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SUBJECTIVE SOCIAL STATUS AND ACADEMIC ADJUSTMENT OF FRESHMEN COLLEGE STUDENTS IN A PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION (PHEI)

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ABSTRACT

Students transition to higher education with varying perceptions of their social status, which may be associated with how they experience and respond to academic demands. Examining these perceptions may provide further insight into their academic adjustment. This study therefore investigated the relationship between Subjective Social Status, in terms of socioeconomic status and community social status, and academic adjustment among 124 freshmen college students at the University of Luzon, a Private Higher Education Institution (PHEI) in Dagupan City, Philippines. A quantitative descriptive-correlational research design was employed, with data collected through the MacArthur Scale of Subjective Social Status and the Academic Adjustment Scale. Descriptive statistics and Pearson's product-moment correlation were used to analyze the data. Results indicated moderate levels of perceived socioeconomic status (M = 6.09, SD = 1.45) and community social status (M = 6.12, SD = 1.50). Overall academic adjustment was high (M = 3.50, SD = 0.48), with academic motivation obtaining the highest mean (M = 3.96, SD = 0.82), followed by academic achievement (M = 3.41, SD = 0.67) and academic lifestyle (M = 3.15, SD = 0.56). A significant moderate positive relationship was found between subjective socioeconomic status and academic adjustment (r = .33, p .001), whereas community social status showed no statistically significant association (r = .17, p = .059). This suggests that freshmen who perceive their families to have higher socioeconomic standing relative to the national ladder tend to report better academic adjustment, while immediate community social standing showed no significant association. Findings may inform institutional initiatives including time-management and routine-building workshops, as well as institutional financial advising and peer-mentorship programs.

Keywords: *socioeconomic status, community social status, academic motivation, academic achievement, academic lifestyle, descriptive-correlational, Philippines*

INTRODUCTION

The transition to higher education represents a significant developmental and academic period in students' lives, as freshmen must adapt to new academic expectations, responsibilities, social environments, and institutional demands. Entering higher education requires students to develop new learning routines, manage increased academic workloads, maintain motivation, and evaluate their academic progress. These experiences make academic adjustment an important aspect of students' successful adjustment. College adjustment is generally understood as a multidimensional process encompassing academic, social, personal-emotional, and institutional adjustment (Gravini Donado et al., 2021). Within this broader process, academic adjustment specifically addressing students' ability to manage and respond to the academic demands of higher education.

Academic adjustment encompasses more than students' academic performance or grades. Anderson et al. (2016) conceptualized academic adjustment through three dimensions: academic lifestyle, academic achievement, and academic motivation. These dimensions reflect students' adaptation to higher education routines and academic responsibilities, satisfaction with their academic progress, and motivation toward their studies. Subsequent research has continued to recognize the relevance of these dimensions in understanding students' academic experiences. Siah et al. (2022) found that perfectionism and coping strategies were associated with academic adjustment among undergraduate students, while Nuralieva et al. (2024) identified significant associations between academic adjustment and various psychological and educational factors, including basic psychological needs, classroom participation, and assessment beliefs. Similarly, Jaiswal et al. (2024) examined academic adjustment in relation to students' sense of belonging and perceived stress in distance-learning environments. Collectively, these studies demonstrate that academic adjustment is influenced by various factors that extend beyond academic ability and performance alone.

Among the factors that may be associated with students' academic experiences especially in a Private Higher Education Institution (PHEI) is their socioeconomic status. This position can influence access to educational resources, learning opportunities, financial support, and other conditions that may shape students' participation in college. For freshmen students, these considerations may become particularly noticeable as they begin managing the financial and academic responsibilities of college, including tuition fees, transportation, living allowances, school materials, and other educational expenses. Disparities in financial resources and family circumstances may also become more apparent as students interact with peers who also have varying economic backgrounds and lifestyles. Previous research has established associations between socioeconomic circumstances and several

academic outcomes. Li et al. (2020) found differences between economically disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged students in learning motivation, academic identity, learning approaches, and cognitive and non-cognitive learning outcomes among college students. Similarly, Qiu and Ye (2023) reported a positive relationship between socioeconomic status and learning engagement among college students, identifying parental autonomy support as a mediating factor. King et al. (2024) used data from 595,444 students across 77 countries and found that mastery-approach goals mediated the relationship between socioeconomic status and learning-related outcomes, including academic achievement, perceived competence, and intrinsic motivation. These findings suggest that socioeconomic status may be relevant to students' motivation, engagement, and other processes associated with their academic experiences.

