CHALLENGES FRESHMEN FACE ADAPTING TO THE DEMANDS OF COLLEGE

Dr. SUDHA RICHHARIYA[1], DEEPAK CHAND[2]

[1]*Professor, Smt. Vidyawati College Of Education Jhansi*
[2]*Assistant Professor, Smt. Vidyawati College Of Education Jhansi*

ABSTRACT

Higher education often requires students to leave their familiar hometowns and enter new environments, whether that be different cities, states, or even countries. While this transition offers valuable opportunities for academic, social, and personal growth, it can also present obstacles that negatively impact students' academic success and overall well-being. This study examines the challenges faced by students studying away from home, focusing specifically on financial difficulties, cultural and language barriers, emotional and psychological struggles, housing issues, and adapting to unfamiliar educational settings. A mixed-methods approach will be employed to capture students' experiences alongside insights from experts. The findings aim to contribute to broader discussions about student well-being and institutional support, helping to deepen understanding of the challenges that affect students, educators, policymakers, and academic institutions. The goal of this research is to fill gaps in knowledge and inform potential interventions that support both academic achievement and personal growth.

KEYWORDS: First Year College Students, Financial Issues, Academic Challenge, Emotional Well-Being

INTRODUCTION

The transition from high secondary school to college marks an important stage in a student's life. First-year college students frequently face a range of difficulties as they adjust to a new academic setting, begin living independently, and take on greater personal responsibilities. This study will examine some of the typical challenges experienced by first-year students and offer strategies to help address them. Many students find it difficult to manage the heightened academic demands, including more intensive coursework, complex assignments, and longer reading requirements. Additionally, adapting to different teaching methods—such as lectures and seminars—can be daunting.

Pursuing higher education often requires students to relocate from their hometowns in search of better academic opportunities, specialized programs, or enrollment in prestigious institutions. Typically, this move is driven by a desire for personal and professional growth, marking the beginning of a significant new chapter in their lives. Relocating for education can be highly advantageous, providing access to advanced learning environments, cutting-edge facilities, and opportunities to engage with a diverse community of peers and mentors. These experiences significantly enhance students' intellectual growth and help shape their personalities, preparing them to compete in a global context.

However, this transition comes with its own set of challenges. Leaving behind the comfort of family, familiar surroundings, and supportive communities often places students under immense pressure as they adjust to a new environment. Adapting to life in a different city, state, or even country can be daunting and adds an extra layer of stress on top of academic expectations. Each student's challenges may vary, but common difficulties include adjusting to unfamiliar teaching styles, overcoming language barriers, and

meeting new academic standards that may differ drastically from those they were previously accustomed to. The highly competitive nature of the new environment can further increase the pressure to perform.

Upon settling into their new host location, students often encounter cultural and socio-economic differences that can hinder their ability to fully integrate. While some students may accept and adapt to the new cultural norms, others might struggle, leading to feelings of isolation and homesickness that make social connections difficult. For international students, additional hurdles such as language difficulties and potential experiences of bias or discrimination can deepen the sense of alienation. Financial strain is another major challenge, especially for students from modest backgrounds. The high cost of tuition, housing, daily expenses, and unexpected emergencies can place a heavy burden on both students and their families. Many students try to balance part-time work with their studies, which often leads to increased stress and potential physical or mental exhaustion.

From a psychological perspective, transitioning from a familiar environment to an unfamiliar one can trigger high levels of stress and anxiety. Without the immediate support of family and close friends, students may become vulnerable to mental health issues such as loneliness, depression, or burnout. For many, this may also be their first encounter with complete independence, requiring them to quickly learn essential life skills like time management, financial planning, and decision-making—all without prior experience or guidance.

LITERATURE

"The Role of Social Support in the First-Year Experience of Higher Education", Wilcox et al. (2005) explore how social support impacts the experiences of first-year university students and influences their decision to continue or drop out. The researchers highlight that successful integration into university life requires a balance between maintaining existing social ties and forming new ones in an unfamiliar environment. They caution that relying too heavily on relationships from home can lead some students to disengage from campus life. While the involvement of academic staff in fostering student relationships is recognized as crucial, the study also underscores the importance of non-academic departments—such as university housing and estate services—in promoting opportunities for social connection and integration.

"Life in a University Residence: Issues, Concerns and Responses", Shaikh and Deschamps (2006) explore students' experiences living in university dormitories, revealing widespread dissatisfaction with the residential environment. Many students report experiencing various health issues, including stress, depression, fatigue, sleep disturbances, and poor nutrition. International students, in particular, face added stressors such as culture shock, language barriers, and feelings of homesickness. The study raises serious concerns about an alarming increase in student suicides, particularly among female students. Contributing factors include financial strain, academic demands, and interpersonal conflicts. It was also found that many students rely on informal medical advice from peers or turn to self-medication, often avoiding university health services due to limited awareness or difficulties in accessing them.

