LIVED EXPERIENCES OF IRREGULAR STUDENTS IN PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the lived experiences of irregular students at the Philippine College Foundation using a phenomenological research design. In-depth interviews with key informants were conducted to gather qualitative data, which were analyzed thematically. The analysis revealed ten major themes that reflected the challenges, coping mechanisms, and academic impacts of being an irregular student. Informants reported difficulties such as conflicting class schedules, challenges in social integration, feelings of isolation, and mental health concerns including anxiety and depression. Despite these challenges, irregular students employed coping strategies such as time management, optimism, perseverance, and reliance on spiritual faith. The findings indicate that irregular status can have both positive and negative effects on academic performance. While it enhances academic independence, it also reduces access to peer academic support. These insights contribute to a deeper understanding of the academic and psychosocial needs of irregular students, highlighting the importance of tailored support systems in higher education institutions.

Keyword: Irregular students, challenges, coping mechanisms, lived experiences

1. INTRODUCTION

Higher education remains a crucial pathway to upward mobility and personal fulfilment. For many young people, attending college represents the realization of their aspirations for a better and more secure future. However, this opportunity is not equally accessible to all (Golamco, 2020). Economic hardships, familial responsibilities, and academic setbacks often disrupt students' educational trajectories, leading some to stop schooling entirely, while others continue their studies as irregular students—those unable to follow the prescribed sequence of their academic programs (Evangelista et al., 2020).

Irregular students typically diverge from the standard curriculum progression due to various factors such as course failures, dropping subjects, taking a leave of absence, shifting programs, or transferring institutions (De Guzman, 2016). As a result, they face unique academic and social challenges not commonly encountered by regular students. Their schedules are often fragmented, requiring them to navigate multiple classroom environments and adapt to different peer groups and instructional styles, which can significantly affect their academic performance, social engagement, and overall well-being (Guleker & Keci, 2014).

Prior research has explored some of the difficulties irregular students face. Alterator (2016) noted that while students may initially adapt to varied environments, frequent exposure to multiple classroom cultures within a single day can lead to heightened anxiety and culture shock. Similarly, Mesa (2020) emphasized the emotional toll irregular status can have on students, including diminished self-confidence, fear of academic failure, and increased risk of attrition. Despite these insights, much of the existing literature focuses broadly on academic failure or dropout risks without giving sufficient attention to the lived experiences, coping strategies, and resilience of irregular students who persist in their studies Ganesan (2018). This gap in the literature highlights the need for a more nuanced understanding of irregular students, particularly within specific contexts such as private higher education institutions. The Philippine College Foundation, for instance, presents a unique environment where irregular students, especially

those in the Elementary Education Department, strive to overcome personal and systemic obstacles. Financial instability, balancing employment with coursework, social isolation, and disrupted peer relationships are recurrent themes that merit deeper investigation.

Thus, the present study aims to illuminate the academic journeys, challenges, and coping mechanisms of irregular students at the Philippine College Foundation. By centering the voices and experiences of these students, this research seeks to contribute to the growing body of literature on educational persistence and resilience. Moreover, it offers practical insights for educators, administrators, and policymakers on how to better support irregular students' academic success and personal growth. The novelty of this study lies in its emphasis on irregular students not as academic failures, but as individuals demonstrating significant perseverance and adaptability, challenging traditional narratives that often stigmatize non-linear educational paths.

1.1 Theoritical framework

This study is anchored in George Herbert Mead's Social Behaviourism Theory, which underscores the fundamental role of social interactions in the development of the self and individual behaviour. According to Mead, the self is not an inherent entity but rather a dynamic and evolving construct, formed through communication, role-taking, and the internalization of societal norms and expectations. Through interaction with others, individuals come to understand themselves, assume multiple roles, and align their behaviours with the perceived expectations of the social environment.

Social Behaviourism Theory is particularly pertinent in examining the experiences of irregular students at the Philippine College Foundation. The formation of self and identity among these students is significantly influenced by their interactions with peers, faculty, and the broader academic community. Irregular students often occupy multiple social roles simultaneously such as student, employee, and family member necessitating a continual process of role-taking wherein they must understand and respond to varying expectations across different social contexts. Central to Mead's theory is the concept of the "generalized other," which refers to the internalization of the collective attitudes and norms of the broader society. For irregular students, the generalized other manifests in the institutional and societal expectations regarding academic regularity, progression, and success. When students deviate from the standard educational trajectory, they encounter role conflict, social isolation, and the pressure to reconcile their personal circumstances with external standards of academic achievement.

