

Research Article

Adjustment Problems and Coping Strategies of State University Students Living Away from Home

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Abstract: Living away from home for academic purposes presents significant challenges requiring effort, financial resources, and determination to balance personal and academic life. These difficulties can affect both academic performance and overall well-being. This research explored the adjustment problems and coping strategies of students living away from home. A descriptive qualitative approach was employed, involving eight (8) students from a state university selected through purposive sampling. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to gather data, which were analyzed using thematic analysis. Findings indicated that students adopted two primary coping strategies: (a) Emotion-Focused Coping and (b) Problem-Focused Coping, each encompassing specific categories and subcategories. Emotion-focused coping involved managing emotions to reduce stress, while problem-focused coping addressed the practical challenges of their environment. These strategies enabled students to navigate the emotional and situational hurdles of living independently. The study highlights the complex interplay between emotional and practical coping mechanisms used by students to maintain their well-being and academic performance. Insights gained may inform programs and policies that better support students adjusting to life away from home.

Keywords: adjustment; coping strategies; living away from home; stress

1. Introduction

Choosing a university is a crucial life decision as it lays the foundation for one's future career. As a result, prospective students carefully consider various options offered by different institutions before making an informed decision (Haron et al., 2017). The number of students studying abroad is rapidly increasing. According to the OECD, internationally mobile students are expected to reach 6.9 million by 2030, a 51% rise from 2015 (Medani et al., 2024). Studying at college and university causes a lot of students to suffer, especially when they are away from their homes (Thurber & Walton, 2012). They must learn through themselves and acquire the skills necessary to live independently without their parents. They must acquire the skills to be independent, practical, and capable of managing their time. (Nghiem et al., 2021).

Students studying away from their hometowns often struggle to adapt to new environments, cultures, and social settings. Some scholars (Medani et al., 2024) found that undergraduates face psychological, financial, and nutritional challenges, emphasizing the need for better support systems. They face difficulty with their financial needs, as they must pay for rent, travel, living expenses, utility bills, and more. (Nghiem et al., 2021). Students moving into a new school setting must adjust to various academic and social demands, with their adaptation shaped by past experiences and individual resilience (Kwarikunda et al., 2023). However, beyond a handful of studies looking at the challenges of transitioning to a university, only a few researchers have examined the students' coping strategies. Getting used to a new school is necessary to keep up with the fast-paced lifestyle of the area (Nghiem et al., 2021). Students who are aiming for high-quality education choose to be separated from their families and have to build confidence and deal with pressures and problems (Jamora et al., 1999). Most children and adolescents adapt successfully as they move out to study, whereas some experience adjustment problems (Murberg & Bru, 2004). As children and

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adolescents leave home to study, most adapt well, but some face difficulties in adjusting (Thuen & Bru, 2004). Adjustment problems involve poor or insufficient adaptation or the inability to cope with the demands of social relationships and the pressures of daily life (Jacob, 2007). These include the student's personal, emotional, social, and academic adjustments (Polec-eo, 2013).

University belonging and friendship quality play a significant role in a student's transition to college (Pittman & Richmond, 2008) as much as the home environment matters to their academic performance (Behaghel et al., 2017). Regardless of the students' varied background and their respective communities, they still found a common reason for aiming at flagship universities: they were motivated by support from family and community to attend a topnotch university, wanting a career they felt could not be supported by their hometown's economy (Stone & Évora, 2021). Parents and family are the important sources of mental and financial support to students (Bartoszuk et al., 2019). Therefore, they need to establish positive bonds with their new place to help lessen the sense of separation from their families (Scopelliti & Tiberio, 2010). Long-term adjustments can be facilitated by assisting students in changing their understanding of the expectations of the university and their coping mechanisms (Gall et al., 2000).

The purpose of this study is to describe the adjustment problems and coping strategies of students studying away from home. Identifying such issues is a significant way to understand how adjustment strategies help students overcome the hurdles of university life. The Coping Theory of Lazarus and Folkman (Folkman, 1997) serves as the springboard of the study. It involves the mental and behavioral strategies a person uses to handle stress, which are generally divided into Emotion-Focused and Problem-focused coping methods. Coping is not seen as a personal trait but rather as a process, as conceptualized by Lazarus and Folkman (Rew, 2005). The results may help identify the adjustment challenges faced by students living away from home, as well as the effective coping strategies they can use while transitioning to a university setting. The two questions that need to be addressed are: What adjustment problems do third-year College of Education students at a state university encounter? And what emotion-focused and problem-focused coping strategies do they use to manage their personal, social, and academic adjustments during their transition to independent living?

