

# Challenges and Coping Strategies of a High School Honor Student Enrolled in Tertiary Education

Nel John D. Pelayo<sup>1</sup>, James L. Paglinawan<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Graduate Student, Central Mindanao University,

<sup>2</sup>Faculty, Central Mindanao University

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## ABSTRACT

Honors students are perceived as an individual that can tackle any school activities and written works, on the contrary they are also a normal human being with normal capabilities. Understanding these they must be an average individual that is handling each factors affecting them in college with efficiency. However, research shows that the transition from high school to college is a critical phase in a student's academic journey, often accompanied by a host of academic, social, and emotional adjustments. For high school honor students, who have consistently demonstrated exceptional academic performance. This shift presents unique challenges. While their strong academic foundation and study habits may set them apart, the demands of tertiary education introduce new levels of rigor, independence, and competition that can test their resilience. Adapting to a more complex learning environment, managing increased workloads, and balancing social and personal responsibilities can be overwhelming, even for these high-achieving students. The main objective of this qualitative study was to explore the insights and perspective of an honor high school student currently in college in terms of the challenges they encountered and how they handle such challenge. The data were generated from in depth interviews and analyzed through a thematic analysis process. In performing this method it revealed that the honor students in high School felt a sense of pride upon achieving the reward of their hard work as one of the top performing individuals in their year level, but upon going to college they encountered academic stress due to the increase level of education thus they needed to give more effort. According to the data the challenges that the students encountered is made easier by having emotional support and inspiration mostly in the form of loved individuals which made them to suggest that incoming college students that in previously an honor student in high school must gain self-confidence and adaptability.

## INTRODUCTION

The shift from high school to college represents a crucial phase in a student's educational journey, characterized by notable changes in academic demands and personal responsibilities. College requires students to be more independent, self-driven, and equipped with advanced learning strategies compared to high school. They must navigate larger classes, irregular timetables, and more challenging coursework, often without the structured guidance they previously received. This highlights that at the tertiary education level, students need to elevate their skills to meet college expectations. Consequently, students set goals to attain higher knowledge and develop into productive individuals in the future.

High school to college education is a complex process that involves not only academic preparation but also emotional and social adjustments. High-achieving students, in particular, face unique challenges as they navigate the transition to college. Hossler, D., & Gallagher, K. S. (1987). This statement is further supported by Vincent, C. L. (2023) according to his study the transition from high school to college involves more than academic readiness, students must also navigate new social and emotional challenges. Recent narrative research at a large southern university found that students face hidden and unfamiliar obstacles during this period, with cultural and resource transitions playing a significant role in their adjustment. This highlights the importance of institutional support and resources that address not only academic but also cultural and emotional aspects of the college transition. In relation to the unique challenges faced by high school honor student, this qualitative study seeks to

explore the lived experiences of high school honor students as they navigate the challenges of college life. It aims to shed light on the obstacles they face, ranging from academic

pressure and time management struggles to social adaptation and mental well-being. More importantly, it examines the coping strategies these students employ to maintain their academic standing while managing the stressors of higher education. By highlighting their insights and experiences, this study provides a deeper understanding of the factors that influence their success and well-being. According to Conley, D. T. (2007), College readiness is a multifaceted issue that involves not only academic preparation but also systemic and noncurricular factors. Disparities in high school instruction quality and alignment with college expectations often leave students unprepared for postsecondary challenges. Thus, this study is aiming for other that can affect the mental and physical capabilities of the students since they already excel in terms of academic performance may it be due to hard work talent or both.

### **Objectives of the study**

This study aims to identify the challenges and coping strategies of a high school honor student enrolled in tertiary education. Specifically tailored to acquire result from the following:

1. Identify the insight of being an honor student in high school.
2. Recognize the pressures and problems of high school honor students in college.
3. Determine the solutions of problems faced in college.

### **Statement of the problem**

Since honor students are perceived to be separated on their class in terms of academic performance, in further looking at the what it takes to be an honor student we can see that there are other factors to looked in order for an individual to succeed in college. According to Hossler, D., & Gallagher, K. S. (1987), The transition from high school to college is a complex process that involves not only academic preparation but also emotional and social adjustments. High-achieving students, in particular, face unique challenges as they navigate the transition to college.

To provide more streamline and focused goal the problem are broken down into more simple and narrow questions focusing on the high school honor students currently in college. The problem questions are as such:

1. What do an individual feel when they are recognized as an honor student in high school?
2. What are the challenges encountered of a high school honor student when they are in college?
3. How do they deal with such challenges and pressure that they encountered?

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Research design**

The study used a Narrative and Phenomenological approach as it focuses on understanding the lived experiences and perceptions of individuals regarding a particular phenomenon or situation and also collecting and analyzing stories or personal accounts of individuals' experiences. Aims to describe the essence of a shared experience from the perspective of those who have lived it and to understand how people make sense of their lives through the experiences they tell.