By applying Social Behaviourism Theory, this study seeks to explore the multifaceted challenges irregular students face, particularly focusing on issues of social integration, role conflict, and self-perception. It also examines the coping mechanisms these students employ, including the reliance on social support networks, adaptive role-taking strategies, and the negotiation of self-identity in response to academic and social pressures. Furthermore, the theoretical lens provides a nuanced understanding of how these psychosocial dynamics impact academic engagement and performance. Through this framework, the study not only illuminates the lived realities of irregular students but also offers insights into how educational institutions might better support their academic persistence and social inclusion. In doing so, it contributes to the broader discourse on student diversity, resilience, and the sociocultural dimensions of higher education experiences.

1.2 Research Questions

1. What are the challenges experienced by irregular students?
2. How do irregular students cope with the challenges they experience?
3. How does being irregular students affect their performance in class?

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

2.1. Research Design

This study utilized a qualitative phenomenological approach, which was particularly suitable for exploring and describing the lived experiences of

irregular college students. Phenomenology aimed to investigate deeply into the subjective experiences of individuals, focusing on how they perceived and made sense of their unique situations (Creswell, 2015). By employing this approach, the study sought to uncover what it meant to be an irregular student the Philippine College Foundation, Valencia City. Phenomenology enabled the researcher to capture details and underlying meanings embedded in the participants' experiences, providing a rich understanding of their academic journeys (Garcia & Uy, 2025).

2.2. Research Locale

The study was conducted at the Philippine College Foundation campus in Hagkol, Valencia City, during the second semester of the academic year 2023-2025. This setting provided a familiar environment for the participants, facilitating open and candid discussions about their experiences as irregular students. By conducting the research within the college campus, the researcher aimed to capture the contextual factors and institutional aspects that influenced the experiences of irregular students within their academic environment.

2.3. Research Participants

The participants of the study were five irregular students from the Philippine College Foundation in Valencia City. They were selected based on specific inclusion criteria. To be eligible for the study, the 4th year students had to be currently enrolled during the 2023-2024 school year and must have been classified as irregular students. This included those not following a traditional course schedule, such as students who had taken breaks from their studies, changed their majors, or had to balance work with academic responsibilities. The study included students from diverse backgrounds to provide a broader understanding of the various challenges irregular students encounter in their academic journeys.

2.4. Sampling Procedure

Purposive sampling was chosen in selecting the study participants who could provide diverse perspectives on the experiences of irregular students. The criteria for selection included variability in academic backgrounds, year of study, and program affiliation within the school. This

method ensured that the sample represented a range of experiences relevant to the study's objectives, allowing for in-depth exploration of common themes and unique perceptions among irregular students. Despite the small sample size, purposive sampling aimed to maximize the depth and richness of data collected, focusing on quality rather than quantity in qualitative research (Patton, 2015).

2.5. Research Instrument

This study used qualitative interviews conducted in person. All interviews were recorded using mobile phones to capture the responses accurately. An initial inquiry was made to ensure that participants met the eligibility criteria. The interview questions were researcher-made and validated through expert and language review to ensure their effectiveness in exploring the experiences of irregular students.

2.6. Validity of the Instrument

To ensure validity, the interview questions underwent a validation process that involved feedback from academic professionals and experts in the field. This feedback was used to refine the questions for clarity, relevance, and comprehensiveness, ensuring that they effectively captured the participants' experiences.

The researcher employed consistent interviewing techniques, including maintaining a neutral stance, using standardized prompts, and following a structured yet flexible approach to allow for in-depth responses. Member checking was also conducted, where participants reviewed their transcribed responses to verify accuracy and authenticity, minimizing the risk of misinterpretation. Furthermore, participants signed a verification form, confirming the correctness of their responses and ensuring the trustworthiness of the data collected.

2.7. Data Gathering Procedure

The researcher used the following guidelines to collect the data: the researchers formulated a formal letter, duly noted by their thesis adviser, requesting permission from the Dean of the School of Education for approval. The researchers explained what the study was about and how the information would be used. The respondents answered the prepared questionnaire, followed by the actual interview conducted by the researcher.

They were informed that the data gathered would be kept private and confidential. Confidentiality was maintained during the transcription of the interviews. The researcher assigned the participants codes such as IS1, IS2, IS3, and so on to quickly locate their responses. To verify the data, a focus group discussion was conducted with a number of participants. The focus group discussion helped the researcher to cross-check and validate the themes identified during the thematic analysis. This process helped ensure the reliability and credibility of the data, enhancing the trustworthiness of the study's findings.

2.8. Qualitative Data Analysis

Thematic analysis of the data is conducted to answer the research questions following the guidelines for reflexive thematic analysis. This independently involved checking the transcripts of audio files and reading the data in its entirety independent from subjective experiences. In other words, different irregular students would interpret reality in different ways, given that knowledge is always situated.