2. Materials and Methods

The researchers used a qualitative descriptive design to provide a comprehensive summary of events, answering the questions of who, what, where, and how. This approach is exploratory and allows for a deep understanding of the phenomenon under study. The researchers will also use triangulation, which involves using multiple sources of data to provide additional insight into the phenomenon.

2.1. Informants

The informants were picked via purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling is a technique in qualitative research that selects a specific group of people or units for study rather than at random. Informants are chosen "on purpose" (Palinkas et al., 2015). The inclusion criteria helped determine whether or not the informants were eligible to participate in the study. The inclusion criteria are as follows: a) the interviewee must be a 3rd-year student at West Visayas State University – College of Education; b) the interviewee must have at least 5 months of experience living away from home while at a university. The researchers also considered the informants' place of residence, which should be outside of the provinces in Panay Island. Choosing third-year students as informants provides a more accurate understanding of transition experiences. The inclusion criteria is illustrated in table 1, alongside with the pseudonym of the informants.

Table 1. Informants of the study.

Informants	3 rd year COE student of WVSU	Duration of Living Independently	Hometown Address
Nelstrom	✓	5 years	East Valencia, Buenavista, Guimaras
EJ	✓	2 years	Alaguisoc, Jordan, Guimaras
AL	✓	2 years	Himamaylan City, Negros Occidental

PJ	✓	2 years	Tantangan, South Cotabato
LG	✓	2 years	Poblacion, Nueva Valencia, Guimaras
JP	✓	2 years	Bacolod City, Negros Occidental
RS	✓	2 years	Balcon Maravilla, Jordan, Guimaras
D	✓	1 year and 6 months	San Lorenzo, Guimaras

Eight (8) informants qualified for this study. Out of these eight, five informants have experienced living away for 2 years, one informant experienced living away for 1 year and 6 months, and one informant for 5 years. Also, regarding their place of origin, out of these eight informants, one informant came from East Valencia, Buenavista, Guimaras; one informant came from Alaguisoc, Jordan, Guimaras; one informant came from Himamaylan City, Negros Occidental; one informant came from Tantaran, South Cotabato, one informant came from San Lorenzo, Guimaras, one informant came from Poblacion, Nueva Valencia, Guimaras, one from Bacolod City, Negros Occidental and one informant came from Balcon Maravilla, Jordan, Guimaras.

2.2. Instruments

The researchers conducted a face-to-face, semi-structured interview with the participants to acquire the necessary information. Face-to-face interviewing helps generate ideas flexibly and investigate solutions to become proactive in identifying, swiftly assessing, and making an understanding of the material (Nghiem et al., 2021). In the semi-structured interview, the researchers provided questions but allowed the interviewers and interviewees to elaborate on their questions and responses. Semi-structured interviews are based on a semi-structured interview guide, which outlines the questions or topics the interviewer needs to cover. This approach helps maximize interview time by enabling the interviewer to explore respondents more thoroughly and systematically while keeping the conversation focused on the intended objectives (Jamshed, 2014). The interview guide is structured into four sections: the first includes the consent form for participants, the second addresses demographics, the third contains the interview questions, and the final section covers additional information. The questions are divided into a main question and related sub-questions, grounded in Lazarus & Folkman's Coping Theory (Folkman, 1997). The guide underwent further refinement through pilot testing and was submitted for evaluation by members of the research committee, the research instructor, and a panel of experts in qualitative research.

2.3. Data Collection

In the course of this research study, the following steps were practiced to acquire the necessary information successfully. To obtain permission to conduct the research with the students, a letter of approval was sent to the Dean of the College of Education. Moreover, a validation letter was addressed to a Grammarian, Qualitative Research Expert and Registered Guidance Counselor. Another letter of consent was addressed to the research instructor, which contained the research topic, research objective, and target respondents of the research study to observe formality. Afterward, a pilot study was conducted, which allowed for testing the interview guide, along with the interview style and method. By the use of purposeful sampling, the identified respondents were subjected to a semi-structured, face-to-face interview. Despite the convenience of face-to-face interviews, a probable misalignment of the schedule between the researchers and the respondents was foreseen. To address this challenge, the interview schedule has been organized based on the availability of both parties. Before the interview, the researchers assigned each member of their team to do the following tasks: three interviewers to converse with the respondents and one assistant to record the answers. The general point of the interview is to observe the gestures and to see through the interviewees' eyes by having them explain their experiences. The respondents were orientated before the interview process to ensure a smooth-sailing interview. Aside from the interview guide, the respondents were asked open-ended questions so that the researchers could grasp their experiences well. The interview was conducted in an empathetic and conversational style. While conducting the interview, a voice recorder has been utilized to document the responses. With ethical considerations, the pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of the respondents. Subsequently, the responses were transcribed with accuracy. The transcribed responses were subject to analysis.

