Students' transition experiences in the seventh grades in a laboratory school

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Article Info

ABSTRACT

The transition to high school often induces feelings of discomfort among students, potentially leading to stress and challenges, especially given their diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. If left unaddressed, these difficulties may contribute to disengagement, classroom challenges, and, in some cases, academic setbacks or dropping out. This study examines the transition experiences of grade seven students (n=144; 81 females and 63 males) enrolled in a laboratory school in Leyte. It focuses on their perceived appreciation of their former schools, the importance of acquired competencies, and the difficulties encountered during the transition. Findings indicate that respondents generally highly appreciate their former schools and recognize the value of the competencies they developed while reporting moderate difficulty levels in the transition. Students from public schools, in particular, showed a strong appreciation for their previous school environment and competencies. Additionally, students with higher grades expressed a greater appreciation for their former school and reported lower levels of difficulty in adjusting. The results suggest that enhancing school engagement and fostering a sense of belonging could ease the transition process, helping students better adapt to their new environment.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Transition experiences are an essential aspect of students' educational journeys, often involving developmental changes (e.g., physical, intellectual, emotional, and cultural) as well as systemic challenges (e.g., organizational and social discontinuities) [1]. Despite the importance of smooth transitions, this area is frequently overlooked in educational research and practice [2], [3]. Students' transitions can produce positive and negative impacts, particularly in their socio-emotional development. Many students face setbacks, anxieties, or adjustment issues, while others view transition as a healthy, necessary shift in their development [2]–[4].

For most students, however, the transition to a new educational stage brings specific challenges. Changes in curriculum and pedagogy, for instance, can be incredibly demanding. Students often report difficulty adapting to more individualized, less experiential learning environments, a shift particularly challenging in subjects like mathematics, where factors like peer relationships and personal traits can affect academic performance [5], [6]. Researchers have identified several factors that can further impact students' transition experiences, including gender, prior behavior, academic achievement, and socioeconomic background [7]–[9]. Gender differences are notable; while adolescent girls are generally more vulnerable to

environmental and biological changes, older girls have been found to experience fewer difficulties than boys and younger students [1]. Additionally, students with behavioral issues or limited academic preparedness tend to struggle more during transitions. Socioeconomic status also plays a role, as students from lower-income families often lack the support systems that facilitate successful transitions [3].

Introducing the K-12 basic education program [10] in the Philippines has reshaped the transition process. Under this program, students face significant transitions in grade 7 and grade 11, with the latter year marking entry into senior high school. The K-12 curriculum aims to prepare students for higher education and vocational, technical, and entrepreneurial paths, aligning with a rapidly evolving global landscape. However, implementing this program has not been without challenges, as students must select schools that align with their chosen courses or academic tracks, adding new complexities to their transition experiences. Students face additional challenges in specialized educational settings like the Visayas State University Integrated High School (VSUIHS). VSUIHS, which has a long-standing history as an agricultural institution, offers a modified curriculum that includes advanced courses in sciences and mathematics [11], [12]. Despite the broader K-12 curriculum changes, VSUIHS continues to employ a discipline-based curriculum, which can further complicate the transition for incoming students. Research has highlighted the importance of schools' roles in supporting students during these transitions. A school's environment, curriculum, and support structures can significantly influence students' adjustment and success in a new educational setting. Scholars suggest equipping students with the competencies needed for transition is crucial [1]. However, research on high school transitions remains limited, particularly regarding how students perceive their former schools' roles in preparing them for new academic challenges.

This study draws on ecological systems theory [13], [14] and attribution theory [15], [16]. According to ecological systems theory, students' understanding of their educational environment grows as they engage more deeply with the surrounding systems, including relationships with teachers, peers, and family members, which can positively impact their transition experience [13]. Attribution theory suggests that students often attribute positive academic outcomes to internal factors, like their own abilities, which can support a smoother adjustment during transitions [16]. Effective transitions require a nuanced understanding of students' perspectives, encompassing their appreciation of their former school's contributions, the perceived relevance of the competencies they acquired, and the difficulties they encounter in their new setting [1]. Prior educational experiences strongly influence students' ability to adapt to new routines, build relationships with new teachers, and work more independently [2], [17], [18]. Schools may design activities, strategies, and resources to aid the students' effective transition from primary to junior high school.