The researchers also applied the six steps prescribed by Braun and Clarke (2006) to carry out the thematic analysis of the data. These steps included familiarizing with the data, generating initial codes, sorting the codes into potential themes, and collating all relevant coded data extracts within the identified themes. Visual representations were used to help sort the codes into themes. Thematic analysis is a process of thinking about the relationship between codes, themes, and various levels of themes. The fourth step involves reviewing the themes, the fifth step entails refining and naming the themes, and the sixth step entails providing a write-up of the thematic analysis.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of the key informants' descriptions of their experiences as irregular students led to the emergence of nine distinct themes: (i) Different Subject Schedules, (ii) Adjustment Other Students, (iii) Being Out of Place, (iv) Dealing with Anxiety and Depression, (v) Time Management, (vi) Being Optimistic and Motivated, (vii) Seeking God's Help, (viii) Perseverance, (ix) Academic Independence, (x) Reduced Peer Academic Support.
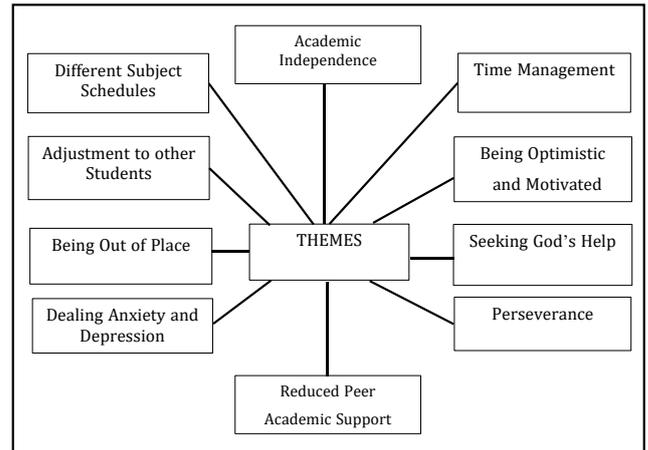

Figure 1. Themes Emerged about the Experiences of Irregular Students.

3.1. Challenges of Irregular Students

Different Subject Schedule

In Frame 1, the informants shared similar challenges with their schedules. Informant 1 said that adjusting to subject schedules was one of the common complex parts of being an irregular student. Informant 2 also talked about the difficulty of managing schedules and catching up on missed subjects, which often happen simultaneously. Informants 3 and 5 highlight their challenge in fitting with subjects in new curriculum. These problems can lower a student's motivation and make it harder for them to finish their degree (Evangelista et al., 2020).

Frame 1. Challenge on Different Subject Schedule

THEME	RESPONSES
Different Subject Scheduled	*IS1*: As an irregular student there's a lot of challenges, I've encountered specially the subject scheduled because, my 2nd year subject is same time as my major subject in 3rd year, in short makalibog. *(As an irregular student there's a lot of challenges, I have encountered specially the subject scheduled because, my 2nd year subject is same time with my major subject in 3rd year, in short confusing.)*
	IS2: Isip usa ka irregular student ang akong mga hagit sa academic kay to cope up all behind nga subject ug dugang nga financial support kay kinahanglan nako nga bayran ang tanan nga petition subject. *(As an irregular student my academic challenge is to cope with all the behind subjects. And also, additional financial*

	support because I need to pay for all the petition subjects.)
	IS3: Ang nag unang mga hagit sa akademiko nga akong gi atubang karon isip usa ka Irregular nga estudyante is kanang feeling nga dili ka fit in old old curriculum imong batch tapos, niabot ang new curriculum. Dayon needs mi mag petition sa uban nga mga subject para lang maka apas sa new curriculum. *(The main challenge I am facing now as an irregular student is that feeling does not fit in old curriculum is your batch then, we need to petition other subjects just to catch up with the new curriculum.)*
	IS5: As an irregular student isa jud sa pinaka challenge is ang pag adjust sa subject schedule naku labi nag sa isa ka adlaw isa ra imung klase unya absent pajud si ma'am. *(As an irregular student, one of the biggest challenges is adjusting my subject schedule, especially when I only have one class in a day and the teacher is absent.)*

Irregular students have very different experiences compared to regular students, especially when it comes to schedules. Regular students usually follow a fixed and organized timetable. In contrast, irregular students often deal with scattered schedules, attend classes in different rooms, and meet new classmates in every subject. These challenges have meant that irregular students must adjust a lot, which can cause stress and require extra patience (Ricenko, 2016). On top of that, irregular students must adapt to new classroom environments, which often lead to peer pressure and feelings of isolation (Golamco, 2020).

In addition to these challenges, research has shown that irregular students often struggle with time management and balancing their academic responsibilities with personal commitments. According to a study by Garcia et al. (2021), irregular students frequently report higher stress level due to their need to juggle multiple priorities, leading to difficulties in maintaining a consistent academic performance. Furthermore, irregular students have experienced a sense of "out-of-placeness" due to their irregular attendance patterns and the difficulty in forming lasting connections with peers, as highlighted by Santos and Balanon (2018). This lack of stability in their academic and social lives negatively impacts their overall college experience and mental well-being, as observed by Lim and Tan (2019), who noted that students with fragmented schedules often experience feelings of alienation and a decreased sense of belonging.