"Challenges of International Students' Adjustment to a Higher Education Institution", Baklashova and Kazakov (2016) examine the difficulties international students encounter while adapting to university life and propose strategies for effective integration. The research highlights the importance of promoting cross-cultural exchange, ensuring equal access to educational opportunities, and enhancing intercultural competence. The authors recommend training programs for educators and professionals who work with international students, as well as offering personalized consultations and tutoring services to help reduce psychological stress. Additionally, they suggest implementing orientation sessions, guest lectures, and company visits to support international students' adjustment and encourage their engagement with the local community.

"The Mental Health Needs of Today's College Students", Kitzrow (2003) discusses the growing psychological challenges faced by college students, particularly in the context of living away from home. The research highlights how emotional struggles—such as loneliness, anxiety, and stress—can worsen existing mental health issues. These findings underscore the urgent need for institutions to strengthen on-campus support services to better address students' emotional and psychological well-being.

"The Problems Faced by University Students and Proposals for Solution", Doygun and Gulec (2012) examine the common challenges encountered by university students, with a particular focus on issues related to nutrition and mental health. Many students report not following a healthy diet, and there is a clear demand for more accessible counseling services. The study also supports earlier findings by Koser and Mercanlioglu (2010) regarding the inadequacy of academic counseling provisions. The research emphasizes the importance of well-structured orientation programs and support services, noting that these play a crucial role in enhancing students' overall university experience and academic performance.

AIM OF THE STUDY

This study aims to investigate the major challenges encountered by first-year college students as they move from secondary school to higher education. It focuses on uncovering the academic, social, emotional, and practical obstacles commonly faced during this transitional phase, while also examining the various factors that affect students' ability to adapt and maintain their well-being. Additionally, the study seeks to recommend practical strategies and institutional support systems that can facilitate a smoother transition, foster academic success, and improve the overall experience of first-year students at college.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of the study titled CHALLENGES FRESHMAN FACE ADAPTING TO THE DEMANDS OF COLLEGE are as follows:

1. To identify and thoroughly analyze the academic difficulties that first-year college students face as they adjust to higher education.
2. To investigate the time management habits of first-year college students and explore how they juggle academic duties, personal responsibilities, and social activities during this transitional period.
3. To assess the accessibility and usage of support services and resources available to first-year college students.
4. To offer research-based recommendations to educational institutions and other stakeholders on effective strategies and interventions that can help first-year students successfully navigate the shift to college life.

THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study focusing on the challenges encountered by first-year college students as they transition to higher education forms the basis for the research. It establishes a conceptual framework that directs the study's design, methodology, and analysis of findings. Within this framework, various theories and models may be integrated to explain the factors affecting students' experiences and difficulties during this important period.

The Ecological Systems theory and the Students Transition Model

This theory, developed by Urie Bronfenbrenner, explains how individuals are influenced by different layers of their environment, ranging from immediate settings like family and school to broader societal and cultural contexts. In the case of first-year university students, their adjustment and challenges can be understood by examining how these multiple environmental systems—such as family support, peer relationships, university culture, and societal expectations—interact and impact their experiences during

the transition to higher education. And The Student Transition Model focuses specifically on the process students undergo as they move from one stage of education to another, particularly the shift from secondary school to college. It highlights the various academic, social, and emotional adjustments students must make and identifies factors that either support or hinder successful adaptation. The model emphasizes the importance of institutional support, personal coping strategies, and peer networks in helping students manage this transition effectively.

Within the framework of Ecological Systems Theory, the Transition Model is especially applicable. This model acknowledges that moving to higher education is a complex process shaped by multiple interconnected factors. It suggests that students' successful adjustment to university life arises from the dynamic interaction between their personal traits, the support provided by the institution, and their social relationships.

Key Elements of the theories

Microsystem (Immediate Environment): Individual characteristics such as students' personal traits, previous academic experiences, and socio-demographic background play a significant role in how they perceive and handle the challenges of transitioning to university. Their level of academic involvement—including participation in coursework, faculty engagement, and academic tasks—also influences their sense of belonging and overall adjustment.

Mesosystem (Connections Between Microsystems): Relationships with peers, roommates, and social groups within the university community greatly affect students' social integration and their development of identity. Positive interactions with faculty members and advisors are essential, providing crucial support for both academic progress and personal growth.

Exosystem (Indirect Environmental Factors): Family support, although not directly present within the university setting, impacts students' self-esteem, motivation, and well-being. Institutional elements such as university policies, orientation programs, academic advising, and counseling services shape the resources available to students and affect their ability to manage challenges.