Given the critical role of this transition period, research into students' perceptions of their prior educational experiences and their impact on adaptation to high school is warranted. This study contributes to the field by addressing the transition to specialized curricula, an area that has received limited attention in existing research. While prior studies have predominantly focused on the transition processes within regular education settings [19], specialized curricula' unique characteristics and demands remain underexplored. By examining this transition, the study generates insights that contribute to a more nuanced understanding of curriculum adaptation and implementation. The findings have significant implications for educational policy and practice, particularly in designing evidence-informed strategies to support learners and educators navigating specialized academic programs. Specifically, this study aims to bridge gaps in the literature by examining grade 7 students' perceptions of their transition experiences. It focuses on their appreciation of their former schools' support, the perceived importance of acquired competencies, and the challenges encountered in their current school setting. Findings from this study may provide valuable insights for developing programs and initiatives to support students during this crucial transition phase.

2. METHOD
2.1. Research design, participants, and environment
This study used descriptive analysis with a survey questionnaire as the tool for data gathering. Descriptive research uses a method of disciplined inquiry to obtain and analyze empirical data to produce knowledge. The respondents were the grade 7 students (n=144; 81 females and 63 males) of the VSUIHS-a laboratory school of the College of Education, Visayas State University. As a school policy, these students were required to pass the entrance examination before they were admitted. Because one of the thrusts of the University is excellence in science and technology, VSUIHS has an advanced curriculum that is inclined to its thrusts.

2.2. Research instrument
The questionnaire was about the student transition survey [1] with good internal consistency (between 0.70-0.90). Before administration, it was tested with a similar group of respondents from a public school. The

questionnaire is organized into four groups: i) general information; ii) appreciation of the work carried out by their schools; iii) perceived importance of the skills, attitudes, and experiences acquired while in the school for the performance in the current situation (academic or professional); and iv) experienced difficulties in the transition from the former school to the current situation. Respondents rated their agreement with statements using a five-point scale, ranging from 'strongly disagree' (1) to 'strongly agree' (5).

2.3. Data gathering procedure

Ethical considerations for human participants were strictly followed [20]. Communication with the school head was secured. Informed consent was obtained from the respondents. Utmost confidentiality was observed. The questionnaires to be self-administered were given to the respondents.

2.4. Statistical treatment of data

Descriptive statistics analysis was used. A t-test was used to determine the differences in terms of previous schools. A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was made to organize relationships between transition experiences. When the ANOVA revealed a significant main effect, Tukey's honestly significant difference (HSD) post hoc tests were performed to identify which specific group means differed significantly.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Demographic profile

The participants were in grade seven in junior high school (male=63, female=81), with age ranges of 10-13, and one student was 10 years old. Table 1 shows that most of the population (76.39%) came from within Baybay City, while the remaining is distributed from the nearby locality. Completers from Visca Foundation Elementary School (VFES) have the highest percentage (15.97%) accepted in junior high school, while 4.17% did not indicate their previous school. The grade point average (GPA) (M=90.71, SD=4.37) ranges from 77 to 97, with 16 (11.10%) students in the lower bracket (75-83) and 71 (49.30%) students in the average bracket, while 57 (39.60%) were above average see in Table 2.'

Table 1. Distribution of respondents according to type of school previously attended

Type of school	Frequency	Percent (%)
Private	64	44
Public	80	56
Total	144	100

Table 2. Distribution of respondents according to GPA

Grade	Frequency	Percent (%)
75-83	16	11.1
84-92	71	49.3
93-100	57	39.6
Total	144	100.0

3.2. Appreciation of the work carried out by the former school

As shown in Table 3, students reported high appreciation (M=4.10, SD=0.89) of their former school. The participants' previous school had helped them prepare for junior high school. High school students have the highest chance of improving their post-school results when transition assistance is provided. In particular, they appreciated the most encouragement to continue despite setbacks and develop a positive attitude towards peers and the school. One plausible explanation is that the laboratory school has a screening process to select potential completers. Another study reported that students anticipate a positive transition experience [21]. On the other hand, students who have inadequate preparation for high school and the organization of high schools tend to drop off from schooling [22].