Adjustment to other Students

In Frame 2, the informants 1, 2, 4 and 5 said that the social challenges that they have encountered due to their irregular status include adjusting with the different attitude of their different classmates in every subject. Social challenges refer to difficulties in interacting and building relationships in various social contexts.

Frame 2. *Challenge in Adjustment to other Students.*

THEME	RESPONSES
Adjustment to other Students	*IS1*: Irregular student is not easy; you need to deal with different attitudes and different students.
	IS2: Tungod sa akong irregular status akong social challenges mao ang pag connect sa mga regular student's kay dili sayon ang pag communicate nila kay ako ra ang irregular student sa ilang section. *(Due to my irregular status, my social challenges are to connect regular students because it's not easy to communicate as I'm the only one irregular student at their section.)*
	IS4: Adjusting to different groups ilabi na sa pag group works. I had an experience nga we had a group activity but dili nako sila kaila so I had a bad hard time on socializing with my fellow students. *(Adjusting to different groups especially in group work. I had an experience where we had a group activity, but I don't know them, so I had a bad hard time socializing with my fellow students.)*
	IS5: Wala kay permanent circle of friends, lisod kaayu mamansin tapos basin di sila ganahan sakua maulaw ko. *(I don't have a permanent circle of friends, so it's very hard for me to socialize. I'm worried they might not like me, and I feel embarrassed.)*

These challenges often arise from differences in background, communication styles, or group dynamics and can lead to feelings of isolation, stress, or discomfort (Coiro et al., 2017). People use the psychological process of adjustment process to cope with or handle the pressures and issues of daily life (Misigo, 2015). It is centered on how a person adjusts to their surroundings and daily needs and has the connotation of conformity. A person's social attitude directly showed how they perceived social issues. Collective attitudes refer to individual attitudes significantly influenced by group interactions to the point that they become incredibly stable and typical within the group. The ability to adjust to changes in one's physical, professional, and social environment is known as adjustment (Pramanik et al., 2014). To put it differently, adjustment is a behavioral process used to control demands or expectations that are not in line with the surrounding circumstances. The attitude initially manifests as a trial reaction, which is a halted replacement behavior that emerges inside a mediocre adjustment response. Still, it has the capacity to develop into the organism's long-term set. Treating society and its members with consideration fosters a more comfortable and harmonious social existence due to the positive responses received from others.

Psychological adjustment helped the body handle its internal and external needs, tensions, and desires as well as external expectations and demands. According to the results of research, there are social beings that can adapt to their environment and participate in society. A survey found no discrepancies in secondary school pupils' places of residence, but there are notable gender gaps among them. Given that these gender differences are proven to be quite substantial in all spheres of adjustment, including family, peer, and societal adjustment, there seems to be a pressing need for reform. Creating plans to encourage secondary school kids' enhanced coping mechanisms must be a top priority for academics, governments, families, and all other interested parties (Pramanik, et al. 2014). Roque (2018) highlighted numerous reasons, and it is essential to understand that not all irregular students have poor or low academic averages. Various factors contribute to a student becoming irregular, such as personal circumstances, financial issues, or schedule conflicts. Being an irregular student often means interacting with classmates of different ages and academic levels, which can present unique challenges.

Similarly, García et al. (2021) discussed how irregular students faced barriers to integrating into peer groups, as their inconsistent schedules hindered opportunities for social bonding. They emphasized that these challenges could result in social isolation, which negatively impacting academic performance and mental well-being. Furthermore, Golamco (2020) further explored the role of peer relationships, noting that irregular students often feel pressure to conform to new classroom dynamics while navigating unfamiliar social environments. These pressures, combined with academic challenges, demand greater emotional resilience and adjustment skills. Roque (2016) also stressed that irregularity in academic schedules stems from various factors, such as financial struggles, personal circumstances, or institutional policies, all of which exacerbate the social challenges faced by these students.

Being Out of Place

Frame 3, all informants felt being "out of place" or did not belong to the group. This shared experience of social disconnection revealed the psychological and social challenges faced by students in unfamiliar or unwelcoming environments. Evangelista et al. (2020) highlighted that one of the primary concerns for irregular students is "grouping," which involves integration and collaboration with regular students.

