017). Additionally, Joo et al. (2018) noted that financial pressure often pressures students into part-time employment, adding to academic and emotional tension. The high scores on feeling pressured, time management struggles, emotional adaptation, and financial stress highlight just how complex the personal side of college life can be.

Despite this, students seem to be managing, which is a positive sign. Lower scores on statements related to emotional support, personal growth, and resilience suggest that while they're coping, there's still room for schools to provide more guidance and support systems.

This result is similar to a 2024 report by Inside Higher Ed, nearly half of college students identified balancing academics with personal, family, or financial responsibilities as their most significant stressor.

This underscores the importance of providing comprehensive support systems to help students navigate the multifaceted challenges effectively.

**Table 4**  
**Personal Challenges faced by Freshmen Students**

<b>Indicators</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Description</b>
I feel pressured to meet expectations from my family and professors.	3.53	1.16	Strong
I find it challenging to balance personal time with academic demands.	3.49	1.08	Moderate
Adjusting to a new environment has been emotionally challenging for me.	3.47	1.14	Moderate

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I experience stress due to the pressure of becoming independent.	3.43	1.18	Moderate
I have had difficulty managing my finances since living away from home.	3.43	1.19	Moderate
I have had trouble sleeping due to stress or worries about college life.	3.41	1.16	Moderate
I find it difficult to ask for help when facing personal challenges.	3.40	1.05	Moderate
I have struggled to maintain a healthy lifestyle since entering college.	3.38	1.12	Moderate
I have struggled to develop a personal routine that works for me.	3.37	1.02	Moderate
I have struggled with time management in my personal life.	3.36	1.09	Moderate
I have difficulty setting personal goals and staying motivated.	3.35	1.07	Moderate
My coping mechanisms for stress have changed since entering college.	3.32	.99	Moderate
I experience anxiety when facing unfamiliar situations in college.	3.30	1.14	Moderate
I feel insecure about my abilities and accomplishments in college.	3.30	1.17	Moderate
I sometimes doubt whether I belong in my chosen course or program.	3.30	1.08	Moderate
My self-esteem has been affected by my college experiences.	3.26	1.05	Moderate

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College life has affected my ability to stay optimistic about my future.	3.25	1.07	Moderate
My self-confidence has been affected since transitioning to college.	3.24	1.15	Moderate
I feel overwhelmed by the responsibilities of managing my daily life.	3.23	1.04	Moderate
Managing my emotions has been more difficult since starting college.	3.23	1.12	Moderate
Being away from my family has impacted my emotional well-being.	3.20	1.23	Moderate
I struggle with self-discipline in managing my personal responsibilities.	3.09	1.12	Moderate
I have difficulty making decisions on my own without guidance from family.	3.06	1.11	Moderate
I often feel lonely despite being surrounded by classmates and peers.	3.01	1.16	Moderate
I often feel homesick since starting college.	2.99	1.28	Moderate
I feel comfortable seeking emotional support when I need it. (R)	2.68	1.00	Moderate
I am satisfied with how I am handling my personal challenges in college. (R)	2.46	1.05	Weak
I feel that my personal growth has improved despite the challenges. (R)	2.45	1.03	Weak
I believe I am becoming more resilient through my college experiences. (R)	2.40	1.01	Weak

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The transition to college has made me feel more independent. (R)	2.18	.91	Weak
<b>Overall Mean - Personal Challenges</b>	<b>3.15</b>	<b>.60</b>	<b>Moderate</b>

Scale: 1.00-1.50 Very Weak; 1.51-2.50 Weak; 2.51-3.50 Moderate; 3.51-4.50 Strong; 4.51-5.00 Very Strong

Table 5 presents the freshmen students experienced moderate social challenges with mean of  $2.74 \pm .43$ . This shows that the students are experiencing considerable pressure of social challenges and they are able to manage them. The low standard deviation of .43 indicates that the responses of the students are homogenous.

The social challenges experienced most by the freshmen students are experiencing situations where they felt uncomfortable due to peer expectations ( $3.43 + .98$ ), peer influence impacting decision-making ( $3.39 + .92$ ), the social aspects of the college transition is overwhelming and difficult for to navigate ( $3.31 + .91$ ), finding it easy to initiate conversations and connect with new people in college ( $3.30 + .98$ ), and feeling pressured by peers to conform to certain behaviors or social norms ( $3.30 + .91$ ). This is supported by various studies that strong peer relations and organized group activities have been found to decreased loneliness while increasing intrinsic motivation in the process of adjustment (Zhao et al., 2022; Kritikou & Giovazolias, 2022).