### **Locale of the study**

The study was conducted in Central Mindanao University, Musuan, Maramag, Bukidnon. February to March of the year 2025. The participant were 1<sup>st</sup> year honor students that were honor students in high school.

### **Participants of the study**

The criterion for selecting the participants were prepared, First, the Participants must be an Honor student in

high school, Second, the participants must be currently studying at a tertiary level of education.

The participants were chosen by snowball sampling enabling the researcher to have access to participants who fit the inclusion criteria. There were seven participants involved in the study.

### Research Instrument

Structured interviews served as the main research tool. An interview guide was created and its content was validated by experts to ensure accuracy. The use of open-ended questions encouraged participants to share detailed accounts of their experiences, while also providing the flexibility to ask follow-up questions based on their answers. The question were:

1. How do you feel being an honor student in high school?
2. What are the pressures you encountered in tertiary education?
3. What are your coping strategies in dealing the challenges you encountered?
4. What are your recommendations for future high school honor student enrolling in tertiary education?

### Data Gathering Procedure

The research data was collected through face-to-face interviews scheduled on mutually agreed dates between the participants and the researcher. With participants' consent, their responses were recorded in writing and transcribed verbatim for thematic analysis. This method ensured the data collection was both organized and flexible enough to capture the unique aspects of each participant's experience. Participants were selected based on whether they met the inclusion criteria. Prior to the interview, researchers explained the study's objectives, purpose, and community benefits to the prospective participants. They also clarified participants' rights, including confidentiality of the interview and data. To begin the interview, initial questions were asked to collect basic information such as the participant's name, age, course, and college year level, followed by the introductory questions.

### Data analysis

The researcher a thematic analysis approach on the data. Thematic analysis is a widely recognized qualitative research method that involves identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns or themes within data. This approach is praised for its flexibility and accessibility, allowing researchers to systematically interpret complex qualitative data while maintaining transparency and rigor (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Dawadi, 2020)

1. Familiarization with the data - The researcher immerses themselves in the data by reading and re-reading it to gain a deep understanding.
2. Generating initial codes - Systematic coding of interesting features across the dataset is conducted to organize data into meaningful groups.
3. Searching for themes - Codes are collated into potential themes that capture broader patterns relevant to the research questions.
4. Reviewing themes - Themes are refined by checking their coherence and relevance against the coded extracts and the entire dataset.
5. Defining and naming themes - Each theme is clearly defined and named to reflect its core meaning and significance.
6. Writing up the analysis - The final report is produced by weaving together the themes with supporting data extracts and linking findings to existing literature.

## RESULTS AND DICUSSION

### Question 1: How do you feel being an honor student in high school?

The most common underlying general insights shown after the thematic analysis is applied is that the majority of the participants felt a *Sense of Accomplishment and Pride* in being an honor student in high school. Supported by the following responses:

*"I feel honored and amazed because among those students in high school I made myself one of those lucky students for being one of those academic achievers in that school."*

*(Response 1)*

*"Being an honor student in high school was a big achievement for me. It made all the sleepless nights and hard work worth it, and I genuinely felt happy and proud of my accomplishments." (Response 2)*

*"I feel a huge sense of accomplishment. Knowing that all the hard work, late nights studying had paid off." (Response 4)*

For many students, being an honor student in high school is more than just an academic achievement—it's a deeply personal triumph. The sense of accomplishment and pride they feel can be incredibly empowering, motivating them to continue striving for excellence in their academic journey. This emotional boost can be particularly important during the transition to higher education, where students face new challenges and uncertainties.

When students reflect on their experiences as honor students, they often highlight the emotional payoff of their hard work. As one student noted, "Being an honor student in high school was a big achievement for me. It made all the sleepless nights and hard work worth it, and I genuinely felt happy and proud of my accomplishments" [Response 2]. This sense of pride and accomplishment is not just about academic success; it's about the personal growth and resilience that comes from overcoming obstacles. As Conley emphasizes, being prepared for college involves not only academic readiness but also psychological readiness, which includes having a positive self-image and confidence in one's abilities (Conley, 2007). By fostering a strong sense of self-efficacy and motivation, the experience of being an honor student can play a significant role in helping students navigate the challenges of higher education with confidence and determination.

## **Question 2: What are the pressures you encountered in tertiary education?**

On this group of response, the thematic analysis narrowed the opinions of the participants in terms of pressures encountered to **Academic Pressure** this is due to the new environment, instructors having the participants to mentally adjust and more difficult activities or school work adding more pressure due to their drive to succeed in the tertiary level of education. The themes are supported by the following responses:

*"The pressures I currently encountered in tertiary education is about the subjects and instructors, because the subjects and instructors are new for me and they are so different from high school teachers." (Response 3)*

*"1. academic pressure" (Response 4)*

*"more difficult coursework" (Response 7)*

One significant implication of the academic pressures encountered in tertiary education is that students face a steep learning curve as they adapt to a new academic environment. The challenges posed by unfamiliar subjects, instructors, and more demanding coursework can be overwhelming, yet they also serve as a catalyst for personal growth and academic resilience.