Nevertheless, the relationship between socioeconomic status and academic outcomes may still vary across individuals and educational contexts. Che Sulaiman et al. (2020), for instance, found that most of the students in higher education institution, in their final-year, did not perceive their parents' socioeconomic status as influencing their academic achievement. This suggests that economic circumstances do not necessarily translate uniformly into academic outcomes and that students' personal experiences and perceptions may also be important considerations. Consequently, examining socioeconomic status solely through objective indicators, such as family income, parental educational attainment, or occupation, may not fully capture how students understand and evaluate their socioeconomic circumstances. An additional perspective involves subjective social status, which refers to individuals' perceptions of their social and economic position relative to others. This subjective perspective recognizes that individuals may evaluate their circumstances differently even when they share similar objective socioeconomic characteristics.

Research has increasingly recognized the relevance of subjective socioeconomic status in understanding university students' academic and social experiences. Vázquez et al. (2024), in a study involving students enrolled in a distance-learning university, found a positive relationship between subjective socioeconomic status and academic performance. Similarly, Rahal et al. (2024), examined undergraduate students and identified an association between students' subjective social status within the classroom and their academic performance. Although classroom-based subjective social status differs from subjective socioeconomic status, their findings demonstrate that students' perceptions of social position may be meaningfully associated with academic experiences. Furthermore, Fernández et al. (2025) found a positive relationship between subjective social status and university students' sense of belonging, while Fernández et al. (2023) highlighted how socioeconomic experiences and perceived similarity with peers shaped students'

understanding of belonging in higher education institution. These findings suggest that students' subjective evaluation of their socioeconomic position may provide an additional perspective for understanding their experiences within the university environment.

In the Philippine context, the transition to college may involve various socioeconomic and academic challenges, particularly for students entering a university for the first time. Del Rosario and Guerra (2024), in their study of first-year students in a state university, identified socioeconomic concerns, financial stress, and difficulties adjusting to college as among the challenges experienced by the students. Although their study provides relevant insights into the experiences of Filipino college freshmen, the institutional setting differs from that of the present investigation. A State University is a *public* higher education institution, whereas a Private Higher Education Institution (PHEI) entails different financial considerations and educational experiences, particularly concerning tuition fees. These circumstances provide a relevant context for examining how students perceive their socioeconomic status and how such perceptions relate to their adjustment to university academic demands.

Despite existing research examining socioeconomic status in relation to academic performance, learning motivation, learning engagement, achievement goals, and other student experiences, limited attention has been given with academic adjustment as a multidimensional construct. Previous studies have established the relevance of subjective socioeconomic status to academic performance and university belonging (Vázquez et al., 2024; Fernández et al., 2025; Rahal et al., 2024). However, these outcomes do not fully capture the broader academic experiences represented by academic lifestyle, academic achievement, and academic motivation. Moreover, studies examining socioeconomic status have generally focused on specific learning outcomes rather than students' overall adaptation to academic demands. This leaves a gap in understanding whether students' subjective socioeconomic status is significantly associated with their academic adjustment, particularly among college freshmen in a Private Higher Education Institution (PHEI).

Addressing this gap, the present study examined the relationship between Subjective Social Status, in terms of Socioeconomic Status and Community Social Status, and Academic Adjustment among freshmen college students at the University of Luzon, a Private Higher Education Institution (PHEI) in North-west Central of Luzon. By examining these variables, the study seeks to contribute to a broader understanding of how students' perceptions of their social status relate to their adaptation to PHEI's academic demands. The findings may provide empirical insights that can inform student support initiatives, academic advising, and institutional programs intended to promote freshmen students' academic adjustment.

Research Problem

The present study investigated the relationship between Subjective Social Status and Academic Adjustment among freshmen college students in a Private Higher Education Institution (PHEI).

Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. What is the level of subjective social status of the respondents in terms of:
   1.1 Socioeconomic Status; and
   1.2 Community Social Status?
2. What is the level of academic adjustment of the respondents in terms of:
   2.1 academic lifestyle;
   2.2 academic motivation; and
   2.3 academic achievement?
3. Is there a significant relationship between the respondents' Subjective Social Status and Academic Adjustment across the following domains:
   3.1 Socioeconomic Status; and
   3.2 Community Social Status?

Hypotheses of the Study

H_{01}: There is no significant relationship between the respondents' socioeconomic status and academic adjustment.

H_{02}: There is no significant relationship between the respondents' community social status and academic adjustment.