2.4. Data Analysis

After the interview, the researchers utilized thematic analysis to analyze qualitative data. It emphasizes, identifies, analyzes, and interprets qualitative data patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The process of analyzing the data identified how the students from a State University cope with their emotional and adjustment problems. By using first-person narrative, the researchers conducted the Open and Axial coding to break the data into discrete parts and draw connections between codes. This method utilizes processes that identify themes within the data, categorize the data, and allow for the negotiation, codification, and presentation of meaning (Mohajan & Mohajan, 2022). The data collected revealed two main themes which are the Emotion-Focused Coping and Problem-Focused Coping used by the students to manage their adjustments. The categorization of the data collected identified the different strategies they used under the particular theme. It shows that to manage their emotions, students (1) Acknowledge their emotions to avoid anxiety, (2) Establish a support system through friends and family, (3) Minimize stress by self-gratification, and (4) Divert attention through entertainment. Meanwhile, to manage their academic, personal, and financial problems, students (1) Manage tasks by time management, (2) Budget their allowance through financial constraints, and (3) Socialize through adapting to a new environment. Figure 1 shows the matrix of themes gathered from the study's results, arranged in a web manner. It shows the two main themes, subthemes, and smaller topics under the various subthemes.

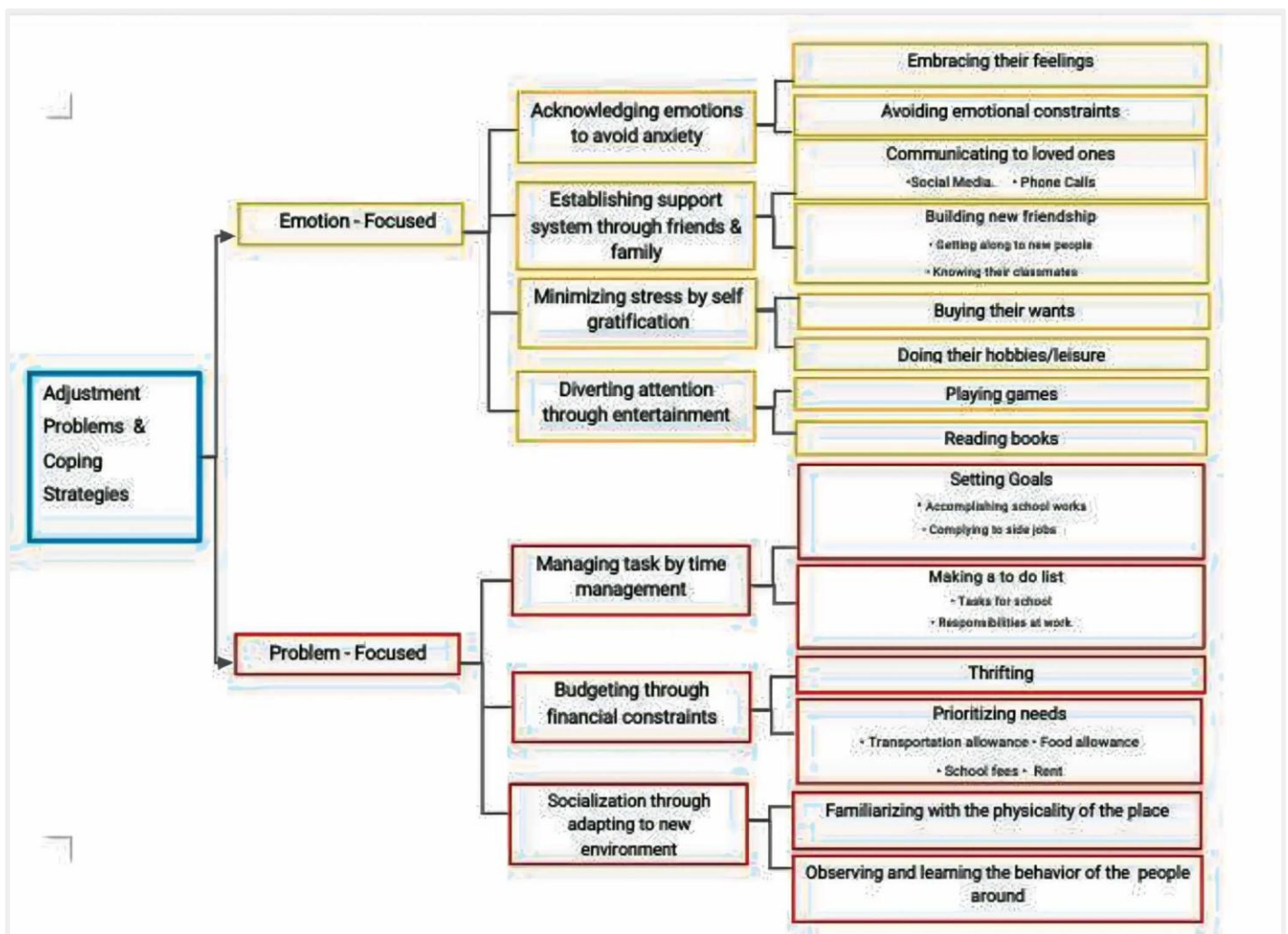


Figure 1. Categorization of data.

Overall, the methodology used in this research is aligned to attain answers as from the research questions within the legal and ethical boundaries permitted by the study.

3. Results

The researchers employed a qualitative questionnaire to identify the adjustment issues that students faced and the coping mechanisms they used to manage their personal, social, and academic adjustments while living independently. A total of (8) eight third-year college participants provided responses to open-ended questions. The acquired data was thematically analyzed and categorized. When examined, two major themes appeared. Coping strategies include emotion-focused and problem-focused approaches. Emotion-Focused Coping examines the coping methods students use to manage emotional challenges, whereas Problem-Focused Coping digs into the Coping methods employed by students to overcome problems encountered while living away from home.

