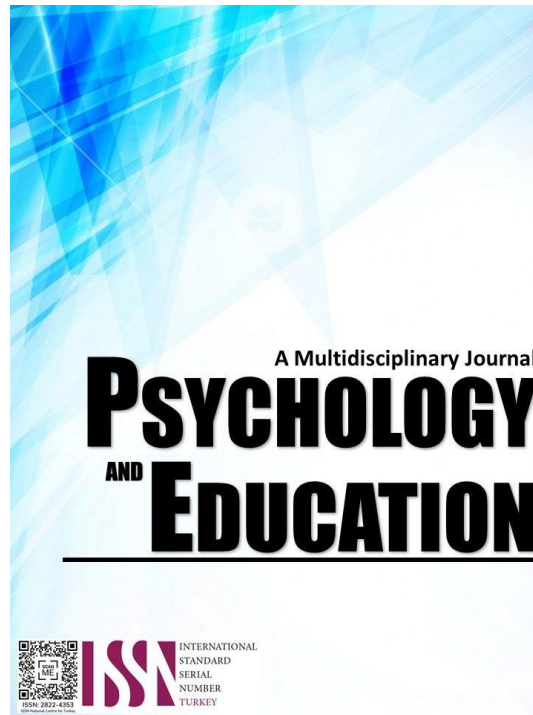


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Correlational Study of Transferee Learners' Engagement and Sense of Belongingness with their Academic Performance

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Abstract

The academic and social transitions of transferee learners are critical determinants of their success in a new school environment. This study aimed to examine the correlation between the transfer experiences of junior high school students and their levels of engagement and sense of belongingness at Valencia National High School. It aimed to know how these aspects are associated with students' academic achievement and social adjustment. There is an increasing number of transferee students in the Philippine educational context, many of whom experience difficulties in academic adjustment, integration, and emotional well-being. It is important to know their experiences in developing school-based interventions that support inclusive education and fair learning opportunities. Using a descriptive-correlational research design, quantitative data were gathered through structured survey questionnaires administered to 313 transferee students from Grades 7 to 10. The study assessed variables such as academic and social engagement, coping mechanisms, acceptance, and sense of belongingness. Findings revealed that while most students reported positive transitions, issues with academic adjustment and social connectivity persist. A significant correlation was found between transfer experiences, engagement, and sense of belongingness, with belongingness being the strongest predictor of student engagement. The influences were teacher support, peer relationships, and institutional programs such as orientation and mentoring. The findings suggest that enhancing school support systems with a focus on relationship development and emotional safety will yield better academic performance and integration for transferee students. The study, therefore, contributes to developing responsive educational practices and policies to sustain student mobility and to foster inclusive learning environments.

Keywords: *transfer students, academic engagement, social engagement, coping mechanism, institutional support, student experiences, and peer relationships*

Introduction

Transferee students, those who move from one educational institution to another, always encounter some challenges that can have a significant impact on their academic and social success. The Philippines' different educational institutions, as well as varying cultural norms and levels of institutional support, complicate these transitions. This study seeks to investigate transfer students' experiences in this specific situation, emphasizing academic engagement, social engagement, coping mechanisms, and a sense of belonging. In the case of the junior high school students, an increasing trend of transfers is evident in Valencia City and other municipalities in Bukidnon. Lloyd Saimbata observes that an ever-increasing number of transferees enrolled at Valencia National High School nowadays indicates an urgent need to investigate how these students adapt to new academic and social environments. While the DepEd is allegedly promoting their inclusion, transfers are considered, as one would still confront integration hurdles stemming from a lack of familiarity with school culture, differing instructional approaches, and the burden of building new relationships with classmates.

The Philippine educational system includes a diverse spectrum of institutions with unique teaching approaches, campus cultures, and support services. Castañeda (2019) found that transferee students have distinct problems transitioning to different educational contexts. The study found that students struggle with academic transition, social integration, and negotiating new institutional expectations.

Additionally, Rivera (2018) discovered that transferee students in the Philippines commonly struggle to maintain academic achievement while attempting to build new social connections. Recent studies by Santos and Dela Cruz (2022) revealed that peer mentoring and inclusive pedagogical strategies mitigated the social exclusion of transferee learners in Mindanao schools. The same results were corroborated by Lopez et al. (2023), who revealed that junior high school transferees who were provided with specific academic support and guidance used to participated in and took part in school activities more than their peers.