Frame 3. Challenge of Being Out of Place

THEME	RESPONSES
Being out of Place	*IS1*: Sometimes, I feel out of place especially in my lower level but it's okay that's normal.
	IS2: Sa una kadaghanan sa ila kay close kay pariha ra sila og section pero I need to do something for me to connect their level. *(At first because, most of them close already since they are the same section but, I need to do something for me to connect their level.)*
	IS3: Oo, gibati nako ang out of place sa sulod sa klase kay tungod ang akong pagka irregular naa koy classmate nga first year, second year

	og third year. *(Yes, I feel out of place inside the classes because, being irregular, I have classmates who is first year, second year and third year.)* **IS4**: Sometimes, since they have group of friends then bag.o ka sa ilang klase, usahay maka feel jud ko nga ma out of place ko. *(Sometimes, since they have group of friends then you're new to their class, sometimes I feel like I'm out of place.)* **IS5**: Yes, halos tanan subject jud labi na kay lahi-lahi akong mga classmates lisod kaayu makig reach out sa ilaha. *(Yes, almost every subject, especially now that I have different classmates it's not easy to reach out with them.)*

This interaction is often perceived as a challenge because it can impact both their academic performance and the quality of their work. Irregular students may feel out of place or inferior when working with regular students, which affected their confidence and willingness to participate fully. The social dynamics within these group settings significantly influenced their academic experiences, potentially leading to either positive or negative outcomes depending on the nature of their interactions and the support they received from their peers (Orwell, 2016).

For some students, it is hard to approach those new faces in class, but irregular students do not have a choice but to interact with different students in class. Being out of place is also one of the challenges an irregular student faces. The irregular students struggled everyday in dealing with people when attending their class. Additionally, García et al. (2018) noted that irregular students often perceive themselves as outsiders, especially in collaborative tasks where familiarity and rapport are essential for effective teamwork. These challenges are exacerbated when irregular students encountered subtle forms of exclusion or judgment from their peers, which lead to feelings of alienation and decreased motivation.

Dealing Anxiety and Depression

In Frame 4, informant 1,2, 3 and 5 mentioned that they experienced anxiety and depression because they are part of life as a student. Anxiety and

depression may lead to difficulties in emotional expression and communication, causing individuals to exhibit detachment, indifference, emotional distance in their social interactions. Increased levels of anxiety and depression have also been linked to lower GPAs among college students (BlackDeer et al., 2023).

Frame 4. Challenge on Dealing Anxiety and Depression

THEME	RESPONSES
Dealing Anxiety and Depression	**IS1**: Anxiety yes, maybe because it's part of life as a student. **IS2**: As an irregular student anxiety and depression anaa permi pero alang kanako naay usa ka powerful and loving God walay lugar ang negativity. (*As an irregular student anxiety and depression is always there but, for me has a powerful and loving God there is no place to negativity.*) **IS3**: Oo, aduna akong mga kaagi sa kabalaka og depresyon, maka huna huna ko nga mo undang nalang sa akong pag eskwela tungod sa akong problema, isip usa ka mama nga estudyante. *(Yes, I have a history of anxiety and depression, I think that I will stop my schooling because of my problems. As a mother and a student.)* **IS5**: Yes sometimes, I think it's normal to feel that depression since given my situation, but I just let it go and cry.

This suggests that to fully understand the impact of factors such as substance use on academic performance, it is important to account for internalizing symptoms, like anxiety and depression, which confound the relationship. Moreover, Slemp (2022) highlighted that students experiencing anxiety and depression are more likely to face difficulties in maintaining consistent academic performance, as these mental health issues can lead to procrastination, absenteeism, and decreased motivation. This aligns with studies by Kaul (2023), who found that psychological well-being is a critical predictor of academic achievement, and interventions aimed at reducing

stress and enhancing emotional resilience can yield significant benefits.

In addition, Slemp (2022) underscored the importance of creating supportive environments prioritizing mental health awareness. Their findings suggested that incorporating mental health education into educational curricula and providing accessible mental health resources can mitigate the impact of anxiety and depression on students' educational performance. These results indicated the importance of both negative emotions and mindfulness. Other studies also showed that negative emotions, including depression and anxiety, adversely affect academic performance (Asher et al.,2021).

3.2. Coping Mechanism of Irregular Students

Time Management

In frame 5, Informants 1, 2, 4 and 5 said that Time Management is critical to cope with the academic stress and working schedule, Informant 2, said that the "strategies I used to cope with my academic stress is to ask God for peace of mind, eagerness to study". And Informant 4, said that setting a working schedule is the best strategy to cope with academic stress. Irregular students often face a significant academic burden each semester, taking on more courses than their regular counterparts to make up for previously missed classes. This additional workload necessitates the development of strong time management skills to balance their academic responsibilities effectively. Time management becomes an essential tool for these students, enabling them to prioritize tasks and manage their multiple responsibilities efficiently. While this balancing act can be challenging, those who master will likely see considerable benefits in their future endeavours (Naelgas et al., 2025).

The ability to manage time well not only aids in their current academic success but also prepares them for future challenges in both personal and professional realms (Golamco, 2020). Understanding the specific challenges faced by irregular students and the stress they experience is crucial for developing effective support systems and interventions. Addressing academic stress and its various domains is essential to help these students navigate their educational journeys successfully and to improve their overall well-

being (Agbay, 2015). These students, as identified by Ganesan (2018), typically experienced heightened levels of academic stress compared to their peers on conventional paths. This stress stems from various sources, including financial constraints, the juggling act of balancing work and study commitments, and the complexities involved in navigating non-linear academic trajectories (Reddy, 2018).