3.1 Emotion-Focused Coping

This theme examines the coping strategies students use to address emotional challenges while living away from home. These strategies are divided into four key categories: (1) Acknowledging emotions to avoid anxiety, (2) Establishing a support system through friends and family, (3) Minimizing stress by self-gratification, and (4) Diverting attention through entertainment. Each category delves into specific approaches supported by participants' insights and relevant research.

As they transition to living independently, students have made various adjustments. They feel homesick and anxious most of the time. To manage these, recognizing and managing emotions is essential for reducing anxiety and improving emotional well-being. Mindfulness practices, which involve present-moment awareness and non-judgmental acceptance of emotions, have been shown to reduce emotional reactivity and promote psychological stability. Mindfulness is directly associated with lower levels of anxiety (Goldin & Gross, 2010). PJ elaborates that fully experiencing her emotions helps to lighten her burden

"I give myself time to absorb all of my problems... to feel it all in order to lighten my feelings after."

Acknowledging emotions rather than suppressing them enables individuals to effectively process and resolve their feelings, which can lead to improved mental health, better emotional regulation, and clearer decision-making. Suppressing emotions, on the other hand, often intensifies negative feelings and can contribute to increased stress and anxiety over time. Embracing emotions allows individuals to gain insight into their emotional state and take constructive steps toward managing challenges (Shallcross et al., 2010). PJ emphasizes the importance of not suppressing feelings:

"I do not suppress my emotions. If I'm sad, then I'm sad. If I'm angry, I'm angry. I don't suppress it because the more that you hold back, the more it triggers you."

By regulating emotional responses, individuals can reduce the influence of negative thoughts and approach situations with a clearer perspective and greater resilience (Carbone et al., 2024). R highlights the importance of emotional control, emphasizing its impact on maintaining focus and achieving goals:

"I do not allow myself to be overpowered by my negative thoughts because I know that they will affect my performance badly. I don't let my negative emotions consume me."

Similarly, PJ highlights the importance of reframing negativity into positivity:

"I deal with those emotions by acknowledging what I feel and trying to reverse my thoughts, looking on the brighter side of things."