The key goals of this study are to measure the level of learners' transfer experience in terms of academic engagement, social engagement, coping mechanisms, and acceptance, to assess their sense of belonging, and to investigate the connections between these variables. This study used surveys to collect data from transferee students, ensuring that the conclusions are statistically strong and credible, which can be used to improve support systems inside local educational institutions. Despite that mobility of students has been studied in general, there has been a lack of contextualized research on transferees at junior high school levels within provincial public schools in the Philippines.

Existing works are predominantly focused on higher education or urban areas, with a gap in understanding how young adolescents adapt to school transitions in rural or semi-urban communities. This research fills that void by not only assessing the students' adjustment but also how their experience relates to engagement and sense of belonging, both of which are significant to their academic persistence and mental well-being.

By addressing such goals, the study hopes to contribute to the enrichment of more effective support systems and policies within the school, thereby increasing the students' academic achievement and well-being. With sufficient and tangible knowledge of the students' experiences, schools can design and create effective interventions to help transfer students work well academically and socially in their institution.

Research Questions

This research investigated how transferring students became engaged and experienced their move to another educational institution. Thus, the focus of this research was to answer the following questions:

1. What is the transfer experience perceived by transferee learners among Junior High School Students of Valencia National High School?
2. What is the level of learner engagement in terms of:
 - 2.1. academic experience;
 - 2.2. social engagement;
 - 2.3. coping mechanism; and
 - 2.4. acceptance?
3. What is the level of a learner's sense of belongingness?
4. Is there a significant relationship between transfer experience, engagement, and sense of belongingness and the learners' level of engagement?

Literature Review

Transfer Experience

The research on transfer experience stressed the dramatic emotional and psychological difficulties. Qualitative research by Castañeda (2019) indicates how transferee students have trouble adjusting to a new academic environment, social participation, and adapting to institutional expectations. Surveys are used to measure anxiety, stress, and satisfaction levels among students, which provide valuable pieces of information on transfer experiences. Results of a study regarding the adjustment of transfer students from community colleges in the USA on their transfer process by Laanan (2007) confirmed that academic preparedness, as well as institutional support, played pertinent roles in smooth transitions.

The Transition theory of Nancy Schlossberg (1981) is a well-grounded framework for understanding how people go through significant changes. Major focus on situation, self, support, and strategies was highlighted as four main points that affect the transition experience in the study. For students transferring to a new college, the "situation" refers to the reasons for transferring and the problems they experienced during the transition. Under "self" are the attributes and resources they possess during the transition: their psychological resilience and previous experiences. On the other hand, "support" is all about the external help available to them, such as their family, friends, and institutional resources. Finally, coping strategies deal with the mechanisms and actions of students for them to adapt to their new learning environment. The importance of Schlossberg's theory for this study rests in understanding various natures and different factors related to transfer experience, which affect the students during their transition.

On student transfer, Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979) gives further insights by making the student experience contingent upon exposure to multiple environmental systems families, community, school, or even work.

That is how local studies strengthen the understanding of transfer experiences. Garcia and Martinez (2021) cited examples such as feelings of isolation, homesickness, and anxiety among Filipino transfer students, which would need institutional assistance through orientation programs and peer mentoring. Dela Rosa and Espiritu (2023) have more recent research about the impact of family involvement and community engagement in helping transferees successfully navigate transitions. These models are best suited for this research as they explain how support systems and environmental changes influence the adaptation process of the students. The variables that were under investigation—academic motivation, coping, and sense of belonging—are influenced by both external support in the new school setting and the internal resources of the student.

Additionally, international comparative studies, like that of Chen et al. (2021), show that transfer students in Asia face unique challenges related to language barriers and cultural adjustment, which institutions can address through targeted support programs.