Objectives of the Study

This study aimed to determine the relationship between subjective social status and academic adjustment among freshmen college students in a Private Higher Education Institution (PHEI).

Specifically, the study aimed to:

1. Determine the subjective social status of the respondents in terms of socioeconomic status and community social status using the MacArthur Scale of Subjective Social Status (SSS).

2. Assess the respondents' level of academic adjustment in terms of academic lifestyle, academic achievement, and academic motivation using the Academic Adjustment Scale (AAS).
3. Determine whether a significant relationship exists between subjective socioeconomic status and academic adjustment across the socioeconomic status and community social status domain.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study is anchored in three complementary models: Max Weber's (1922/1946) Three-Component Theory of Stratification, Antony S. R. Manstead's (2018) Psychology of Social Class Theory, and Nancy K. Schlossberg's (1981) Model of Human Adaptation to Transition. Together, these theories conceptualize how subjective perceptions of social standing influence students' adaptation during the transition to higher education.

Weber (1922/1946) posits that social stratification operates across three distinct dimensions: *Class* (economic order based on shared life chances), *Status* (social order grounded in social honor, prestige, and lifestyle), and *Party* (political influence). This study focuses specifically on the *Class* and *Status* dimensions, as they mirror the fundamental constructs evaluated in subjective social status research.

While Weber conceptualizes objective stratification, Manstead (2018) demonstrates that an individual's subjective evaluation of their standing within these class and status dimensions independently drives psychological, cognitive, and behavioral outcomes. Manstead notes that individuals with higher perceived social status often construct identity around educational and financial attainment, whereas those with lower perceived status may experience a "cultural mismatch" with university environments. This perceived mismatch can generate psychological discomfort and affect educational persistence, thereby justifying the use of a perception-based instrument—the MacArthur Scale of Subjective Social Status (SSS), to measure students' self-placed standing along national socioeconomic and community ladders.

Finally, Schlossberg's (1981) transition theory frames entering college not merely as an objective milestone, but as a dynamic process of adaptation wherein an individual's subjective appraisal of change determines their adjustment outcomes. According to Schlossberg, successful transition relies on the balance between individual characteristics, environmental supports, and the nature of the transition itself. In an educational context, this adaptation manifests in specific developmental domains. This study focuses on the

academic dimension of transition, utilizing the Academic Adjustment Scale (AAS) to evaluate how effectively first-year university students adapt to academic demands, expectations, and study habits.

Synthesizing these perspectives, Weber outlines the dual structural dimensions of social standing (*Class* and *Status*), Manstead establishes how perceived standing within these domains influences psychological functioning and behavioral fit, and Schlossberg provides the framework for understanding academic adjustment as a perceptual transition process.

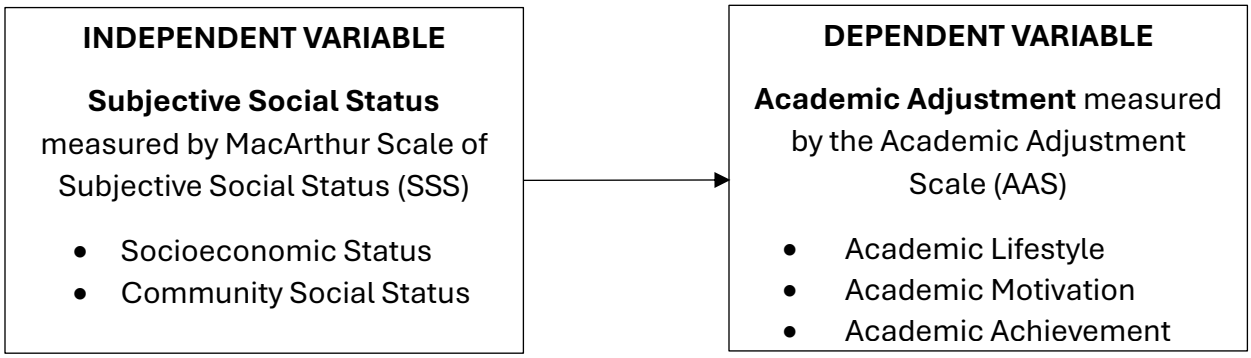


Figure 1. *Research Paradigm*

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative descriptive-correlational research design to examine the relationship between subjective social status and academic adjustment among freshmen college students enrolled in a Private Higher Education Institution (PHEI). A descriptive-correlational design is appropriate for examining the relationship between variables without manipulating them or inferring a cause-and-effect relationship (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Research Locale

The study was conducted at the University of Luzon, a Private Higher Education Institution (PHEI) in Dagupan City, Pangasinan, Philippines. The locale was selected because it provided direct access to college students enrolled in a diverse, urban educational setting, making it well-suited for the objectives of the study. Conducting the research at this institution offered valuable insights for locally tailored data that can inform school-based

interventions and guidance programs. Additionally, the administration's willingness to participate and the institution's overall accessibility greatly facilitated data collection and the successful completion of the study.