Results revealed that new friendship helps them cope with homesickness and adjust to their new environment. A strong support system, which includes close relationships with family and friends, acts as a protective buffer against psychological stress by providing emotional, informational, and appraisal support. This social support is essential for fostering resilience and emotional adjustment, especially during challenging times. Individuals with strong support networks are better equipped to cope with stress, recover from setbacks, and maintain overall mental well-being (Demaray & Malecki, 2002).

Regular communication with family plays a crucial role in promoting emotional stability and protecting psychological well-being, particularly during stressful or challenging periods. Consistent emotional support from family members helps individuals feel connected, reduces feelings of isolation, and provides reassurance. Maintaining strong family connections can buffer against stress and enhance coping strategies (Geçer & Yıldırım, 2021). AL reinforces this idea by sharing:

"When you are having difficulties in life, you must have a strong connection with your family as your support system."

PJ elaborates on how regular communication with her family helps alleviate

homesickness and anxiety:

"I do a video call with my family at night to share what happened during my day and check on them as well. With that, I feel a sense of relief."

During stressful periods, establishing social connections can greatly improve mental well-being by offering emotional support and a dependable network, which aids individuals in managing challenging circumstances (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2010). Nelstrom shares how forming these connections has helped him cope:

"It helped me a lot because, as a person, I enjoy having someone to talk to and dedicating my time to sharing my feelings."

AL echoes the benefits of making friends:

"Making friends really makes my life easier. Whenever I feel homesickness, I have someone to share my problems with."

EJ and D further describe the emotional comfort these friendships provide:

"It feels like having my family by my side."

"They helped me adjust, so I don't feel shy about interacting with others."

Forming friendships during transitional periods, such as the first semester of college, is vital for emotional adjustment and stress relief. These new relationships provide a sense of belonging, reduce feelings of isolation, and offer emotional support during times of change.

Furthermore, self-affirmation enhanced problem-solving abilities in individuals who were chronically stressed and performing below their potential. (Creswell et al., 2013). LG shares how this practice helps her manage stress:

"Sometimes you take time to eat... it's like a way of self-reward or self-gratification."

Retail therapy, the act of buying items to relieve stress, can foster a sense of empowerment by countering feelings of helplessness or loss of control. By making purchasing decisions and satisfying personal desires, individuals can experience a mood boost and a temporary emotional uplift. This form of self-reward enables individuals to restore a sense of agency and enhance their overall emotional well-being (Rick et al., 2013).

LG elaborates on how this small act helps her manage stress:

"When I'm stressed or feeling low, I treat myself by buying my favorite snacks or meals. It reminds me to take care of myself and enjoy little things, even when life feels overwhelming."

Moreover, they engage in different leisure activities which play a significant role in promoting mental well-being by providing individuals with a sense of purpose, helping to reduce stress, and elevating mood. Engaging in hobbies or recreational activities offers a mental break from daily pressures, fosters relaxation, and enhances overall life satisfaction. Such activities can be essential for improving emotional resilience, boosting happiness, and reducing feelings of anxiety (Lagunes-Córdoba, 2022). LG shares how she uses leisure activities to manage stress:

"Sometimes I watch movies to somehow forget my problems and lessen the negative feelings."

She emphasizes how these activities provide a mental reset:

"Watching a comedy or a feel-good movie helps me relax and recharge. It's my way of taking a break from all the pressures."

To divert their attention from stress, homesickness, and other negative emotions, the participants believe that media and entertainment provide effective distractions that help them detach from stress and negative emotions, offering temporary relief from the pressures of daily life. Engaging with media, whether through television, movies, or other forms of entertainment, allows individuals to focus their attention elsewhere, reducing emotional tension and promoting relaxation. Entertainment media, both interactive and noninteractive, have a great potential to help people get back from stress and strain and to encourage the recharging of their physical and mental resources (Reinecke & Rieger, 2021). Nelstrom explains how video games help him cope:

"I'm really happy playing games... that I can relieve and release my stress through games."

Video games offer a powerful outlet for stress relief, providing players with an immersive experience that allows them to temporarily escape from real-life pressures. Additionally, video games can empower individuals by offering challenges and rewards, which contribute to a sense of accomplishment and control. These games can serve as an effective coping strategy, reducing emotional tension and improving overall mood (Kuo et al., 2016). Nelstrom elaborates on the sense of escapism games provide:

"It's like entering a different world where I don't have to think about my worries. It makes me feel more in control and happier."

To prevent negative emotions from affecting their studies, participants take time to read as reading is a powerful tool for enhancing mental well-being and reducing stress. Nelstrom

highlights the role that books have played in his personal growth:

"The books are really helpful for me in building myself. I have books for self-development and personality development."