Academic Engagement

The importance of student engagement in academic activities is well-documented in the literature. Astin's Theory of Involvement (1984) put forward that student engagement significantly influences educational outcomes. A qualitative study assessing student engagement in higher education conducted by Johnson et al. (2019) uses Likert scale surveys to measure the academic participation of the students, interaction with faculty, and involvement in extracurricular activities. The study shows that higher levels of engagement are related to better academic performance and overall satisfaction of the students. Furthermore, Rivera (2018) in the Philippine context investigates the role of extracurricular activities in helping enhance transfer students' academic engagement. The study revealed that students' active participation helps significantly in improving their academic performance and social integration.

Recent studies by Lim et al. (2022) emphasize that digital learning tools and platforms enhance academic engagement, especially for transferees who need flexible learning opportunities. Furthermore, Gonzalez et al. (2023) found that early academic advising and tutoring services for transferee students significantly improve academic retention and GPA. Recent work by Martin and Bolliger (2022) illustrates that students' attitude towards online and blended engagement approaches greatly influences their motivation and persistence, particularly for transferees who require flexible learning environments. Likewise, Bolliger and Martin (2021) concluded that instructor and peer engagement approaches enhanced learning outcomes in distance contexts, which can apply to transferees with interrupted academic trajectories.

Social Engagement

Tinto's Model of Institutional Departure (1993) stresses the need for social integration for students' retention, which, in turn, when integrated, plays an important role in transferee students' integration. Social engagement includes participation in extracurricular activities and making real friends with peers. Tinto (1993) and Astin (1984) show that socially engaged students tend to do well academically and be satisfied with their academic experiences.

A local study by Bautista (2022) highlights that Filipino transfer students who join cultural events and peer groups show greater adaptability and academic success. Zhao et al. (2021), on the international circuit, found that social support networks relieve stress and enhance well-being among transferee students.

More so, Harper and Quaye (2015) urge institutions to provide diversity programs that foster social inclusion, especially for minority and transfer students. Thomas (2022) emphasizes that intentional social inclusion activities and community engagement programs significantly enhance retention and sense of community among transfer students. Zhao and Kuh (2021) also demonstrate that learning community engagement positively contributes to engagement and well-being.

Acceptance

Acceptance among members of the school community matters regarding the well-being of transferee students. Research by Baumeister and Leary (1995) regarding the need to belong theory underlines that peer acceptance and faculty acceptance significantly affect mental health and achievement among students. Transferee students who tend to feel accepted are more apt to be involved actively in activities at school and maintain good grades (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

A Philippine study by Santos and Mendoza (2021) discovered that transferee students accepted by peers and faculty members exhibit greater academic achievement and are more inclined to engage in institutional activities. In addition, Smith et al. (2020) emphasize the contribution of inclusive school policies in promoting acceptance among student populations with diverse backgrounds.

Globally, studies conducted by Miller and Brown (2022) posit that acceptance and respect from the school community are principal predictors of persistence among transferee students. Allen et al. (2018) carried out a meta-analysis indicating that school belonging and perceived acceptance have a strong impact on academic motivation and psychological adjustment. This is similar to findings by Li and Wang (2021) which indicated that school belonging is a mediating variable for academic acculturation among migrant students.

Coping Mechanisms

The coping mechanism is an important tool for transfer students to cope with the stress and hurdles they face in adapting to a new school. Stress and coping theory, postulated by Lazarus and Folkman (1984), elaborates on the importance of coping mechanisms through the lenses of problem-focused and emotion-focused coping strategies in the case of the adaptation process into a new context. Moreover, Carver et al. (1989) demonstrated how effective coping strategies could reduce anxiety and improve students' academic performance.

In the local context, Villanueva's (2020) study found that peer support, time management, and religious observance are among the defensive ways shared by Filipino transferee students. Research on the international forefront, like that of Park et al. (2022), suggests that mindfulness and resilience training programs are effective adaptation tools. Similarly, Lee and Kwon (2021) strongly recommended the establishment of such programs in universities. The coping model is also further developed by Park et al. (2020), who have identified successful mechanisms of stress-coping while transitioning in academia through crisis. These conclusions justify further development of resilience and mindfulness training as generic approaches that can be used even outside of pandemic situations.

Sense of Belonging

A feeling of acceptance and belonging is an absolute necessity for students if they are to be successful in their academic studies and overall functioning. The way Strayhorn's Sense of Belonging Theory (2012) is discussed illustrates the weight of students' feeling accepted, valued, and connected with others in their academic communities. Hurtado and Carter (1997) performed qualitative research defining how social and study environments affect students' feelings of belonging.