The social challenges experienced least by the freshmen students are feeling that campus activities are not accessible and inclusive for all students ( $2.47 \pm .94$ ), program offers inadequate support and resources to help students navigate social challenges ( $2.47 \pm .93$ ), balancing free time ineffectively between socializing with friends, relaxation, and academic responsibilities ( $2.45 \pm 1.00$ ), college orientation program ineffectively prepared me for campus life ( $2.43 \pm .92$ ), and participating in social activities has not improved my overall college experience ( $2.41 \pm .97$ ).

These results highlight that while freshmen are managing their social challenges moderately well, they still face significant pressures, particularly related to peer expectations and the complexities of forming new social connections. The discomfort stemming from peer influence and the overwhelming nature of the college social environment suggest that students are navigating a delicate balance between individuality and the desire to fit in. The emotional regulation abilities including the mindfulness training is found to have a direct influence on the ability of student in adjusting to social settings (Lee et al., 2024).

According to the study of Chen and Deng (2024), they have explained that peer pressure is a circumstancing issue within college students that impacts the decision-making process and behavior of students. The study finds that these existing factors including the environment within the family, gender, and academic setting can also impact and affect the peer pressure which leads to outcomes that are both positive and negative for the life of students. In recognition of these pivotal dynamics, it is important for the educational

institutions to provide social support and systems that will help students to build resilience and balance within their transitional period. According to Awang et al. (2024) and Li et al., (2022), a culture-sensitive orientation and family support were found to be supportive among collectivist students.

**Table 5**  
**Social Challenges faced by Freshmen Students**

<b>Indicators</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Description</b>
I have experienced situations where I felt uncomfortable due to peer expectations.	3.42	.98	Moderate
Peer influence has impacted my decision-making since starting college.	3.39	.92	Moderate
The social aspects of the college transition felt overwhelming and difficult for me to navigate.	3.31	.91	Moderate
I find it easy to initiate conversations and connect with new people in college.	3.30	.98	Moderate
I feel pressured by peers to conform to certain behaviors or social norms.	3.30	.91	Moderate
I often struggle to find social activities or meaningful ways to spend my free time on campus.	3.26	1.01	Moderate
I often feel isolated or left out in social settings on campus.	3.04	1.00	Moderate
I adjusted quickly to the social environment and expectations of college. (R)	2.74	.99	Moderate

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The transition from high school to college has been socially smooth and positive for me. (R)	2.74	1.02	Moderate
I feel well-prepared for the independence required in college. (R)	2.73	.95	Moderate
I find it easy to resist peer pressure in social situations. (R)	2.72	.91	Moderate
My free time on campus is spent building relationships with peers or joining group activities. (R)	2.70	.99	Moderate
I actively participate in clubs, organizations, or events on campus. (R)	2.70	1.08	Moderate
Making close friendships in college has been a challenging process for me. (R)	2.65	1.08	Moderate
Social programs at my college cater to a wide range of student interests. (R)	2.64	.92	Moderate
My peers have a positive influence on my actions and choices. (R)	2.57	.91	Moderate
I feel supported by academic advisors, faculty, or staff members. (R)	2.56	.92	Moderate
My high school experience prepared me socially for the challenges of college life. (R)	2.56	1.02	Moderate

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I spend my free time engaging in activities that help me grow personally or socially. (R)	2.55	.99	Moderate
I feel comfortable approaching college staff for help when needed. (R)	2.55	.93	Moderate
The campus has sufficient resources to help students adjust to college life. (R)	2.54	.92	Moderate
I have developed meaningful relationships with classmates or roommates. (R)	2.53	1.04	Moderate
I feel included and accepted by my peers in the college community. (R)	2.51	.94	Moderate
I use my free time to participate in hobbies or interests that bring me joy. (R)	2.50	1.02	Weak
College-organized activities have helped me feel more connected to my peers. (R)	2.48	.92	Weak
I feel that campus activities are accessible and inclusive for all students. (R)	2.47	.94	Weak
My program offers adequate support and resources to help students navigate social challenges. (R)	2.47	.93	Weak

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I balance my free time effectively between socializing with friends, relaxation, and academic responsibilities. (R)	2.45	1.00	Weak
The college orientation program effectively prepared me for campus life. (R)	2.43	.92	Weak
Participating in social activities has improved my overall college experience. (R)	2.41	.97	Weak
<b>Overall Mean – Social Challenges</b>	<b>2.74</b>	<b>.43</b>	<b>Moderate</b>

Scale: 1.00-1.50 Very Weak; 1.51-2.50 Weak; 2.51-3.50 Moderate; 3.51-4.50 Strong; 4.51-5.00 Very Strong

Table 6 presents the freshmen students experienced moderate academic challenges with mean of 2.75 + .43. This shows that the students are experiencing considerable pressure of academic challenges and they are able to mitigate them. The low standard deviation of .43 indicates that the responses of the students are almost similar with each other.