Macrosystem (Cultural and Societal Values): Broader cultural, societal, and economic factors influence how students perceive higher education, their goals, and their transition experiences. Cultural norms that emphasize independence and self-reliance can affect students' coping strategies and their willingness to seek help when facing difficulties.

Transition Theory developed by (Nancy Schlossberg, 1981), focuses on understanding the psychological and emotional processes individuals experience during significant life changes. It identifies four key components—referred to as the "**four Ss**"—that shape how people navigate transitions:

Situation: This refers to the external event or change that triggers the transition. For first-year students, this might include moving from high school to university, adapting to a new academic setting, and forming new social connections.

Self: This involves the internal psychological and emotional responses during the transition, including shifts in identity, self-concept, and coping abilities.

Support: This includes the social networks and resources available to the individual, such as family, mentors, and institutional assistance, which greatly influence how smoothly one adapts to change.

Strategies: These are the coping methods and problem-solving approaches individuals use to manage the challenges brought on by the transition. Effective strategies promote successful adjustment.

Transition Theory views life as a continuous series of changes rather than a fixed state. People experience multiple transitions throughout their lives, each bringing unique challenges and requiring adaptations. Responses to transitions vary depending on personality, background, and past experiences, with factors

like resilience, self-confidence, and personal resources playing important roles in how individuals handle these changes.

The theory adopts a lifespan perspective, applying to people of all ages and types of transitions. It emphasizes that transitions are cyclical rather than linear, with lessons from previous experiences shaping how future transitions are managed. Practically, this theory provides valuable insights for educators, counselors, and anyone undergoing a transition, allowing them to offer focused support and interventions to help individuals adjust more effectively.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology used to examine the challenges encountered by first-year college students during their transition to higher education employed a qualitative approach. This was carried out through semi-structured interviews with fifty (50) first-year students, who were selected using purposive sampling to obtain in-depth insights into their experiences and viewpoints. The interviews focused on exploring students' personal stories, the coping mechanisms they used, and their recommendations for enhancing existing support systems.

FINDING

The results of the study were organized into five themes for analysis.

1. *ACADEMIC CHALLENGES:* First-year college students often face significant academic challenges as they adjust to the demands of higher education. The transition from high school to college brings increased expectations for independent learning, critical thinking, and time management. Many students struggle to balance coursework with social life and part-time jobs, leading to procrastination and academic stress. Inadequate study skills and difficulties understanding complex course content further hinder academic performance. For some, language barriers add to the challenge, particularly for non-native English speakers. Additionally, limited awareness or use of academic support services and the pressure to perform well can lead to anxiety and self-doubt. The need to adapt to digital learning platforms also presents difficulties for those unfamiliar with online tools. These challenges underscore the need for targeted support to help first-year students succeed academically.

2. *PERSONAL ADJUSTMENT:* The transition to college represents a major life change, and many first-year students encounter significant personal adjustment challenges as they adapt to this new environment. One of the most prominent difficulties involves separation from family and familiar support systems, which can lead to feelings of homesickness, loneliness, and emotional distress. For many students, college is their first experience living independently, requiring them to develop self-discipline, personal responsibility, and coping strategies without the direct guidance of parents or guardians. Establishing new social networks and navigating peer relationships can also be stressful, particularly for students who are introverted or face cultural or social differences. Furthermore, adapting to a diverse campus culture and unfamiliar routines can cause discomfort and anxiety, particularly for those from underrepresented or marginalized backgrounds. These challenges are often compounded by pressure to fit in, make friends quickly, and adjust to the pace of college life. Personal adjustment struggles, if left unaddressed, can affect a student's well-being and academic performance, highlighting the importance of campus support services, orientation programs, and mental health resources in helping students navigate this critical period of change.

3. *FINANCIAL PRESSURE:* Financial pressure is a common and significant challenge for many first-year college students as they adjust to the economic demands of higher education. The cost of tuition, textbooks, accommodation, transportation, and daily living expenses often places a considerable burden on students and their families. For some, the need to take on student loans creates long-term

financial anxiety, while others must work part-time jobs to support themselves, which can interfere with their academic performance and social integration. Students from low-income backgrounds may feel especially stressed, as limited financial resources can restrict their access to educational materials, extracurricular activities, and even basic necessities. Additionally, the lack of financial literacy or experience in budgeting often leads to poor money management, further compounding the pressure. This financial strain not only affects students' academic focus but can also impact their mental health and overall well-being. As such, institutions must consider expanding financial aid programs, offering budgeting workshops, and providing accessible financial counseling to help students manage these challenges effectively.