The study examines students' perceptions of their school social environment and quality of relationships with their peers and faculty, finding that positive feelings of belonging were associated with greater academic engagement and satisfaction. Likewise, Santos (2020) studied how peer support and inclusive practices engender a sense of belonging among transferee students in the Philippines. The study

showed that strong peer relationships and a supportive school culture were the most important key factors that promote a sense of belonging among students. Nguyen et al. (2022) associate belongingness with academic confidence and persistence in international studies.

Therefore, Yoon and Lee (2023) in their additional research mention that mentorship programs and student organizations are factors that greatly promote the sense of belonging in transfer students. Arslan (2021) finds that school belonging predicts adolescent well-being robustly, with loneliness being an adverse mediator. Liu et al. (2023) also showed that peer relations and perceived belongingness directly influence school engagement and adjustment in adolescents in longitudinal models.

The reviewed literature further highlights the various groups of experiences of transferee students with respective pivotal roles of transfer experience, academic engagement, social engagement, acceptance, coping styles, and sense of belonging. Quantitative studies have consistently shown that successful integration into a new school environment calls for more than academic readiness; it also calls for strong social support and opportunities for student engagement. This study aims to investigate the specific experiences of transferee students in the Philippine educational setting, examining how these students cope and navigate their transitions, engage in their new learning environment, and develop a sense of belonging to the school community, to peers, and to teachers with the established theoretical and fundamental underpinnings.

Methodology

Research Design

A descriptive correlational research design was applied to the study on transfer experience, engagement, and sense of belonging among the transferee students. The design facilitates quality collection and numerically quantified data to various visual interpretations of various factors influencing transferee students.

Participants of this study are transferee students enrolled in Valencia National High School in the academic year 2024-2025 under the Basic Education Curriculum (BEC). This demographically diverse gathering of students will provide a wider perspective on the peculiar experiences and coping strategies used during transition.

Respondents

The respondents of this research are transfer students from Grades 7-10 studying at Valencia National High School for the year 2024-2025. They are transfer students from other schools and are now in different stages of adapting to their new study environment. Focusing on these respondents will permit a deeper understanding of what they experienced, what challenges, and how they coped with adjustment.

The study employs a stratified purposive sampling method, a non-probability sampling technique. This method is selected because it allows the researcher to choose respondents most relevant to the study's objectives and who can provide rich, detailed information about their experiences as transferee students.

To have a sample large and representative enough, Slovin's formula was applied to find the respondents for each grade level. This brings together methods such that the sample is not just significant but statistically significant as well. Stratification divides the population into strata (grade levels) before purposive sampling within the strata of respondents who meet the inclusion criteria.

Instrument

To collect a comprehensive picture of the experience and engagement of transferee students, the survey questionnaire was used in this study. The design of such instruments is largely based on the current literature and existing methodologies.

The survey questionnaire aims to gather quantitative data on various aspects of transferee students' experience, such as their emotional response, challenges faced, coping strategies, academic engagement, social engagement, and sense of belonging. The survey was borrowed from Smith and Jones' (2020) study of community college students' transfer experience to ensure that the most important aspects of the transfer process are thoroughly addressed. Furthermore, questions related to academic and social engagement were constructed by Johnson et al.'s (2019) studies, which revolve around the students' engagement at the higher education level.

Procedure

Data were collected through a standardized survey questionnaire that was designed to provide quantitative data on the experiences of transfer students. The survey contained questions targeting their transfer experience, academic involvement, social involvement, coping mechanisms, and acceptance. It will also have items targeting their sense of belongingness as transferee students.

Ethical Considerations

The research was conducted following ethical standards for research on students. Informed consent was sought from all the respondents to ensure that they were aware of the purpose of the study, the procedures to be followed, and their participant rights. Confidentiality and anonymity were upheld throughout the study by giving all the respondents pseudonyms and storing all the data securely.

Results and Discussion

The analysis and interpretation of the data gathered from the survey on the transfer experiences about engagement and sense of belongingness of transferee students in Valencia National High School are presented in this section. Insights and information into the students' academic engagement, social engagement, coping mechanisms, acceptance, and sense of belonging during their transition into their new learning environment will be discussed.