The academic challenges most experienced by the freshmen students are academic workload in college is significantly more challenging than in high school (3.75 + 1.04), balancing multiple subjects at once is a major challenge for them (3.62 + .99), financial stress makes it difficult to concentrate on academic tasks (3.53 + 1.00), finding the academic expectations in college to be overwhelming (3.49 + 1.01), and struggling to understand some of the concepts taught in college courses (3.45 + .96).

The academic challenges least experienced by the freshmen students are finding the teaching methods used in college less engaging and ineffective (2.47 + .96), academic performance in college has not improved compared to high school. (2.45 + 1.00), professors are unapproachable and unwilling to provide help when needed (2.43 + 1.00), the college workload has not taught us to manage time more effectively (2.42 + .97), and feeling unmotivated to achieve academic success in college (2.32 + .97).

These results highlight that freshmen students are encountering significant academic challenges, particularly in adjusting to the increased workload and complexity of college-level studies. Burnout and high cognitive load are likely to occur together; goal-setting and structured break interventions ward off these threats (Misra & McKean, 2000). The transition from high school to college often involves a steep learning curve, where students must develop new study habits and time management skills to cope with the demands of multiple subjects and higher expectations. Integrated orientation, advising, and healthy faculty–student relationships drastically minimize dropout rates (Mathew,

2023; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Financial stress further exacerbates these challenges, making it difficult for students to focus on their academic tasks.

A recent study by Bedewy and Gabriel (2015) supports these observations, indicating that continuous learning stress can exhaust a person's resources and lead to several adaptation problems. The study emphasizes that fear of failing, academic workload, instructor behavior, adjustment to a new setting, and assessment and examination routines are significant stressors for first-year college students. Addressing these issues through targeted support services and academic interventions can help students navigate their first year life more successfully. Empirical evidence indicates that accessible counseling and mental health services have been demonstrated to support persistence and well-being (Osborn et al., 2022).

**Table 6**  
**Academic Challenges faced by Freshmen Students**

<b>Indicators</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Description</b>
The academic workload in college is significantly more challenging than in high school.	3.75	1.04	Strong
Balancing multiple subjects at once is a major challenge for me.	3.62	.99	Strong
Financial stress makes it difficult for me to concentrate on my academic tasks.	3.53	1.00	Strong
I find the academic expectations in college to be overwhelming.	3.49	1.01	Moderate
I struggle to understand some of the concepts taught in my college courses.	3.45	.96	Moderate
Procrastination has negatively impacted my ability to manage assignments.	3.31	.96	Moderate
I feel unsupported academically by my college staff.	3.01	1.04	Moderate
I use a planner or calendar to organize my academic responsibilities. (R)	2.74	1.03	Moderate
My financial situation allows me to focus on my academics without major distractions. (R)	2.70	.96	Moderate
I can rely on scholarships or financial aid to support my academic success. (R)	2.63	.97	Moderate
The college provides sufficient academic resources, such as tutoring or study groups. (R)	2.62	.97	Moderate

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I have access to resources that help me understand difficult course material. (R)	2.59	.91	Moderate
I am able to balance my studies effectively despite financial responsibilities. (R)	2.59	.98	Moderate
Managing my course has become easier over time with experience. (R)	2.58	.93	Moderate
I seek help or guidance when I am unable to complete tasks on time. (R)	2.58	1.00	Moderate
I feel well-equipped to handle the heavier workload in college. (R)	2.57	.95	Moderate
I feel confident in my ability to handle the academic challenges in college. (R)	2.55	.93	Moderate
I receive constructive feedback from my professors to improve my work. (R)	2.55	.93	Moderate
I regularly set aside time for studying and reviewing course material. (R)	2.55	.97	Moderate
I have developed better study habits to cope with the demands of college academics. (R)	2.54	.93	Moderate
I prioritize tasks effectively to meet deadlines for assignments and projects. (R)	2.49	.95	Weak
I feel that the academic staff genuinely cares about my success. (R)	2.49	.93	Weak
Financial stability positively impacts my academic performance. (R)	2.49	.96	Weak
I am satisfied with the quality of education I am receiving in college. (R)	2.48	1.06	Weak
The course I am taking in college align with my academic interests and goals. (R)	2.48	1.02	Weak
I find the teaching methods used in college engaging and effective. (R)	2.47	.96	Weak
My academic performance in college has improved compared to high school. (R)	2.45	1.00	Weak
My professors are approachable and willing to provide help when I need it. (R)	2.43	1.00	Weak
The college workload has taught me to manage my time more effectively. (R)	2.42	.97	Weak