The transition to tertiary education often brings about a significant shift in academic expectations and challenges. Students must navigate unfamiliar subjects and teaching styles, which can be daunting. As one student noted, "The pressures I currently encountered in tertiary education is about the subjects and instructors, because the subjects and instructors are new for me and they are so different from high school teachers" [Response 3]. This adjustment period highlights the importance of academic support systems and resources that can help students manage these pressures effectively. According to Tinto's work on student attrition, academic integration is a critical factor in student success, emphasizing the need for institutions to provide environments that support students' academic and personal development. By acknowledging and addressing these academic pressures, educators can better equip students to thrive in the tertiary education setting.

### Question 3: What are your coping strategies in dealing with the challenges you encountered?

**Support Systems and Time Management** are the themes that arises after the analysis showing that in the opinions of the participant people that bring positive encouragement are a key factor in dealing with pressure in college, time management gives the participants a way to avoid cramming due effectively avoiding mental stress. This statement is strengthened by the following responses.

*"Being surrounded with supportive teachers, classmates, friends and family are one of my strategies to survive because being with them helped me to be motivated and become comfortable in every action I take." (Response 1)*

*"Time management" (Response 4)*

*"I developed effective time management skills" (Response 7)*

One significant implication of the coping strategies used by students in tertiary education is that they rely heavily on support systems and effective time management to navigate academic challenges. These strategies not only help students manage stress but also foster a sense of community and personal organization that are essential for academic success.

The importance of support systems and time management in coping with academic pressures cannot be overstated. Students who are surrounded by supportive teachers, classmates, friends, and family tend to feel more motivated and comfortable in their academic environment. As one student noted, "Being surrounded with supportive teachers, classmates, friends and family are one of my strategies to survive because being with them helped me to be motivated and become comfortable in every action I take" [Response 1]. Additionally, effective time management skills allow students to avoid the stress associated with last-minute cramming, promoting a healthier approach to academic work [Response 4, Response 7]. This aligns with Wang and Zhang's findings on coping strategies during challenging times, which highlight the role of social support and personal resilience in managing stress [2021]. By leveraging these coping strategies, students can better navigate the demands of tertiary education and set themselves up for long-term success.

### Question 4: What are your recommendations for future high school honor students enrolling in tertiary education?

Themes produced in analysis are **Adaptability and Self-Confidence** describing that on the insights of the participants the only person that can control the stress encountered in themselves. Suggesting a very resilient and a positive mindset as supporting by the following Responses:

*"Believe in themselves because studying is never easy. They should be prepared for the struggles and challenges they will face in college and stay determined despite difficulties." (Response 5)*

*"Remain adaptable" (Response 7)*

*"Trust always yourself" (Response 3)*

One significant implication of the recommendations for future high school honor students is that they should cultivate adaptability and self-confidence to navigate the challenges of tertiary education effectively. By embracing a resilient and positive mindset, students can better manage stress and stay motivated in the face of academic pressures.

The advice from current students emphasizes the importance of personal resilience and confidence in managing the transition to tertiary education. As one student suggested, "Believe in themselves because studying is never easy. They should be prepared for the struggles and challenges they will face in college and stay determined despite difficulties" [Response 5]. This aligns with Arnett's theory of emerging adulthood, which highlights the period of exploration and self-discovery that young adults undergo during their transition to higher education.



By remaining adaptable and trusting in their abilities, students can navigate the complexities of college life more effectively. This mindset is crucial for overcoming obstacles and maintaining motivation, as it allows students to view challenges as opportunities for growth rather than threats to their well-being. As such, fostering self-confidence and adaptability can be a powerful strategy for future high school honor students to succeed in tertiary education.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Thematic analysis of student experiences revealed key insights into the transition from high school to tertiary education. Honor students reported feeling a strong sense of accomplishment and pride, which motivated them to excel academically. However, they also encountered significant academic pressures in tertiary education, primarily due to new environments, instructors, and more difficult coursework. To cope with these challenges, students relied on support systems and effective time management strategies to alleviate stress and foster personal organization. Recommendations for future honor students included cultivating adaptability and self-confidence, as resilience and a positive mindset were deemed crucial for navigating the complexities of tertiary education effectively.

The data shows that despite all the pressures and hardships in high school the students felt a sense of accomplishment and pride in achieving an honors recognition in class as a reward for their hard work, thus knowing that hard work pays off no matter the pressures encountered they carry that mentality throughout in college level. The pressure faced due to increased difficulty of education is handled when student find the inspiration and support thus developing mental fortitude to persevere thought the challenges encountered. Ultimately, the ability to adapt to any task and situations given is a key factor in not succumbing to the hardships in college, developing a positive mentality and a flexible mind gives an emotional edge for student and is also a very well suggested coping strategy. Self-confidence in doing any given task is a result of preparation, time management and meticulous learning as resulted for a well-prepared individual avoiding unnecessary additional problems.

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