

College Adjustment Profiles of Undergraduate Students

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Abstract

This study investigated the college adjustment profiles of undergraduate students at the Cotabato Foundation College of Science and Technology (CFCST) during the second semester of School Year 2024-2025. Anchored on Baker and Siryk's Psychosocial Model the research utilized a quantitative descriptive-comparative design. From a population of 7,654, a sample of $N = 2,358$ students was selected using proportional stratified random sampling. Data were gathered via an online survey using the adapted 67-item Student Adjustment to College Questionnaire (SACQ). Statistical treatments included frequencies, percentages, means, standard deviations, independent samples t-tests, and Welch's Analysis of Variance. Results revealed that respondents exhibited a moderate overall level of college adjustment, with institutional adjustment recording the highest mean and personal-emotional adjustment registering the lowest mean. Independent samples t-tests showed statistically significant gender disparities in academic, personal-emotional, and institutional adjustment domains ($p < .001$), whereas social adjustment remained invariant. Additionally, Welch's ANOVA indicated significant variations across academic departments in academic and institutional adjustment ($p < .001$), while adjustment levels remained consistent across all undergraduate year levels. The study recommends implementing targeted mental health programs, gender-responsive institutional scaffolding, and continuous guidance services spanning the entire undergraduate life cycle.

Keywords: College adjustment, Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ), quantitative descriptive-comparative, psychosocial and student integration models, regional state higher education institution

Introduction

Contemporary higher education scholarship underscores that the transition to tertiary learning environments entails complex academic, psychological, and social adjustments that critically influence student retention and holistic well-being (Barbayannis et al., 2022; Lubis et al., 2025). Recent post-pandemic investigations highlight that undergraduates frequently encounter heightened academic stress, adaptation hurdles, and intrapsychic friction as they navigate rigorous institutional demands (Pérez-Jorge et al., 2025).

Within the Philippine tertiary education framework, these transitional pressures are mirrored in shifting academic modalities and socio-economic realities, where students routinely grapple with non-academic constraints, institutional adjustments, and

learning anxiety (Firmante, 2024; Quinal & Purgatorio, 2026). Recent local evaluations underline that navigating these multi-dimensional stressors requires responsive coping mechanisms and targeted institutional scaffolding (Tupas et al., 2025).

Despite this emerging body of recent literature, a critical empirical gap persists. The vast majority of current studies predominantly center on metropolitan universities or generalized student cohorts, leaving a notable paucity of empirical data concerning how undergraduates navigate college adjustment within specialized, geographically distinct state colleges in regional settings. Furthermore, granular investigations examining how specific institutional parameters—such as heterogeneous departmental structures, gendered variances, and multi-year developmental plateaus—intersect within provincial higher education environments remain largely underexplored. To address this critical gap, this study investigated the college adjustment profiles of undergraduate students at the Cotabato Foundation College of Science and Technology (CFCST) in Doroluman, Arakan, North Cotabato, during the second semester of school year 2024-2025.

Statement of the Problem

This study determined the college adjustment profiles of undergraduate students at the Cotabato Foundation College of Science and Technology (CFCST), Doroluman, Arakan, North Cotabato, during the second semester of School Year 2024-2025. Specifically, this research aimed to:

1. Describe the profile of the undergraduate students in terms of the following variables:
 - a) Gender
 - b) Department
 - c) Year level
2. Assess the level of college adjustment of the undergraduate students along the following domains:
 - a) Academic adjustment
 - b) Social adjustment
 - c) Personal-emotional adjustment
 - d) Institutional/Attachment adjustment
3. Determine whether significant differences exist in the students college adjustment when grouped according to their profile variables.

Methods

This study utilized a quantitative descriptive-comparative research design to systematically examine the college adjustment profiles of undergraduate students. The descriptive approach was employed to outline the demographic profile of the respondents and ascertain their levels of adaptation across academic, social, personal-emotional, and institutional domains, while the comparative design facilitated the analysis of significant variations in these profiles when grouped according to gender, department, and year level. The research was conducted at the Cotabato Foundation College of Science and Technology (CFCST) located in Doroluman, Arakan, North Cotabato, serving as a specialized state higher education institution in a rural regional setting.

The target population comprised 7,654 undergraduate students officially enrolled during the second semester of School Year 2024-2025. From this total population, a sample size of $N = 2,358$ undergraduate students was drawn utilizing stratified random sampling proportional to each year level to ensure comprehensive representation across academic standings. Data collection was facilitated through an adapted 67-item survey questionnaire known as the Student Adjustment to College Questionnaire (SACQ), originally developed in 1989 by Robert W. Baker and Bohdan Siryk, which measures respondents' adaptive status across core subscales including academic, social, personal-emotional, and institutional-attachment adjustments.