The results pinpoint several factors that influence their overall experience, including the reinforcement they receive from home, peers, and school, and how capable they are of dealing with scholastic and social challenges. In the process of this research, we will have an appreciation of the complexity of the student's transition, know where they excel, and find areas on how to improve their integration and success in VNHS.

Table 1 shows the extent of learners' transfer experience among Junior High School (JHS) students at Valencia National High School (VNHS). Indicators in the table are ranked on a weighted mean and depict varied measures of the student's transition experience. For every measure, a descriptive rating was given.

The top three and bottom three transfer student experience indicators are indicated in this table. The results show the highest mean score of 3.76 for "I had support from family and friends during my transition," which indicates the importance of social support in assisting students to adjust to a different academic environment.

Table 1. Level of learners' transfer experience as perceived among JHS VNHS students.

Indicators	Mean	Descriptive Rating
1. I had support from family and friends during my transition.	3.76	Agree
2. I successfully adapted to the new norms and practices of my new school.	3.73	Agree
3. The orientation program helped me adjust to the new school.	3.69	Agree
4. I faced challenges related to differences in curriculum or academic standards.	3.56	Agree
5. Adjusting to the new school environment was challenging for me.	3.50	Agree
6. I received adequate academic support during my transition period.	3.40	Moderately Agree
7. I quickly felt at home in the new school.	3.27	Moderately Agree
8. I felt overwhelmed by the new social environment.	3.26	Moderately Agree
9. I found it difficult to adapt to the new academic environment.	3.17	Moderately Agree
10. I felt anxious about transferring to a new school.	3.09	Moderately Agree
Total Mean	3.45	Moderately Agree

Legend: 5 (4.50–5.00) – Strongly Agree; 4 (3.50–4.49) – Agree; 3 (2.50–3.49) – Moderately Agree; 2 (1.50–2.49) – Disagree; 1 (1.00–1.49) – Strongly Disagree.

On the other hand, the lowest mean of 3.09 for "I felt anxious about transferring to a new school" shows that although learners get anxious, their overall transition is relatively smooth.

The conclusion drawn from the findings is that social support sufficiently reduces the challenges of transferees. Family and friends encourage these students; hence, they find it easier to adjust and face fewer challenges in the new school environment. Conversely, despite being the least mean among variables, anxiety still highlights the fact that moving to a new school may be a stressful experience for some learners.

These findings indicate that schools must establish support systems that involve families and promote positive peer relationships. Bridging programs, orientations, and counseling can alleviate psychological distress and make transferee learners' transitions more successful. Making students feel supported at the onset of the transition period is an essential part of their future academic success, and addressing the emotional well-being of students when making transitions.

The study is consistent with Castañeda (2019), who stated that transfer students have difficulty in adjusting but highly benefit when they have external support. A transition in an individual's life, according to Schlossberg's Transition Theory (1981), heavily depends on support systems. Moreover, Garcia and Martinez (2021) noted that institutional interventions such as orientations reduce feelings of isolation and anxiety among students.

Table 2. Level of learners' engagement in academic experience

Indicators	Mean	Qualitative Description
1. How often do you participate in class discussions?	3.75	High
2. How often do you complete your assignments on time?	3.73	High
3. How engaged do you feel during class activities?	3.56	High
4. How often do you feel motivated to achieve high academic standards?	3.53	High
5. How frequently do you seek help from teachers when you don't understand something?	3.51	High
6. How often do you study with classmates?	3.51	High
7. How often do you attend academic support sessions or tutoring?	3.00	Moderate
Total Mean	3.43	Moderate

Legend: 5 (4.50–5.00) – Very High; 4 (3.50–4.49) – High; 3 (2.50–3.49) – Moderate; 2 (1.50–2.49) – Low; 1 (1.00–1.49) – Very Low.

Table 2 presents the level of learners' engagement in academic experience at Valencia National High School (VNHS). The indicators in the table are graded using a weighted mean and represent different aspects of students' learning engagement.