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I feel motivated to achieve academic success in College. (R) 2.32 .97 Weak

**Overall Mean – Academic Challenges 2.75 .43 Moderate**

Scale: 1.00-1.50 Very Weak; 1.51-2.50 Weak; 2.51-3.50 Moderate; 3.51-4.50 Strong; 4.51-5.00 Very Strong

### Coping with challenges of freshmen students

The thematic analysis produced five themes in coping with the challenges of freshmen students namely: Problem-Focused, Emotion-Focused, Social Coping, Resource Utilization and Self-Regulation and Resilience. Problem-focused coping is divided into two sub-themes such as Task and Time Management and Academic Help-seeking. Emotion-Focused coping is divided into three sub-themes which are Distraction and Escape, Cognitive Strategies, and Situational Escape. Social Coping is divided into 3 sub-themes which are Peer Support, Group Integration, and Emotional Support. Resource Utilization is divided into three sub-themes which are Institutional Resources, Inclusive Practices, and Physical and Financial. Self-Regulation and Resilience is divided into three sub-themes which are Rest and Self-Care, Perseverance, and Self-Initiated Growth.

Students relied on Self-Care Strategies to manage stress and stay balanced. Family Support played a strong role, especially through emotional comfort, practical advice, financial help, and assistance with daily needs. Peer and Social Support included friendships and mentoring relationships that fostered belonging and guidance. Finally, Faculty and Institutional Support came through encouraging teachers, effective teaching methods, accessible student services, supportive policies, and involvement in co-curricular activities.

**Table 7**  
**Coping with Challenges of Freshmen Students**

Theme	Sub-theme	Code
1. Problem-Focused Coping	Task & Time Management	Task Organization; Time Management
	Academic Help-Seeking	Study Groups; Faculty Consultation
2. Emotion-Focused Coping	Distraction & Escape	Media Distraction; Physical Distraction
	Cognitive Strategies	Positive Reframing; Cognitive Avoidance

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	Situational Escape	Situational Withdrawal
3. Social Coping	Peer Support	Peer Sharing
	Group Integration	Joining Organizations
	Emotional Support	Support Seeking
4. Resource Utilization	Institutional Resources	Counseling & Mentoring
	Inclusive Practices	Faculty Encouragement
	Physical & Financial	Financial Aid & Allowance; Logistical Support
5. Self-Regulation & Resilience	Rest & Self-Care	Planned Rest
	Perseverance	“Keep Going” Attitude
	Self-Initiated Growth	Self-Reflection & Action

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## Project Proposal

A comprehensive Support and Guidance Program is proposed to help freshmen students successfully navigate the personal, academic, and social challenges they face during their transition to college. This program aims to address the identified needs and challenges through a holistic approach that provides both emotional and practical support.

## Conclusions

Based on the findings of the study, the researcher concluded the following:

1. Most first-year students are 19 years old, primarily female, and studying Business Administration. Many live over 6 kilometers away from home, indicating they've relocated for college.
2. Freshmen face a mix of challenges, with personal issues like managing expectations and balancing time being the most significant. Academic challenges, including heavy workloads and financial stress, follow closely. Social challenges among transitioning

college students were found to be less common but discomfort with the expectations among peers is considered to be a difficulty in their navigation of social college life.

3. It is also found that college students adopt a variety of coping techniques in order to manage their challenges of college life. This includes skills such as problem-solving, emotional support, social and peer connections, and the self-regulation. Through the combination of integral techniques of coping mechanisms in the external resources, the students showed adaptability, confidence, and resilience in dealing with their first year.

4. Most freshman students rely on an integrated strategies of both personal and external support from their families, faculty, institutional resources, and peers in order to deal and overcome with the challenges of their college journey.

5. The proposed project as a results of the findings of the study seeks to provide support freshmen in hopes of overcoming the challenges they face during their transition in college. The program focuses on the well-being, success in their academics, social integration, and connection building among the first-year students with their family, peers, and faculty. This comprehensive approach seeks to facilitate students to adjust efficiently in their college life smoothly in promotion of both the academic and personal growth.