During the second semester of School Year 2024-2025, the questionnaires were administered via an online survey platform under strict ethical protocols, ensuring informed consent, voluntary participation, and data confidentiality. Following data collation, coding, and cleaning from the digital responses, several statistical treatments were applied using computer-assisted software. Frequencies and percentages were utilized to summarize the demographic profile in terms of gender, department, and year level, whereas mean values quantified the levels of college adjustment across the designated domains. To test for significant group variations, independent samples t-tests were employed for binary categories such as gender, while Welch's Analysis of Variance (Welch's ANOVA) followed by appropriate post hoc tests was utilized to evaluate and isolate differences across multi-category groupings including academic departments and year levels, effectively accounting for potential heterogeneity of variances.

Hypotheses

To guide the comparative analysis of the study, the following null hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of significance:

1. There is no significant difference in the college adjustment levels of undergraduate students across academic, social, personal-emotional, and institutional domains when grouped according to gender.
2. There is no significant difference in the college adjustment levels of undergraduate students across academic, social, personal-emotional, and institutional domains when grouped according to academic department.
3. There is no significant difference in the college adjustment levels of undergraduate students across academic, social, personal-emotional, and institutional domains when grouped according to year level.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Baker and Siryk's Psychosocial Model of College Adjustment (1989) and Tinto's Student Integration Model (1975, 1993), which collectively conceptualize student adjustment as a multidimensional and dynamic adaptation process within the higher education environment. Baker and Siryk's model posits that college adjustment encompasses four distinct yet interrelated domains: academic, social, personal-emotional, and institutional attachment, reflecting how students cope with scholastic demands, interpersonal relationships, psychological well-being, and institutional bonding. Complementing this, Tinto's Student Integration Model emphasizes that student adaptation and persistence are fundamentally tied to

integration into both the academic and social systems of the college, shaped by background characteristics and institutional environments. Together, these frameworks provide the conceptual lens for examining how undergraduate students at the Cotabato Foundation College of Science and Technology (CFCST) experience college life, investigating whether demographic and structural attributes such as gender, academic department, and year level produce significant variations in their overall adjustment profiles.

Results

Table 1

Demographic Profile of the Respondents (N = 2,358)

Table 1 outlines the demographic profile of the respondents (N = 2,358) in terms of gender, academic department, and year level. Regarding gender distribution, female students comprised the majority of the participants at 62.7% (n = 1,478), while male

Variables	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	880	37.3
Female	1478	62.7
Department		
College of Education	640	27.1
College of Arts and Sciences	584	24.8
College of Agriculture, Agribusiness, Food Technology and Forestry	273	11.7
College of Information and Communication Technology	859	36.4
Year Level		
First Year	978	41.50
Second Year	660	28.00
Third Year	543	23.00
Fourth Year	177	7.50

students accounted for 37.3% (n = 880). This proportion reflects the general enrollment patterns commonly observed across various undergraduate programs.

In addition, the respondents represented four distinct academic units within the institution. Specifically, the College of Information and Communication Technology recorded the highest representation at 36.4% (n = 859), followed by the College of Education at 27.1% (n = 640), and the College of Arts and Sciences at 24.8% (n = 584). Meanwhile, the College of Agriculture, Agribusiness, Food Technology and Forestry comprised 11.7% (n = 273) of the total sample. Furthermore, concerning academic classification, lower-year students formed the majority of the participants. First-year students constituted the largest group at 41.50% (n = 978), followed by second-year students at 28.00% (n = 660) and third-year students at 23.00% (n = 543). Conversely, fourth-year students represented the smallest proportion at 7.50% (n = 177).

Table 2

Level of Students Adjustment to College (N=2,358)

Adjustment Domain	Mean	Descriptive Level
Academic Adjustment	2.05	Moderate
Social Adjustment	2.07	Moderate
Personal-Emotional Adjustment	1.98	Moderate
Institutional Adjustment	2.09	Moderate

Table 2 outlines the level of students' adjustment to college across four distinct dimensions: academic, social, personal-emotional, and institutional. Overall, the findings indicate that the respondents experience a moderate level of adjustment across all domains, with mean scores falling within a narrow range from 1.98 to 2.09.

Specifically, institutional adjustment registered the highest mean score at 2.09 (Moderate), suggesting that students maintain an average level of connection, satisfaction, and commitment to the university environment. Closely following this are social adjustment with a mean of 2.07 (Moderate) and academic adjustment with a mean of 2.05 (Moderate), indicating that learners experience typical challenges when establishing peer relationships and fulfilling educational requirements.

Furthermore, personal-emotional adjustment recorded the lowest mean score at 1.98 (Moderate). Although this remains within the moderate classification, its lower relative value highlights that psychological well-being and emotional stability represent areas of distinct vulnerability during university life.