Frame 5. Time Management as a Coping Mechanism

THEME	RESPONSES
Time Management	**IS1**: As a student, I mean irregular student, it is important to have time management to cope with academic stress. **IS2:** Akong gibalanse ang akong mga responsibilidad sa akademiko mao ang weekdays ug sa weekend days para kini sa akong pamilya. Apan dili sayon ang pagbuhat ani kon walay tabang sa Dios. Ang Dios ra ang nagtubag nganong na balanse nako tanan uban usab sa cooperasyon of my beloved wife nga nag suporta kanako gikan sa sinugdanan hangtod karon. *(I balance my academic responsibilities on the weekdays and on weekends to my family. But it's not easy to that without help with God. Only God answer why I balance everything. Also, with the cooperation of my beloved wife who supports me from the start until now.)* **IS4**: I set schedules to study and make my requirements though I have a busy schedule as a working student. By doing it I can set aside some extra work for me to study and do my requirements. **IS5**: Time management, this is my secret.

However, it is important to note that time management alone does not always mitigate the stress experienced by irregular students. Misigo's study (2015) highlighted that irregular students often demonstrate resilience by using proactive coping strategies such as problem-solving, seeking social support, and maintaining a positive outlook. These strategies helped them navigate the unique challenges of their educational journeys and maintain academic progress despite stressors. The effectiveness of these coping strategies can be significantly influenced by the institutional support available to irregular students. Coiro et al. (2017) highlighted the detrimental impact of inadequate support systems on the stress levels and overall well-being of irregular students.

Being Optimistic and Motivated

In Frame 6, Informants 1, 2, 3 and 4 mentioned that to maintain motivation and positive attitude is to seek God first before anything else, Informant 1, said that despite the obstacle they faced, they always remain positive as long as the Provider still provide. The motivation in every irregular student has been necessary at several years. Motivation influences the involvement of the students in learning activities. Students' motivation is considered important in the teaching and learning process that penetrates in all levels. These students gave effort on their studies as well as on their academic performance to accomplish their plans in life. Student motivation affects the learning, performance, and the learning environment. (Blackburn, 2012).

Additionally, optimism has been linked to better academic performance and well-being. According to studies on the role of optimism in student success, maintaining an optimistic outlook can help students manage stress, improve resilience, and increase their chances of overcoming challenges (Carver, 2023). Students with positive self-concept are more likely to persevere in the face of adversity, maintain a positive view of their abilities, and remain engaged in their studies (Uy & Azuelo, 2022; Uy et al., 2024). A study by Seligman (2021) found that optimism enhanced psychological and academic resilience, enabled students to bounce back from setbacks and remained committed to their educational goals. Similarly, Peterson & Park (2020) underscored that optimism faster greater satisfaction and a proactive approach to problem-solving, which are

essential traits for navigating the complexities of academic life.

Frame 6. Being Optimistic and Motivated a Coping Mechanism

THEME	RESPONSES
Being Optimistic and Motivated	**IS1**: Despite the obstacle that I have face I remain positive as long as my provider still provides my needs. I need to be positive. **IS2**: To seek God first anything else ug ma eliminate ang negative nga mga pang hunahuna pinaagi sa pagbasa sa bibliya og pag tan aw sa mga positive vibes sa kinabuhi. *(To seek God first anything else and eliminate negative thoughts by reading the bible and watching positive vibes in life.)* **IS3**: Ang kadasig nga akong buhaton ug positibo nga kinaiya bisan daghan babag, akong dawaton permi ang kalisod nga akong nasinati karon, dili ko mo surrender Ginoo na ang bahala nako. *(The motivation and positive attitude that I will do although there are many obstacles, I will accept the difficulty that I am experiencing now. I will not surrender; God will guide me.)* **IS4**: For me, I remind myself of kung unsa ang purpose why I am studying. By knowing my purpose which is to help my parents financially by having stable jobs someday pagmaka graduate nako. This reason is enough for me to maintain my motivation despite challenges. *(For me, I remind myself what the purpose why I am studying. By knowing my purpose which is to help my parents financially by having stable job someday when I graduate. This reason is enough for me to maintain my motivation despite challenges.)*

In a related study, Deci & Ryan (2020) suggested that intrinsic motivation, often tied to purpose and optimism, led to more meaningful and sustained engagement in learning. Their research highlighted that students who find personal significance in their goals and adopt a positive perspective are more likely to persist and succeed academically. Moreover, Williams & Desteno (2018) revealed that maintaining a positive attitude and relying on one's faith or spiritual practices can provide emotional support and a sense of stability, especially in challenging circumstances. Spirituality and optimism together contribute to students' ability to cope with stress and remain focused on their academic and personal goals.