The measure of learner engagement in academic activities is shown in this table. The high mean score of 3.75 for the item "How often do you participate in class discussions?" implies that students are engaging in learning experiences during classes.

Meanwhile, the lower mean score of 3.00 for the item "How often do you attend academic support sessions or tutoring?" suggests that students may not fully utilize additional academic resources. Relatively engaged in class discussions, indicating their eagerness to participate and integrate into the academic setting. On the other hand, a lower mean for academic support sessions may imply underutilization or a lack of sufficient promotion by the school. Low engagement in tutoring services might affect students who need extra help in learning.

This means that transferee students are ready to learn but perhaps do not have an understanding of or confidence in utilizing academic support services. Schools need to promote tutoring and enrichment activities actively, and educators need to encourage transferee students to use these programs actively. The increase in access to academic help can improve learners' academic performance and performance in general.

Astin's Theory of Involvement (1984) maintains that increased participation results in greater educational achievement. Johnson et al. (2019) confirmed that students with greater class participation perform better. Rivera (2018) was keen to focus on the position of joining extracurricular activities in increasing engagement, especially in the case of transfer students.

The measurement of social engagement among learners, through different indicators such as participation in group projects, school events, and extracurricular activities, can be seen in Table 3. The data has been processed for mean scores that are subsequently described in terms of the frequency of engagement.

Table 3. The level of learners in terms of social engagement

<i>Indicators</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Qualitative Description</i>
How often do you take part in group projects or study groups?	3.83	High
How frequently do you participate in school events?	3.66	High
I find it easy to make friends in this new environment.	3.59	High
I enjoy spending time with my peers outside of class.	3.31	Moderate
How often do you attend extracurricular activities?	3.29	Moderate
I actively participate in clubs or organizations at school.	3.17	Moderate
Total Mean	3.47	Moderate

Legend: 5 (4.50–5.00) – Very High; 4 (3.50–4.49) – High; 3 (2.50–3.49) – Moderate; 2 (1.50–2.49) – Low; 1 (1.00–1.49) – Very Low.

The data shows the highest mean score of 3.83 for "How often do you take part in group projects or study groups?" reflects strong collaborative efforts among students. The lowest mean score of 3.17 for "I actively participate in clubs or organizations at school" suggests a need for greater encouragement in extracurricular involvement.

In general, the data reflects a highly positive group effort with the highest mean score of 3.83 for "How often do you take part in group projects or study groups?" while the lowest mean score is 3.17 for "I actively participate in clubs or organizations at school," indicating a need to encourage extracurricular involvement.

The high mean score indicates that the transfer students engage well with their peers in an academic setting for group work and study groups. Low mean scores regarding participation in school organizations imply that while these students may engage in academic collaboration, they do not feel wholly immersed in the school culture.

This result suggests that schools must design accessible, low-threshold club participation and extracurricular activities suited to new students. Administrators and teachers can host transferee-sensitive events or pair up new students with peer buddies to make them feel welcome. Greater social interaction fosters emotional well-being directly and enhances academic motivation indirectly. The schools might need to develop strategies to increase participation in clubs and other extracurricular activities that promote a sense of social belonging.

The Tinto model of institutional departure (1993) put social integration as the key criterion considered in retaining students. Bautista (2022) further added that social involvement aided Filipino transfer students in their adjustment and success. Zhao et al. (2021) assert that a good social support system weakens the stresses faced by students, which are vital components in promoting student well-being.

The learners' engagement has been categorized into the different coping mechanisms of stress management and adjustment to the school environment. The indicators used for the evaluation are seeking help from the school, communicating with the family, doing self-care, and referring to school resources. These are discussed in Table 4.

Coping Mechanisms of the Learners. The highest mean score of 3.51 for "I feel supported by the school during my transition" suggests that institutional support is paramount. The next lowest mean score of 2.96 for "I seek help from peers when I face challenges" seems to indicate that students may not be fully engaging with available peer support networks.