3.3. The perceived relationship between skills gained in school and current academic success

This section explores students' perceptions of the importance of the skills, attitudes, and experiences they gained in school, particularly in supporting their adjustment to their current academic setting. As shown in Table 3, participants reported high perceived importance of these skills, attitudes, and experiences (M=3.75, SD=0.96). They particularly valued skills such as recognizing when they needed help, effective communication, and organizational abilities for managing and performing various tasks. Research indicates high school transitions can disrupt supportive relationships, potentially impacting students' well-being and academic engagement [23]. However, a supportive school environment that promotes strong social

connections and a sense of belonging can help ease these challenges. Schools that foster such supportive relationships contribute to smoother transitions and protect against low academic outcomes during students' first year of high school [24], [25].

Table 3. Self-reported transition experience of the respondents

Statement	Mean	SD
Appreciation of the work carried out by the former school.	4.10	0.89
I always considered that school cared for me and my success.	4.35	0.75
I was always told that to be fair, to worry about others and to act rightly were important attitudes for life.	4.44	0.66
I was encouraged and learned not to give up when I failed.	4.55	0.78
Students perceived the usefulness of their school-learned skills and attitudes in their current performance.	3.75	0.96
I am organized enough to be able to plan and perform task in deadlines.	3.88	0.85
I know it's important to master the languages I've learned.	3.93	0.65
I understand my limitations and possess the ability to seek appropriate support.	4.15	0.58
Difficulties experienced among respondents.	2.56	1.15
It was difficult for me to solve practical issues of everyday life	2.72	0.76
I wasn't used to the study/workload that is now demanded.	2.87	0.82
I wasn't used to the rigor and demand I now have to put on my study/work.	2.92	0.77

3.4. Difficulties experienced by respondents

Participants reported experiencing moderate difficulties (M=2.56, SD=1.15), with a high standard deviation (±1.15) indicating a range of responses. The transition to high school involves a multifaceted adjustment, i.e., academic, social, and emotional dimensions. Studying in an educational setting with an advanced curriculum must face these transitional changes. It can be inferred that the challenges are likely related to the advanced curriculum, which emphasizes science and mathematics. To overcome these challenges, students need effective strategies. According to Entrich [26], student success is influenced by effort, commitment, and investment in their future, as these qualities help students develop clear goals and a strong sense of purpose. Soland and Kuhfeld [22] also suggest that students must negotiate new social relationships and adapt to the practices and routines of the new school to manage difficulties effectively.

3.5. Exploring the relationships among variables

This section examines the relationships among variables, focusing on differences by type of school, grade level, and academic performance as they relate to students' transition experiences. Table 4 illustrates the differences in appreciation, perceived importance, and difficulty between students from public and private schools. Students from public schools reported significantly higher levels of appreciation (t(142)=2.97, p<0.05) and perceived importance (t(142)=3.54, p<0.05) compared to students from private schools. However, the two groups had no significant difference in perceived difficulty. The differences in appreciation may be attributed to the school environment, as curriculum designers and teachers in public schools may be actively fostering a sense of appreciation among students. Brophy [27] emphasizes that fostering appreciation in education requires valuable teaching content, explaining its relevance, modeling its applications, and scaffolding students' engagement with the content. Building on Brophy's model, Pugh and Phillips [28] suggest that to cultivate appreciation, schools should i) selectively teach content with real-world applications, ii) emphasize the everyday relevance of core content, and iii) scaffold students' learning by providing support tailored to their motivational zone. A study demonstrates that among English as a second language (ESL) students, learner-centered techniques, a supportive classroom atmosphere, excellent teacher-student interaction, and the inclusion of technology and actual resources foster classroom satisfaction and positive learning attitudes [29].