Table 3

Independent Samples t-Test for Student College Adjustment in Terms of Gender

Variables	t	df	p	Interpretation
Academic Adjustment	-3.51	2356	< .001	Significant
Social Adjustment	-0.36	1673.96	0.718	Not Significant
Personal-Emotional Adjustment	3.82	2356	< .001	Significant
Institutional Adjustment	-4.93	1908.95	< .001	Significant

Note. N = 2,358. Degrees of freedom for Social Adjustment and Institutional Adjustment reflect the Welch-Satterthwaite adjustment for unequal variances.

Table 3 presents the results of the independent samples t-test examining differences in student college adjustment across gender. Specifically, the analysis reveals a statistically significant difference in academic adjustment ($t = -3.51$, $df = 2356$, $p < .001$). This indicates that gender plays a distinct role in how learners cope with educational demands, academic requirements, and study routines.

In contrast, the results for social adjustment demonstrate no significant difference between the groups ($t = -0.36$, $df = 1673.96$, $p = .718$). This suggests that male and female students experience a comparable degree of social integration, peer interaction, and participation in campus life.

Furthermore, a significant difference emerged regarding personal-emotional adjustment ($t = 3.82$, $df = 2356$, $p < .001$). This finding points to underlying variations in psychological well-being, emotional stability, and stress management between male and female students. Finally, institutional adjustment yielded a statistically significant difference ($t = -4.93$, $df = 1908.95$, $p < .001$). This implies that male and female students diverge in their overall attachment, satisfaction, and commitment to the university environment.

Table 4

Tukey HSD Post-Hoc Test for Student Adjustment Across the Department

Variables	SS	df	MS	F	p	Interpretation
Academic Adjustment	0.72	3	0.24	12.84*	< .001	Significant
Social Adjustment	0.34	3	0.11	2.86*	0.036	Not Significant
Personal-Emotional Adjustment	0.37	3	0.12	2.47	0.06	Not Significant
Institutional Adjustment	2.52	3	0.84	25.01*	< .001	Significant

Table 4 displays the results of the analysis examining student adjustment to college across the four academic colleges. Specifically, the findings reveal significant differences among the colleges in terms of academic adjustment ($F = 12.84$, $p < .001$). This indicates that students enrolled in different academic programs experience distinct levels of academic adaptation, which can be attributed to varying curriculum demands, workload pressures, and academic environments across disciplines.

In addition, regarding social adjustment, the analysis yielded an F-value of 2.86 ($p = 0.036$), though classified as not significant, suggesting that overall social adjustment levels remain relatively stable across the different college departments. Furthermore, the results for personal-emotional adjustment showed no significant variation across the colleges ($F = 2.47$, $p = 0.06$). This implies that students' psychological well-being and emotional stability are relatively uniform regardless of their specific departmental affiliation, pointing to shared psychological transitions inherent to the undergraduate experience rather than program-specific stressors.

Finally, institutional adjustment demonstrated highly significant differences across the academic units ($F = 25.01$, $p < .001$). This suggests that student attachment, satisfaction, and commitment to the institution vary markedly depending on their specific college, likely influenced by differing levels of departmental support resources, faculty engagement, and program-specific infrastructures within the university.

Table 5

Welch's ANOVA for Differences in Student Adjustment Across Year Level

Variables	SS	df	MS	F	p
Academic Adjustment	0.047	3	0.016	0.828	0.478
Social Adjustment	0.04	3	0.013	0.341	0.796

Personal-Emotional Adjustment	0.068	3	0.023	0.458	0.711
Institutional Adjustment	0.054	3	0.018	0.516	0.671

Table 5 details the results of Welch's ANOVA examining differences in student college adjustment across various academic year levels. The analysis reveals no statistically significant variations across year levels in any of the adjustment dimensions ($p > .05$). Specifically, academic adjustment yielded an F-value of 0.828 ($p = 0.478$), while social adjustment recorded an F-value of 0.341 ($p = 0.796$). Similarly, personal-emotional adjustment showed no significant differences across cohorts ($F = 0.458$, $p = 0.711$), and institutional adjustment yielded an F-value of 0.516 ($p = 0.671$). These findings indicate that students' levels of adaptation remain remarkably consistent regardless of their progression through the undergraduate program.

Discussion

The empirical findings delineate a comprehensive profile of collegiate adaptation within a large-scale student cohort ($N = 2,358$). Grounded in the foundational taxonomy established by Baker and Siryk (1989), college adjustment operates as a critically multidimensional construct encompassing academic, social, personal-emotional, and institutional domains. Across these dimensions, the respondents demonstrated moderate adaptation levels. This uniform standing signifies that while undergraduates successfully fulfill baseline matriculation requirements, they concurrently experience persistent transitional friction and developmental strain.