Table 4. *Level of Learners' Engagement in terms of Coping Mechanism*

Indicators	Mean	Qualitative Description
1. I feel supported by the school during my transition	3.51	Very High
2. I talk to my family about my school experiences.	3.37	Moderate
3. I engage in self-care activities to manage stress.	3.29	Moderate
4. I utilize school resources (like counseling) to help me adjust.	3.04	Moderate
5. I seek help from peers when I face challenges.	2.96	Moderate
Total Mean	3.23	Moderate

Legend: 5 (4.50–5.00) – Very High; 4 (3.50–4.49) – High; 3 (2.50–3.49) – Moderate; 2 (1.50–2.49) – Low; 1 (1.00–1.49) – Very Low.

Support from the institution emerges as a key factor enabling students to cope with transitions. Not seeking help from peers may suggest issues related to trustworthiness, confidence, or insufficiently developed social ties. This would mean that schools must strengthen mechanisms of peer-to-peer support and place their counseling readily in plain view and within reach. Initiatives such as group counseling, stress management workshops, or peer-initiated sharing circles can endow students with active coping strategies that diffuse academic and emotional tensions. Such programs develop resilience and flexibility in transferee students as well. The school must initiate peer mentoring programs to encourage greater levels of peer support among students who have recently transferred.

Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) theory asserts that adjustment to new situations largely depends on problem-focused versus emotion-focused coping strategies. In her study, Villanueva (2020) noted that Filipino transferee students have tapped family support, peer support, and the practice of their religion as strategies for adjusting. Mindfulness training was also positively emphasized as aiding the students' resilience by Park et al. (2022).

Table 5 presents the level of learners' engagement in terms of acceptance, focusing on how students perceive respect, comfort, and fairness within the school community.

Table 5. *Level of Learners' Engagement in terms of Acceptance*

Indicators	Mean	Qualitative Description
1. I feel respected by the school community.	3.87	High
2. I am comfortable being myself at this school.	3.74	High
3. My opinions are valued by my peers and teachers.	3.61	High
4. I feel accepted by the faculty and students here.	3.53	High
5. I believe that I am treated fairly by everyone	3.43	Moderate
Total Mean	3.64	High

Legend: 5 (4.50–5.00) – Very High; 4 (3.50–4.49) – High; 3 (2.50–3.49) – Moderate; 2 (1.50–2.49) – Low; 1 (1.00–1.49) – Very Low.

This indicates that students feel welcomed at an average high score of 3.87 in being accepted as learners in their new schools: "I feel respected by the school community." On the other hand, the mean of 3.43 on "I think everyone treats me fairly" would convey an area to be improved: the perception of fairness. These results suggest that transferee students have generally felt respected, yet the concerns around fairness imply a possibility for some students to be subjected to slight forms of exclusion or bias. This implies that it should be an intentional aspect of the school climate to develop a culture of equity and inclusiveness.

Teachers and school leaders should ensure that classroom discipline and student-to-student interaction are imbued with respect for equity and diversity. Welcomed students will engage more, raise questions, and work academically better. The schools should consider looking into whether their policies and the relationships between students and teachers ensure all learners are treated equitably.

The Need to Belong Theory by Baumeister and Leary (1995) emphasized the significance of peer and faculty acceptance in students' academic and social well-being. Transfer students accepted in Santos and Mendoza (2021) achieve higher academic performance. Smith et al. (2020) stressed that inclusive school policies are vital to promoting acceptance.

Table 6 reveals the degrees of learners' sense of belongingness in school as measured by their social relations and inclusiveness. The indicators will cover how friends see students as having friends, participating in activities, and seeking help from others.

With the highest mean score of 3.76 for the statement "I have made close friends since transferring," it could be said that apparent social integration is perceived by the students. The lowest mean score of 3.30 for the statement "I find it easy to talk to my classmates about personal issues" implies that those students feel socially accepted; however, deeper social links may need to be developed.

Table 6. *Level of Learners' Sense of Belongingness*

Indicators	Mean	Qualitative Description
1. I have made close friends since transferring.	3.76	High
2. I feel that I am a part of the school community.	3.72	High
3. I feel included in school activities.	3.68	High
4. I am comfortable seeking help from classmates.	3.46	Moderate
5. I feel connected to my peers in this school.	3.44	Moderate
6. I find it easy to talk to my classmates about personal issues.	3.30	Moderate
Total Mean	3.55	High

Legend: 5 (4.50–5.00) – Very High; 4 (3.50–4.49) – High; 3 (2.50–3.49) – Moderate; 2 (1.50–2.49) – Low; 1 (1.00–1.49) – Very Low.