4. *SUPPORT SERVICE UTILISATION:* The effective use of support services is crucial for the successful adjustment of first-year college students, yet many underutilize the resources available to them. Universities typically offer a wide range of support services—including academic advising, counseling, tutoring, career guidance, and wellness programs—designed to assist students in navigating the academic and personal challenges of college life. However, first-year students may be unaware of these services, uncertain about how to access them, or hesitant due to stigma, fear of judgment, or a perceived need to handle problems independently. Cultural background, previous educational experience, and personality traits can also influence the likelihood of service utilisation. When students do engage with support systems, they are more likely to experience improved academic outcomes, better emotional well-being, and greater satisfaction with their college experience. Therefore, institutions must actively promote awareness and accessibility of these services, especially during orientation and the early stages of college, while fostering an inclusive and supportive environment that encourages help-seeking behaviors.

5. *MENTORSHIP AND GUIDANCE:* Mentorship and guidance play a critical role in supporting first-year college students as they navigate the complexities of academic, social, and personal transitions. Entering college often involves facing unfamiliar environments, increased responsibilities, and heightened expectations, all of which can be overwhelming without proper support. A structured mentorship program—whether peer-led, faculty-driven, or professionally facilitated—can provide students with personalized guidance, encouragement, and a sense of belonging. Mentors help first-year students understand institutional systems, make informed academic choices, manage time effectively, and cope with stress or uncertainty. Additionally, mentors serve as role models, offering insight into balancing academic and personal life while fostering confidence and self-efficacy. The presence of mentorship can significantly ease the adjustment period, reduce dropout risks, and enhance overall student engagement and retention. As such, integrating mentorship and guidance into first-year experience programs is essential for promoting student success and well-being.

CONCLUSION:

The study explored the diverse and interconnected challenges encountered by students living away from their hometowns, identifying these obstacles as physical, financial, emotional, and social in nature. While relocation for education offers greater access to learning and career opportunities, it simultaneously presents significant strains on students' quality of life and academic success.

A central issue highlighted in the findings is the widespread financial insecurity experienced by students. This includes difficulties in budgeting, delayed financial support from families, and a general lack of financial literacy. Additionally, inadequate housing and limited access to nutritious, affordable food emerged as major concerns, with many students enduring substandard living conditions. As a result,

students often face emotional stressors such as homesickness, anxiety, depression, and academic pressure—challenges that emphasize the need for strong social and institutional support systems.

The research also shed light on problems related to social isolation, cultural adjustment, language barriers, and the need for learning environments that support academic success. Female students, in particular, reported safety-related concerns that require targeted attention through inclusive dialogue and policy intervention. Despite these obstacles, many students demonstrated notable resilience by actively seeking academic guidance and personal support as coping mechanisms.

Tackling these issues calls for coordinated efforts among educational institutions, local governments, and policymakers. Enhancing financial aid programs, expanding access to safe and affordable accommodation, strengthening mental health services, and creating inclusive, supportive environments are critical steps toward addressing the challenges faced by students studying away from home. Initiatives that foster a sense of normalcy, community, cultural integration, and mentorship can significantly improve students' well-being and academic experiences.

Ultimately, this study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the unique needs of non-local students and to advocate for practical, responsive solutions that support their holistic development and academic success.

REFERENCES:

1. Schlossberg, N. K. (1981). A model for analyzing human adaptation to transition. The counseling psychologist, 9(2), 2- 18.

2. Press. Quaye, S. J., Harper, S. R., &Pendakur, S. L. (Eds.). (2019). Student engagement in higher education: Theoretical perspectives and practical approaches for diverse populations. Routledge.

3. King, A.E., McQuarrie, F.A., &Brigham, S.M.(2021). Exploring the relationship between student success and participation in extracurricular activities. SCHOLE: A Journal of Leisure Studies and Recreation Education, 36(1- 2), 42-58.

4. Nandigama, N. C. (2016). Teradata-Driven Big Data Analytics For Suspicious Activity Detection With Real-Time Tableau Dashboards. International Journal For Innovative Engineering and Management Research, 5(1), 73–78

5. Maringe and Carter (2007) conducted a study titled "International students' choices of UK universities: A focus on the decision making processes."21(6),459472, International Journal of Educational Management .10.1108/09513540710817358theDOI

6. Nandigama, N. C. (2023). Data-Warehouse-Enhanced Machine Learning Framework for Multi-Perspective Fraud Detection in Multi-Stakeholder E-Commerce Transactions. International Journal on Recent and Innovation Trends in Computing and Communication, 11(5), 592–600. https://doi.org/10.17762/ijritcc.v11i5.11808

7. U. Teichler, "The changing debate on inter nationalisation of higher education."(2004).48(1), Higher Education, 5–26.10.1023/B:HIED.0000033774.80484.0d is the DOI.

8. Gorman, D., Ramirez, E., Brough, M., & Westoby, P. (2016).Young migrants discuss their well-being. 17(4), 1123–1140, Journal of International Migration and Integration.