## **Recommendations**

As a result of the findings of the study, the following are the recommendations:

1. The educational institution should consider a comprehensive approach in building an interactive orientation program to address the academic and social challenges the students offer. These orientation programs are focused on facilitating the students to build a habit of time management skills, partake the academic expectations, and build a sense of community both inside and outside the college. Furthermore, the orientation will most likely provide growing opportunities for the first-year students to build a relationship with the faculty, staff, and their peers to constantly build a supportive environment from the start of their college program.

- Individual Counselling: This form of social support will provide counselling services among freshman who are dealing with problems in relation to emotional regulation, time management, and their development of self-confidence.

- Group or Peer Counselling: The study suggests the establishment of support groups especially considering how similar peers experience same social and emotional stress.

- Academic or Career Counselling: Type of counselling that will provide aid in skill management and decision-making process of students.

- Psychosocial Counselling: Address the psychosocial gaps of students in terms of adjustment-related stresses and mental health awareness.

2. The institution in consideration of the findings of the study may also improve the academic support services including the tutoring services, academic advising, and the peer mentoring. Through these mentoring workshops on study skills, time management, and the help-seeking behaviors of students can protect and ensure the first-year students with the necessary tools in order to manage their academic challenges efficiently.

3. Educational institutions can also increase the number of student mechanisms access to emotional and mental health support services. This includes stress management trainings, counselling services, and establishment of peer-support groups. Moreover, similar initiatives with the objective of promoting self-care techniques and building of self-resilience should also be a priority in helping the students manage their personal stress and the emotional challenges of students.

4. Colleges can also consider investment in programs catered to peer mentoring in order to create a various and wide range of social and holistic integration activities. This includes the empowerment and strengthening of club fairs, study sessions, student-led events and organizations which are all aligned with the diverse needs of the students. Through facilitation and expansion of peer support networks, the college can aid in building friendship and establish emotional support, and equip a sense of belongingness which ensures that every student, despite of their socioeconomic background, has equal opportunity to be integrated in the campus community.

5. Create a campus program that actively promotes family engagement in the transition process of first-year college students. There shall be orientation sessions among family members and provide them with necessary resources on how they can be of greater help to students holistically.

6. Members of the faculty can also be trained in dealing with the challenges faced by their students especially the first-year students and how they can be encouraged to adapt a more technical and inclusive form of teaching to better fir the diverse needs of students. The educational institution should also make sure that the student services including counselling and career services are deemed to be more accessible and well-promoted to first-year students.

7. Strengthen and build financial literacy workshops. Educational institutions might also consider the expansion of their financial services including the need of emergency grants and be granted with assistance in dealing with the living expense of freshman students.

8. Establish the regular feedback mechanisms and intervention among the first-year students all over the year in order to assess that the adjustment the first-year students is facing are well-targeted for program improvement and intervention. These mechanisms can also be conducted through surveys or focus groups discussions in order to have the feedback regarding the difficulties and challenges faced by the freshman students at the same time ensuring that the support systems are effective.

## Compliance with Ethical Standards

This study prioritized the rights and well-being of all participants. Before participation, clear explanations were provided about the study's purpose, procedures, and the voluntary nature of involvement. Participants were assured they could choose to participate or withdraw at any time without any consequences. As the study involved topics that are in nature sensitive such as the personal adjustment challenges and the experiences from counseling, several ethical guidelines were implemented. Furthermore, in recognition that discussing personal adjustment challenges could be difficult. In dealing with these risks, following ethical guidelines were employed.

First, participants were provided with consent forms which included the permission to record interviews. In addressing the foreseeable psychological risks in the conduct of the data gathering process, the topics and subject matter discussed in the questions were thoroughly reviewed in order to reduce the unnecessary distress for the participants. Moreover, they were informed that most of the questions might be personal therefore the interviewer asked questions in a polite manner. Once uncomfortable, participants were told and encouraged that they could skip certain questions. In dealing with the signs of emotional distress in the occurrence of interview, participants are given an option to either pause or to withdraw the discussion.

The data that were collected were handled with utmost confidentiality. Only the researcher and pertinent personnel in the study have access to these information in order to align with the ethical guidelines required for privacy and data protection and confidentiality. The identity of participants is also kept anonymous all throughout the study through a careful selection of candidates for the interview. Through these boundaries and precautions, it facilitated a sensitive and productive data gathering with utmost respect for the research processes and the rights of the participants.

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