The findings suggest that while students seem to form friendships, their emotional openness and their bonding in social relations on a deeper level may still be developing. This emphasizes how importance should be given to forming close relationships and not mere casual friendships.

Schools may initiate mentorship programs, weekly contacts, and peer clusters on an interest basis to enable transferee students to form long-lasting relationships. A stable sense of belonging has consistently been linked to higher academic persistence and decreased dropouts. Schools may wish to initiate peer-bonding programs to help strengthen interpersonal relationships.

Strayhorn's (2012) Sense of Belonging Theory proposed that students are more academically successful when they feel valued and connected. Hurtado and Carter (1997) discovered that engaging in social environments leads to higher engagement. Santos (2020) emphasized peer support in building a sense of belonging.

Table 7 presents the correlation analysis between learners' transfer experience, engagement, and sense of belongingness. The correlation coefficients indicate the strength and direction of the relationship between these variables.

Table 7. *Correlation analysis of learners' transfer experience, engagement, and sense of belongingness*

Indicators	Correlation Coefficient	Probability
Engagement	0.405	0.000*
Academic Engagement	0.337	0.000*
Social Engagement	0.322	0.000*
Acceptance	0.313	0.000*
Coping Mechanism	0.320	0.000*
Sense of Belongingness	0.477	0.000*

* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The correlation between transfer experiences, student engagement, and sense of belonging, the sense of belonging experienced the highest correlation with transfer experience ($r = 0.477$, $p = 0.000$), which suggests that the more undisturbed transfer experience the students have, the higher their sense of connection to the new school setting.

The positive correlation posted above suggests that a well-supported transition process is very crucial to students' sense of belonging and engagement. These findings affirm that the interventions to enhance belongingness, coping ability, and involvement will have a direct impact on academic achievements. Administrators must apply these findings to develop strategic, data-driven policies that focus on the adjustment and integration of transferee students.

Thus Gonzalez et al. (2023), in their works, stated that early academic support increases retention rates whereas Lee and Kwon (2021) supported the notion that formal peer counseling helps enhance engagement and belonging; whereas, Yoon and Lee (2023) found that structured mentorship programs were instrumental in helping improve transfer students' sense of belonging.

The results of this research have direct educational implications. Firstly, the fact that sense of belongingness correlates significantly with student engagement means that schools will have to emphasize social integration equal to that of academic support. Peer mentoring programs, homeroom advisory check-ins, and classrooms that practice inclusive classroom practices can all instill a greater sense of community.

In addition, teacher training in inclusive and trauma-informed teaching practices can facilitate teachers to help transfer students more empathetically. Second, the moderate utilization of academic support services indicates a demand for improved promotion and availability of tutoring, remediation, or learning assistance programs. Third, the findings justify the implementation of formalized orientation programs for transferees, which can facilitate academic and social acclimatization and result in enhanced performance.

These implications point to a proactive approach: schools should not wait for transferee students to struggle but should instead embed supportive practices within the school system. In this way, academic institutions can become more responsive and inclusive, particularly in public secondary schools serving diverse learners.

Conclusions

The transfer experience, student engagement, and belonging at VNHS have been examined in the study. Findings show that though there was a generally positive transition, with family and peers aiding in the process, students still faced some challenges with academic adaptation and deeper social integration. Engagement in school activities was significant in developing a strong sense of belonging, with the assumption that positive transitions would enhance the total school experience for students.

These results point toward the importance of schools in facilitating an enabling environment that promotes students' academic and social welfare. Such schools should provide transferee students with chiefly therapeutic programs aimed at academic assistance, peer work, and social inclusion to better aid these students in their adaptation.

Since the current study sheds some light on the situation, it has limitations in that it is confined to a population and based purely on self-reported data. Future investigations might also want to incorporate a larger student population, longer-term transitional effects,

and qualitative methods to help ground matters from the perspective of transferee students.

The bottom line is that for a good transfer experience to promote student engagement and positively impact the student's perceived sense of belonging, effective support mechanisms must be installed by schools to help transfer students feel welcome, valued, and thus academically and socially able to thrive within the new environment.

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