Seeking God's Help

In Frame 7, Informants 1,2,3 and 4 said that every time they have experienced emotional stress, they take their time to pray so that their emotional stress is relieved. Informant 1 said, that in terms of stress and emotion, "I listen to music and take some rest as my stress reliever. Informant 5 said, "By keeping myself busy, in that way I don't have time to think anymore".

Research evidence suggested that students experienced some kind of stress in one way or the other, therefore stress is part of students' existence and can affect how students cope with the demands of the university life (Ramos, 2011; Rutter, 2022). Additionally, Soliman (2014) argued that high levels of stress do not only lead to anxiety and loss of objectivity but could also lead to increased incidence of errors and improper behavior such as cheating in examination, fraud and negligence. This presupposes a high stress level, and it controls effect on students learning outcomes.

Frame 7. Seeking God's Help as Coping Mechanism.

THEME	RESPONSES
Seeking God's Help	**IS1**: In terms of stress and emotion it's basic listening to music and taking some rest is my stress reliever. **IS2**: Handling stress and emotion mao ang critical nga pag manage ug kinahanglan natong itugyan ang tanan ngadto sa Dios sa maong sitwasyon. Tungod kay ang dalan og emosyon are medication, pero para lang maka connect sa Dios kada adlaw pinaagi sa pagbasa sa mga kasulatan sa Bibliya. (*Handling stress and emotions is critical to manage. And we need to surrender everything to God in that situation. Because stress and emotion are medication but only to be connected to God daily by reading the scriptures in the bible.*) **IS3**: Akong gidumala akong stress ug emosyon sa pagsulti sa Ginoo ug pagsimba matag dominggo. (*I manage my stress and emotions by talking to God and worshiping every Sunday.*) **IS4**: I handle stress and emotions by taking time to pray. It is my stress reliever and always think na there's always a reason for everything. Positive lang gyud ang hunahunaon. (*I handle stress and emotions by taking time to pray. It is my stress reliever and always think that there's always a reason for everything. Always think positive.*)

In a study by Jafari et al. (2018), it was found that faith-based coping strategies, such as prayer and religious activities, can reduce stress and improve psychological well-being. Students who have engaged in these spiritual practices reported to have lower levels of anxiety and increased emotional resilience that enable them to manage the demands of their academic and personal lives more effectively. Furthermore, studies have found that religious practices, such as prayer, have positively influenced stress recovery through enhanced feelings of spiritual connection, hope, and purpose (Koenig, 2019). This aligns with the experiences of the informants, who view prayer to find peace and strength amid challenges. Additionally, engaging in religious activities has been linked to lower levels of depression and anxiety (Yonker, 2022).

Perseverance

In Frame 8, perseverance is distinct from motivation and determination, and it includes

elements of both. Success at something requires persistence with the ability to push through when confronted with complications (Dulay, 2023). If people do not persist in facing obstacles, they will remain stuck in their struggles. Perseverance, often regarded as the key to success, is the steadfast and unwavering commitment to achieving one's goals despite challenges and setbacks. It is the ability to persist in the face of adversity, maintaining focus and determination. A trait lauded throughout history as it fuels personal growth, ignites ambition and paves the path to accomplishments (Kaul, 2023).

Frame 8. Perseverance as Coping Mechanism

THEME	RESPONSES
Perseverance	**IS1**: I cope by persevering through positivity. Even when I cry, I make sure not to give up and keep pushing forward. **IS3**: Ang teknik nga akong gigamit aron makalahutay kay ang paglahutay ug padayon bisan lisod. *(The technique I use to survive is perseverance enduring and continuing even when it's hard.)* **IS4**: I use perseverance as a way to cope by treating every challenge as an opportunity for growth and self-discovery, believing that each struggle shapes me into a stronger person. **IS5**: I persevere by accepting that challenges are part of everyone's journey, and by enduring through them, I become more resilient.

Moreover, studies on resilience also supported the importance of perseverance. According to Richardson (2022), resilience—the ability to bounce back from adversity often involves sustained effort, with perseverance being a key component. In addition, research by Rand et al. (2020) suggested that individuals who persist through difficult circumstances are more likely to experience personal growth and achieve long-term goals.

3.3 Effects of Irregular Student Status on Academic Performance

Academic Independence

The responses of informants in Frame 9 underscore the theme of academic independence, highlighting how students cultivate self-directed learning habits to navigate academic challenges. These behaviours such as independent research, personalized study guide creation, structured scheduling, and lesson summarization are emblematic of self-regulated learning (SRL) strategies.