LG adds how reading motivational material helps her stay grounded:

"Whenever I feel overwhelmed by homesickness or academic stress, I turn to motivational books. They give me new perspectives and encourage me to keep going. For instance, I read a book about embracing failures, and it helped me realize that setbacks are just steps toward success."

She also mentions how inspiring movies complement her reading:

"It's not just books – I also watch movies with uplifting messages. They give me ideas on how to face challenges and remind me to stay positive."

Reading can be an essential part of stress management and emotional recovery (Rizzolo et al., 2009). Engaging with books, particularly self-help and motivational genres, fosters personal growth, resilience, and emotional regulation. These books provide valuable insights, coping strategies, and encouragement, helping individuals navigate challenges more effectively.

The strategies – such as establishing social connections, retail buying, reading, playing games, and regularly communicating with loved ones – demonstrated the respondents' determination to continue their academic journey despite the psychological burden. Through these strategies, they at least still feel the warmth of home despite being away. This experience helps them foster a sense of independence, preparing them for their future careers.

3.2. Problem-Focused Coping

This section focuses on the coping strategies that students use to overcome problems while living away from home. These strategies include time management, budgeting, and adapting to new environments, which are vital for students' overall well-being and academic performance.

Juggling academics and personal responsibilities is a challenge for the students causing them to feel stressed most of the time. Therefore, in handling these, effective time management is essential for maximizing productivity and reducing stress. It involves planning, organizing, and prioritizing tasks to ensure efficient use of time (Aeon et al., 2021). Strategies include goal setting, which helps focus on priorities, and to-do lists, which break tasks into manageable steps and track progress. Self-regulation is equally important, ensuring discipline and minimizing distractions. By managing time effectively, individuals can reduce procrastination, meet deadlines, and maintain a healthy balance between work and personal life.

Establishing clear goals allows students to remain focused on their academic responsibilities by providing direction and motivation. It enables them to prioritize tasks effectively and allocate their time to what matters most. This helps students stay on track, reduce distractions, and navigate challenges with a sense of purpose. This focus ensures that students can maintain productivity and achieve their objectives efficiently. Nelstrom emphasizes this by stating:

"Maintaining proper organization, such as effective time management, is crucial because if you don't achieve it, focusing on school becomes much harder."

Similarly, EJ highlights the importance of setting clear goals as a key factor in maintaining motivation:

"I always go back to my goals, so I will always be reminded about what my purpose is."

Creating a to-do list helps students organize their tasks systematically and track their progress effectively. It provides a clear structure, reducing the feeling of being overwhelmed and ensuring that important responsibilities are not forgotten. To-do lists also offer a sense of accomplishment when tasks are completed, which boosts motivation and encourages productivity. This simple yet effective tool allows students to manage their workload more efficiently and stay focused on their goals. EJ underscores the value of to-do lists as a powerful tool for managing time and improving efficiency:

"I have a list of my priorities that I need to accomplish and organize on time."

Students believe that planning ahead improves their academic performance (Alyami et al., 2021). It helps them manage their responsibilities effectively, creating a positive cycle of motivation and accomplishment.

As they live independently in the city with a limited budget, budgeting is a vital skill for them, as it ensures financial stability and responsible money management. It helps prioritize necessities over wants, preventing overspending and financial difficulties. By practicing budgeting, students can allocate their resources wisely and focus on meeting essential needs

(Susanto & Alimbudiono, 2019). AL highlights the importance of adopting these habits to achieve financial security and independence:

"I save my allowance by separating my expenses like my food, buying my vitamins and necessities, fare, and printing my modules."

As D explains, budgeting empowers individuals to take control of their finances and avoid overspending:

"I've started saving and budgeting my finances. Now, I only spend on my needs and less on my wants."

Thrifty habits allow students to save money while still addressing their essential needs. By practicing mindful spending, they can reduce unnecessary expenses and allocate their resources more effectively. These habits not only promote financial stability but also encourage responsible money management. Creating a budget and prioritizing essential expenses are crucial steps in managing finances effectively. This practice not only helps individuals maintain financial stability but also reduces unnecessary stress by ensuring resources are allocated to necessities.