Respondents

The target population of the study (N = 781) comprised all officially enrolled freshman college students across the participating college departments at the University of Luzon during the first semester of Academic Year 2026–2027: College of Accountancy, College of Business Administration, College of Criminology, College of Computer Studies, College of Engineering and Architecture- AIT, College of Hospitality and Tourism Management, College of Liberal Arts, and College of Medical Laboratory Science, Pharmacy and Biology. Transferees, second-degree students, upper-year irregular students, and students who declined participation or withdrew prior to the completion of data collection were excluded from the study.

The minimum sample size (n = 265) was initially estimated using Taro Yamane's formula to establish the desired number of respondents from the identified population. For participant recruitment, voluntary-response sampling, a non-probability sampling technique, was employed. Its application was considered appropriate in view of the nature and objectives of the investigation, which focused on subjective social status and academic adjustment. Both constructs involve self-perceptions and individual evaluations of one's socioeconomic standing, perceived position within the community, and experiences of academic adaptation. Consequently, the study relied on participants' willingness to provide personal assessments of these dimensions through a self-administered questionnaire. Voluntary-response sampling provided a recruitment approach consistent with the self-report nature of the research instruments while recognizing the importance of participant autonomy and informed decision-making in eliciting responses concerning personally perceived social and academic circumstances.

In accordance with established ethical principles governing research involving human participants:

1. Eligible students were provided with an Informed Consent Form explaining the purpose of the study, confidentiality measures, and their right to decline participation or withdraw at any stage without academic penalty or prejudice.
2. Only students who voluntarily agreed to participate and provided informed consent were included in the study. A total of 124 respondents (n = 124) voluntarily participated and completed the questionnaire in full.

The final sample consisted of 124 eligible respondents who voluntarily completed the research instrument. Their responses provided the empirical basis for examining the levels of subjective social status and academic adjustment, as well as the relationships between the study variables through descriptive statistical analysis and Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient. Although voluntary-response sampling does not provide every member of the target population with an equal probability of selection, it offered a feasible and ethically appropriate means of recruiting participants whose responses directly addressed the research objectives. The potential for self-selection bias was nevertheless recognized in interpreting the findings and considering their generalizability beyond the participating respondents.

Table 1

Distribution of Respondents According to Age

Age	Frequency	Percentage (%)
18	104	83.87%
19	15	12.10%
20	5	4.03%
Total	124	100%

Table 1 presents the distribution of the student respondents according to age. As shown in the table, out of the total 124 respondents, the vast majority were 18 years old, accounting for 104 students or 83.87% of the sample. This is followed by students who were 19 years old, comprising 15 respondents (12.10%). The smallest proportion consisted of respondents aged 20 years old, representing only 5 students (4.03%).

The concentration of respondents at 18 years old (83.87%) aligns with the typical developmental and educational trajectory of college freshmen in the Philippines following the K–12 educational system, where students usually graduate from Senior High School at age 17 or 18.

Table 2

Distribution of Respondents According to Sex

Sex	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	80	64.5

Female	44	35.5
Total	124	100

Table 2 presents the distribution of the student respondents according to sex. As presented in the table, out of the total 124 respondents, the majority were male, comprising 80 students (64.5%) of the sample. On the other hand, female respondents numbered 44 students (35.5%) of the total respondent pool. The demographic distribution shows a higher representation of male freshmen (64.5%) relative to female freshmen (35.5%) across the participating college departments included in the sample.

Research Instruments

This study utilized two research instruments to measure the variables of the study.

The MacArthur Scale of Subjective Social Status (SSS) was utilized to measure respondents' Subjective Social Status. The scale uses a 10-rung ladder, in which respondents are asked to indicate where they perceive their family to stand in relation to Socioeconomic Status and Community Social Status Domain (Ladder). Higher positions on the ladder indicate a higher perceived social status, whereas lower positions indicate a lower perceived social status.