Frame 9. Academic Independence

THEME	RESPONSES
Academic Independence	**IS1**: Tungod sa akong sitwasyon, na-anad ko nga mag-research og magbuhat og study guides para sa akong kaugalingon. *(Because of my situation, I got used to doing research and making study guides for myself.)* **IS3**: Nakat-on ko nga mag-organize og study schedule para mabawi ang mga lapses sa klase. *(I learned to organize a study schedule to compensate for gaps in class.)* **IS4**: Na-develop nako ang habit nga every after class, mag-summarize ko sa lessons para ma-retain nako tanan. *(I developed the habit of summarizing lessons after class so I could retain everything.)*

Recent studies have emphasized the significance of SRL in enhancing academic performance. For instance, Mercado (2022) found that Filipino senior high school students engaged in modular distance learning exhibited SRL behaviors like goal setting, environment structuring, and time management, which correlated positively with their academic performance and self-efficacy in Elesio (2023) revealed a significant relationship between SRL strategies and academic performance among college students. The research highlighted that student who frequently

employed SRL strategies tended to achieve higher academic outcomes.

Furthermore, the integration of technology in learning environments has been shown to influence SRL. Canlasa et al. (2024) explored how technology impacts students' self-determination and SRL in a Philippine island university, noting that while technology can support SRL by providing resources and flexibility, it also presents challenges that require strategic support and policies to ensure effective learning. These findings align with the participants' experiences, illustrating that cognitive independence is not only a response to individual circumstances but also a critical component of effective learning strategies (Uy & Azuelo, 2025; Uy & Tan, 2025). By adopting SRL behaviors, students enhance their ability to manage learning autonomously, leading to improved academic outcomes.

Reduced Peer Academic Support

The responses above in Frame 10 highlights the theme of reduced peer academic support, emphasizing the challenges students face when peer collaboration is limited. Participants express feelings of isolation, difficulties in coordinating with peers due to scheduling conflicts, and the burden of undertaking group tasks alone.

Frame 10. Reduced Academic Support

THEME	RESPONSES
Reduced Academic Support	**IS1**: Kung group work, kasagaran ako ra nagtrabaho kay walay kabalo unsa ko kaimportante sa group. *(In group work, I usually end up working alone because no one really knows my role in the group.)* **IS2**: Dili ko kaapil pirmi sa group reviews kay lain-lain akong schedule sa uban. *(I cannot always join group reviews because my schedule is different from theirs.)* **IS5**: Makamingaw kay walay kauban mag-discuss sa assignments, so self-study ra pirmi. *(It is lonely because I have no one to discuss*

assignments with, so it's always self-study.)

Recent studies underscore the significance of peer support in academic settings. For instance, a study by Drysdale et al. (2022) demonstrated that peer support enhances learners' achievement and well-being. Similarly, Chaudhry et al. (2024) found that students engaged in peer support programs reported improved academic performance and reduced stress levels.

Moreover, the absence of peer support can adversely affect students' academic adjustment. Research by Zhang et al. (2025) indicates that perceived peer support positively predicts academic adjustment among higher vocational college students. The study suggests that peer support facilitates academic hope and professional identity, which are crucial for academic success.

The lack of peer interaction, as expressed by the participants, may lead to decreased motivation and increased feelings of loneliness. This aligns with findings from a study by Liu Yang (2024), which highlighted that peer support significantly influences students' emotional health and engagement. The participants' experiences reflect the broader implications of reduced peer academic support, emphasizing the need for institutions to foster collaborative environments that facilitate peer interaction and support.

4.CONCLUSIONS

The study highlighted that irregular student at the Philippine College Foundation experienced a diverse range of challenges and coping mechanisms throughout their academic journey.

The findings revealed that these students struggle with significant difficulties, including managing overlapping and conflicting subject schedules, integrating into established social groups, and coping with financial instability.

Despite these adversities, irregular students exhibited resilience through various coping strategies. Effective time management is a crucial skill, helping them balance academic and individual responsibilities. Additionally, many students maintain optimism and motivation by drawing on personal goals and external sources of

support. Spiritual practices, including prayer and religious engagement, provide significant emotional relief and a sense of purpose.

Being irregular students had both empowering and challenging effects on their academic performance. On the positive side, their unique circumstances fostered academic independence, encouraging self-reliance, time management, and proactive learning strategies. However, this independence came at a cost limited opportunities for peer collaboration and social learning resulted in reduced academic support, which may have negatively impacted their overall academic performance and sense of belonging.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

Irregular students may use time management strategies to balance academic responsibilities with personal obligations, reducing the risk of feeling overwhelmed. Instructors may provide guidance on course scheduling to ensure that irregular students to avoid conflicts and manage their academic load effectively. Institutions may consider offering flexible scheduling options, such as evening classes or online courses, to accommodate irregular students' diverse needs.

Future researchers may be encouraged to conduct comparative studies that explore the experiences of irregular students across different educational institutions. Research may include perspectives from faculty members and academic advisors to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges these students face and how institutions can better support them.

6. ACKNOWLDGEMENT

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