New and unfamiliar environment is also a challenge for these students. Adjusting to a new environment requires understanding the physical layout and observing the behavior of those around you. These strategies create a sense of belonging, build connections, and enhance comfort. As JP shares, familiarizing oneself with the surroundings provides a feeling of security and helps navigate the new space with confidence:

"To adapt to a new environment, I think what I did was to familiarize myself with the 'physicality' or physical layout first. I made an effort to understand what facilities were nearby, such as the library, canteens, and various buildings within the school. Outside, I looked for the nearest supermarket, grocery store, and pharmacy."

Observing and understanding others' behaviors before engaging in social interactions enables students to adapt and respond appropriately. This approach helps them navigate social situations with greater ease and confidence. JP emphasizes that paying attention to the actions and attitudes of others builds awareness and fosters meaningful connections:

"I'm a really shy person, and I get anxious with new people, but I tend to observe people first before I talk to them. Before I socialize with them, I want to know who I'm talking to and what to talk about."

These strategies – time management, budgeting, and social adaptation – demonstrate students' proactive efforts to overcome challenges, supporting both academic success and personal growth. By adopting structured approaches, students develop resilience, foster meaningful connections, and strengthen their capacity to navigate the complexities of independent living. These skills not only help them manage current demands but also prepare them for future responsibilities.

4. Discussion

This study describes the adjustment problems and coping strategies of state university students living away from home. This paper seeks to provide insights into their challenges as they conformed to their new environment and new relationships, as well as the coping strategies they employed to manage these challenges. Modeled after the Coping Theory of Lazarus and Folkman (Folkman, 1997), they were categorized into two primary themes: (a) Emotion-Focused Coping and (b) Problem-Focused Coping. After reviewing the informant's data, seven (7) significant categories were found. Under Emotion-Focused Coping are (1) Acknowledging emotions to avoid anxiety, (2) Establishing a support system through friends and family, (3) Minimizing stress by self-gratification, and (4) Diverting attention through entertainment. Meanwhile, under Problem-Focused Coping, the following are (1) Managing tasks by time management, (2) Budgeting through financial constraints, and (3) Socialization through adapting to a new environment.

Attending university can offer students a positive experience, allowing them to meet new people and encounter diverse ideas, initiate their adult lives, and secure better prospects by obtaining higher education qualifications. For others, though, homesickness causes discomfort in the transition (Thurber & Walton, 2012). Academic responsibilities, financial problems, and social responsibilities add to the burden of students undergoing this transition. Effective adjustment requires not only excelling academically but also building social connections and developing coping strategies to handle stress successfully (Bardach et al., 2020). Goldin and Gross (2010) stated that being mindful or acknowledging emotions is essential for reducing the level of anxiety as well as improving emotional well-being and stability. PJ also stated that embracing her emotions made her lighter afterward, which aligns with Shallcross, Troy, Boland, and Mauss (2010). In line with Carbone, Lenti, Sella, Moè, and

Borella (2024), R and PJ also emphasized the importance of avoiding emotional constraints to focus on achieving their goals.

Emotion-focused coping entails efforts to manage the emotional reactions triggered by stressors (Halfmann & Reinecke, 2021). Students need to practice recognizing their feelings all the time to prevent anxiousness. They might only become more emotionally burdened by emotional constraints. By preventing themselves from hiding their bad emotions going forward, they will be able to alleviate them by accepting them and expressing what they feel. It highlights the importance of emotional self-regulation, which involves controlling emotions to think before acting and to stay positive. Managing emotions effectively can improve performance and well-being, aligning with the findings that emotional self-regulation is key to fostering a positive mindset. Furthermore, they frequently experience anxiety and stress when attempting to solve their problems on their own; to overcome homesickness, they turn to newly made friends for emotional support. Establishing a support system that comes from various sources, such as friends or family, consists of multiple layers, such as emotional and appraisal support, which can be helpful in one's adjustments (Demaray & Malecki, 2002). Studies show that having strong social connections improves mental health and decreases stress syndromes (Martino, 2015). Having stable support through communicating with family and building friendships in the university helped them have a smoother transition to living away, which aligns with some researchers (Demaray & Malecki, 2002; Geçer & Yıldırım 2021; Holt-Lunstad et al., 2010). In light of this, the study emphasized the need for a strong social network to lessen the homesickness and anxiety that one faces.