Table 5 reveals significant appreciation, perceived importance, and difficulty differences across grade groups. Specifically, high-achieving students demonstrated the highest levels of appreciation (F(2,143)=13.95, p<0.05), average-achieving students showed moderate appreciation, and low-achieving students reported the lowest levels of appreciation. These findings suggest that appreciation levels can be grouped according to academic performance. In terms of perceived importance (F(2,143)=3.27, p<0.05), only the average-achieving group exhibited a significant difference, suggesting that students with moderate academic performance perceive the importance of school-related skills and attitudes differently than those in the high- or low-achieving groups. For perceived difficulty (F(2,143)=11.74, p<0.05), low-achieving students reported the highest levels of difficulty, followed by average-achieving students, with high-achieving students reporting the least difficulty. These findings indicate that perceived difficulty during transition can be grouped according to academic performance, with low-achieving students experiencing the most difficulty adjusting.

The post hoc results in Table 6 provide further insights into the grade-based differences in appreciation, perceived importance, and difficulty. For appreciation, students in the highest grade group (93-100) had significantly higher appreciation scores than those in the middle (84-92) and lower (75-83)

grade groups. A significant difference was observed in perceived importance between the middle (84-92) and highest (93-100) grade groups. For perceived difficulty, students in the lowest grade group (75-83) reported significantly higher difficulty scores than the middle and highest groups, indicating that students' perceived difficulty during transition decreases as academic performance improves. These findings are supported by research showing that the difficulty students experience transitioning to high school correlates with their risk of dropping out [30], [31]. Poor transition experiences can also adversely affect students' well-being and academic achievement during and after the transition [32], [33].

Table 4. Difference among groups by type of school

Dimension	Type of school	N	Mean	SD	t	p-value
Appreciation	Public	77	4.22	0.43	2.97	0.004
	Private	67	3.96	0.62		
Perceived importance	Public	77	3.90	0.50	3.54	0.001
	Private	67	3.54	0.62		
Difficulty	Public	77	2.59	0.69	0.69	0.491
	Private	67	2.51	0.64		

Table 5. ANOVA when grouped according to grade

Dimension		Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	p-value
Appreciation	Between groups	6.653	2	3.326	13.95	.000
	Within groups	33.630	141	.239		
	Total	40.283	143			
Perceived importance	Between groups	7.466	2	3.733	3.27	.041
	Within groups	160.756	141	1.140		
	Total	168.222	143			
Perceived difficulty	Between groups	9.136	2	4.568	11.74	.000
	Within groups	54.878	141	.389		
	Total	64.014	143			

Table 6. Post hoc test using Tukey's HSD

Dependent variable	(I) grade	(J) grade	Mean difference	Std. error	Sig.	95% confidence interval	
						Lower bound	Upper bound
Appreciation	75-83	84-92	-0.37954*	0.13515	0.016	-0.6997	-0.0594
		93-100	-0.68197*	0.13817	0.000	-1.0093	-0.3547
	84-92	75-83	0.37954*	0.13515	0.016	0.0594	0.6997
		93-100	-0.30243*	0.08685	0.002	-0.5082	-0.0967
	93-100	75-83	0.68197*	0.13817	0.000	0.3547	1.0093
		84-92	0.30243*	0.08685	0.002	0.0967	0.5082
Perceived importance	75-83	84-92	-0.16109	0.29549	0.849	-0.8610	0.5388
		93-100	0.32346	0.30209	0.534	-0.3921	1.0390
	84-92	75-83	0.16109	0.29549	0.849	-0.5388	0.8610
		93-100	0.48456*	0.18989	0.031	0.0347	0.9344
	93-100	75-83	-0.32346	0.30209	0.534	-1.0390	0.3921
		84-92	-0.48456*	0.18989	0.031	-0.9344	-0.0347
Perceived difficulty	75-83	84-92	0.57542*	0.17265	0.003	0.1665	0.9844
		93-100	0.84342*	0.17650	0.000	0.4253	1.2615
	84-92	75-83	-0.57542*	0.17265	0.003	-0.9844	-0.1665
		93-100	0.26800*	0.11095	0.045	0.0052	0.5308
	93-100	75-83	-0.84342*	0.17650	0.000	-1.2615	-0.4253
		84-92	-0.26800*	0.11095	0.045	-0.5308	-0.0052