Notably, personal-emotional adjustment yielded the lowest mean score, foregrounding psychological well-being as a primary site of intrapsychic vulnerability. This finding converges with historical and contemporary empirical work indicating that undergraduate transition periods are frequently characterized by heightened stress, anxiety, and depressive symptoms as students navigate increased personal autonomy and life events (Compas et al., 1986; Dyson & Renk, 2006). Building upon these baseline stress indicators, extensive longitudinal scholarship and meta-analytic reviews confirm that effective adjustment serves as a powerful predictor of academic performance and institutional retention (Credé & Niehorster, 2012; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1993).

In parallel with these overall descriptive outcomes, independent samples t-tests revealed statistically significant gender disparities across academic, personal-emotional, and institutional adjustment domains, whereas social adjustment remained invariant between cohorts. These significant differences highlight that individual psychological profiles and ecological factors jointly govern how students experience structural and educational pressures. Utilizing an ecological framework, Katz and Somers (2017) demonstrated that both individual and environmental variables account for substantial variance in college adjustment, with environmental factors functioning as significant partial mediators between individual traits and adaptation outcomes.

Furthermore, individual attributes such as self-efficacy play a pivotal role in predicting successful adaptation patterns over time (Ramos-Sánchez & Nichols, 2007; Toews & Yazedian, 2007). Complementing these cognitive traits, interpersonal

variables—including peer support and belongingness—provide vital buffering effects against psychological distress. Specifically, Arslan (2020) established that college belongingness and subjective vitality are essential for maintaining psychological adjustment during periods of intense environmental change, a finding reinforced by Mattanah et al. (2011), who confirmed that secure attachment and social support structures significantly enhance psychosocial adaptation among university students. Conversely, the absence of statistical divergence in social adjustment indicates that peer bonding and interpersonal affiliation operate as shared experiential milestones across diverse demographic groups, aligning with literature noting that baseline social integration is often less dependent on rigid demographic stratifications than on immediate institutional environments (Credé & Niehorster, 2012).

Moving beyond individual and peer-level dynamics, analyses across academic departments unveiled significant variances in academic and institutional adjustment. Students enrolled in distinct disciplinary units encounter heterogeneous curricular complexities, workload intensities, and pedagogical infrastructures, which directly condition their scholastic adaptation and institutional attachment. Specialized professional programs often induce heightened programmatic stress, modulating students' perceived institutional commitment. Grounded in social capital theory, interpersonal resources such as parental background and social class position shape how students navigate these environmental demands (Ostrove & Long, 2007). Moreover, campus experiences do not occur in isolation from broader familial networks; rather, family relationships and separation processes continue to exert considerable influence. Lapsley et al. (1990) demonstrated that separation-individuation and family attachment patterns directly affect collegiate adjustment across undergraduate terms. Similarly, Wintre and Yaffe (2000) highlighted that ongoing relationships with parents serve as a continuous baseline of emotional security during early university life. Consequently, institutional support systems must account for these familial and class-based foundations to secure long-term retention and positive adjustment outcomes (Gerdes & Mallinckrodt, 1994).

Finally, a pivotal conceptual insight emerges from Welch's ANOVA across academic year levels, indicating no statistically significant variations in adjustment dimensions across undergraduate cohorts. Traditional developmental models frequently posit a linear progression wherein advanced undergraduates achieve superior adaptation indices due to cumulative institutional familiarity. However, the present findings corroborate contemporary theoretical perspectives characterizing college adjustment as a prolonged developmental plateau marked by enduring transitional friction. As students progress through their academic lifecycles, the mitigation of initial freshman anxieties is frequently counterbalanced by the emergence of advanced professional coursework, career-oriented stressors, and complex institutional demands. Ultimately, these results challenge deterministic assumptions of chronological adaptation, emphasizing the imperative for higher education institutions to transition from myopic, freshman-centric orientation models toward longitudinal, continuous guidance and mental health interventions spanning the entirety of the undergraduate tenure.

Conclusion

Students demonstrated a moderate level of adjustment to college life. Statistically significant variations in adjustment emerged when analyzed by gender specifically across the academic, personal-emotional, and institutional domains as well as across academic departments. Conversely, student adjustment remained invariant across undergraduate year levels.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and implications of the study, it is respectfully suggested that the administration consider the following enhancements for institutional implementation:

1. Institutional counseling units might want to actively address intrapsychic vulnerabilities and low personal-emotional adjustment scores through structured psychological first aid, individual counseling, and resilience-building workshops.
2. Student support services could benefit from formulating targeted interventions that account for significant gender variances across academic, personal, and institutional adaptation domains.
3. Academic departments might consider evaluating curriculum pressures and designing program-specific support infrastructures to mitigate performance variations across diverse disciplines.
4. Higher education institutions could transition away from myopic, freshman-centric orientation models toward longitudinal, multi-year developmental interventions to effectively counter the observed developmental plateau across undergraduate cohorts.

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