Additionally, Rick, Pereira, and Burson (2013) and LG shared the same idea of how rewarding in the form of buying wants helped in managing stress. Moreover, engaging in leisure and hobbies was also a part of their coping strategies, as this significantly helped in lifting their mood, this was supported by some authors (Lagunes-Córdoba et al., 2022; Creswell et al., 2013). In addition, entertainment, as mentioned by Reinecke and Rieger (2021) provided some way to unwind and improve themselves. Reading, as mentioned by Rizzolo, Zipp, Stiskal, and Simpkins (2009) and playing video games, as Kuo, Hiler, and Lutz (2016), highlights both gave a break from negative feelings. This study found that students use strategies like seeking social support as well as employing distraction techniques to manage emotions such as anxiety, sadness, or frustration.

Meanwhile, problem-focused coping techniques are those that try to control or change stressors (Folkman, 1997). Managing tasks via time management, which was highlighted by Aeon, Faber, and Panaccio (2021), was also mentioned as a helpful way of organizing priorities, which was highlighted in the topical study (Alyami et al., 2021) that emphasized setting goals to motivate in achieving certain milestones. However, some students who have trouble managing their time usually delay finishing assignments, allot insufficient time, and feel more stressed (Bhattacharya et al., 2022). Financially, challenges were dealt through budgeting, together with thriftiness and putting needs over wants, mirroring the findings of Hartantri, Setyadi, and Gunarto (2024) as well as Dorog, Fajardo, Flores, Gulle, and Limocon (2024). Socialization is also seen as a coping strategy because social influence is a part of people's everyday lives, affecting their thoughts, feelings, and actions, often without their awareness. This influence occurs when an individual's thoughts, opinions, and lifestyles are influenced by those of others (Wang et al., 2012). Transferring to a new location requires separating ties to familiar places and major effects on a person's capacity to adapt to a new environment (Chow & Healy, 2008). Getting familiar with the area and the people around was another strategy, JP mentioned her adjustment was smoother as she became more accustomed to her new environment, her statement was further reinforced by Greenwood (2014), McLeod (2001), and Smith's (2010) findings.

In this study, the students showed resilience and adaptation in the face of the changes they encountered when living independently away from home. This capacity to manage difficult situations fosters resilience, which raises the possibility of academic achievement (Goldman, 2019). The students exhibited self-assurance and gained knowledge of resilience, which has been linked to a higher chance of academic achievement (Thompson et al., 2013).

While the coping techniques of students living away from home have been identified by this research, some limitations need to be addressed in the following studies. Firstly, there were just eight (8) informants from a single university who were interviewed for this study. As a result, the information gathered is insufficient to fully generalize students' adjustment issues and coping mechanisms to a wider range of students. Research and practice must focus on a wider range of students as the college-going population continues to diversify (Renn & Reason, 2021). Secondly, there is an inconsistency in the methods used to gather data, ranging

from face-to-face semi-structured interviews to online semi-structured interviews, which limited the observation of interviewees' body language, questioning the authenticity of their responses. Moreover, this setup faced communication issues such as internet connectivity problems, inaudible responses, and errors in recording the interviews. Thirdly, the researchers encountered an issue with the alignment of interviewees' schedules. These changes were due to class cancellations caused by a high heat index. Finally, considering the subject of this study is Filipino students, results may differ from those in other countries. Nevertheless, despite these limitations, this study offers sufficient information to describe the difficulties faced by independent living students as well as the coping mechanisms they used. This study found that each student practices varying coping strategies based on their experiences.

5. Conclusions

Students' experiences shed light on their adjustment problems and coping strategies while staying away from home for academic purposes. It reflects on the struggles faced by students all over the country, wherein they sacrifice the comforts of their hometowns in search of better educational opportunities. Despite living in different communities, students share similar experiences and employ both common and unique coping strategies. Students still exhibit a positive spirit towards their new environment and the new experiences that lie ahead of them. The challenge of transitioning from online to face-to-face education delivery is another significant factor in their struggles, on top of their homesickness. Classes are expected to return to the aforementioned setup, which leaves little time for the students to adjust, making them quite a little awkward towards their peers, which adds to their struggles in creating friendships with their classmates. Although students were inadequately equipped, the majority of them overcame difficulties and showed flexibility when circumstances changed. Considering those challenges, they still manage to accomplish their goals by possessing good self-management skills. By communicating with loved ones and building new friendships, they were capable of creating a strong support system. A strong support system, like familial ties and friendships, gives them a sense of ease in the face of uncertainty. Students could be more comfortable in their transition, both from their hometowns to the city and from the different modalities of classes.

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