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

3.6. The role of supportive relationships and transition programs

Research suggests that positive development is associated with supportive relationships with peers and teachers, which may indirectly foster engagement and a sense of school belonging [22], [34]. Students who experience positive changes during transition are more likely to engage in reflective thinking and seek social support [35]. These social and emotional supports are essential for offsetting the transition's disruptive effects [36].

Teachers and schools are encouraged to ensure the effective delivery of student services, including guidance programs and activities that prepare students for transitions, such as K-12 [35]. For example, effective communication among all stakeholders is essential throughout the entire process of a school transition. The research underscores the importance of establishing clear, consistent communication channels before, during, and after the move to ensure a smooth transition and mitigate potential challenges. This includes designating a focal person for addressing issues and implementing strategies (e.g., consultations) to

keep students, parents, and teachers informed about transition challenges [37]. Effective communication between parents and schools is crucial for smooth transitions.

A review of studies shows that student support plays a significant role in reducing dropout rates and enhancing retention [2], [17]. Schools that provide additional support, such as advisory periods, interdisciplinary teaching teams, orientation visits, summer meetings with high school teachers, and buddy programs during the start of the school year, have higher retention rates and lower dropout rates than schools that lack these supports [38]. Some researchers promote varied practices, i.e., developing structured transition programs, promoting academic development, fostering school connectedness, helping students set goals, and intensifying student support to enhance school transition [17], [22], [39].

4. CONCLUSION

This study examines the grade 7 students' perceptions of their transition experiences to a laboratory school. The study revealed that their transition experiences varied according to school type and academic performance. Students from public schools reported higher appreciation and perceived importance of their prior experiences than private school students. Appreciation and perceived difficulty were also influenced by academic performance, with higher-achieving students reporting higher appreciation and lower levels of difficulty than their lower-achieving peers. Many students identified competencies gained from their previous school, such as organizational and communication skills, which they felt supported their successful transition.

Educational institutions, i.e., laboratory high schools, should implement evidence-based transition programs tailored to address the diverse needs of students based on their school type and academic performance. For students from public schools, these programs can capitalize on their heightened appreciation of prior experiences by integrating reflective practices and reinforcing competencies such as communication skills, which were identified as critical to their successful transition. Conversely, private schools may benefit from introducing initiatives that foster more profound reflection on prior experiences and promote the development of essential transition-related skills. Furthermore, interventions should prioritize support for lower-achieving students by providing targeted assistance, such as structured mentoring and skill-building workshops, to mitigate perceived difficulties and enhance their capacity to adapt to new academic environments. Strengthening collaboration between feeder schools and receiving institutions is essential to establishing a cohesive and supportive framework that facilitates a seamless student transition.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS STATEMENT

This journal uses the Contributor Roles Taxonomy (CRediT) to recognize individual author contributions, reduce authorship disputes, and facilitate collaboration.

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C : **C**onceptualization	I : **I**nvestigation	Vi : **Vi**sualization
M : **M**ethodology	R : **R**esources	Su : **Su**pervision
So : **So**ftware	D : **D**ata Curation	P : **P**roject administration
Va : **Va**lidation	O : Writing - **O**riginal Draft	Fu : **Fu**nding acquisition
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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors state no conflict of interest.

INFORMED CONSENT

We have obtained informed consent from all individuals included in this study.

ETHICAL APPROVAL

The research related to human use has been complied with all the relevant national regulations and institutional policies in accordance with the tenets of the Helsinki Declaration and has been approved by the authors' institutional review committee.

DATA AVAILABILITY

The authors confirm that the data supporting the findings of this study are available within the article [and/or its supplementary materials].

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