The psychometric soundness, predictive utility, and test–retest reliability of the MacArthur Scale of Subjective Social Status have been well-established across prior international literature. Operario et al. (2004) demonstrated the scale's strong predictive validity, showing that individuals' subjective evaluations of their social position significantly predicted self-reported health outcomes even after controlling for objective socioeconomic indicators (e.g., income and educational attainment), while demonstrating temporal stability over time (ρ= 0.62, ρ < .01).

Similarly, Giatti et al. (2012) evaluated the test–retest reliability of the MacArthur Scale (society, neighborhood/community, and work ladders) among adults and civil servants (N = 245), reporting substantial reproducibility with Intraclass Correlation Coefficients (ICC) ranging from 0.64 to 0.75 and moderate-to-good agreement across social ladders (weighted *Kappa* = 0.55 to 0.67). Qualitative prototype analyses further confirmed that respondents consistently anchor the top of the societal and community ladders to business leaders and economic power, the middle to salaried/middle-class workers, and the bottom to marginalized or unemployed individuals, driven primarily by key status indicators such as economic purchasing power and prestige.

While these validation studies primarily involved adult and civil servant cohorts, their psychometric findings provide robust empirical support for the scale's construct validity and temporal stability when adapted to assess subjective standing among university students.

The Academic Adjustment Scale (AAS) developed by Anderson, Guan, and Koc (2016) was used to measure academic adjustment. The AAS is a 9-item instrument designed to assess academic adjustment across three dimensions: Academic Lifestyle (AAS-L), which reflects the fit between the student and their role as a university student; Academic Achievement (AAS-A), which reflects satisfaction with academic progress and performance; and Academic Motivation (AAS-M), which reflects the student's motivation to continue and complete their studies. Each dimension consists of three items, and the subscales may be examined individually or combined to obtain an overall measure of academic adjustment.

The AAS was developed and validated among university students and demonstrated evidence of construct validity, internal consistency, test-retest reliability, and criterion validity. Across two independent samples, the items demonstrated a strong fit with the intended three-factor structure (Study 1: CFI = .97, RMSEA = .072, SRMR = .057; Study 2: CFI = .971, RMSEA = .061, SRMR = .037). The three subscales also demonstrated acceptable to good internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging from .71 to .85. Test-retest reliability over a three-week interval was likewise supported, with correlations of r = .72 for Academic Lifestyle, r = .74 for Academic Achievement, r = .94 for Academic Motivation, and r = .84 for the overall scale. In addition, criterion-related validity was demonstrated, as the Academic Achievement subscale significantly predicted students' satisfaction with their grade point average. These findings support the reliability and validity of the AAS as a measure of academic adjustment among university students (Anderson et al., 2016).

Data Gathering Procedure

Prior to data collection, the researchers secured approval from the concerned section heads of the university. Letters of request were submitted to the respective college deans to obtain approval for accessing the enrollment information of freshman students. After the approvals were obtained, the researchers coordinated with the Registrar's Office to request the list of officially enrolled freshman college students for Academic Year 2026–2027, which served as a reference for identifying eligible participants. After the information has been obtained, the researchers coordinated with different college departments and faculty members for the recruitment and invitation of prospective respondents. The purpose of the study, the procedures involved, the voluntary nature of participation, and the respondent's rights were discussed before participation. Informed consent was obtained from each respondent

before administering the research instruments. After the survey questionnaires were completed, the forms were collected and verified for completeness. Each form was anonymous and coded, organized, and securely stored for analysis.

Data Analysis

The quantitative data collected were encoded, tabulated, and analyzed using appropriate descriptive and inferential statistical procedures through a statistical software. To analyze the demographic profile of the respondents in terms of age and sex, frequency and percentage distributions were computed. To address Research Question 1, the weighted mean and standard deviation were utilized to determine the level of Subjective Social Status of the respondents across its two distinct domains, namely Socioeconomic Status and Community Social Status. Similarly, to address Research Question 2, the weighted mean and standard deviation were calculated to assess the level of academic adjustment among the respondents overall and across its three sub-dimensions: academic lifestyle, academic motivation, and academic achievement, with standard deviations used to measure response variability.

To answer Research Question 3 and test the two null hypotheses of the study, the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient (r) was employed to evaluate the strength and statistical significance of the linear relationships. Specifically, separate Pearson r analyses were conducted to evaluate the relationship between Socioeconomic Status and overall Academic Adjustment to test the first null hypothesis (H_{01}), as well as the relationship between Community Social Status and overall Academic Adjustment (overall) to test the second null hypothesis (H_{02}). All statistical tests were evaluated at the standard two-tailed $\alpha = .05$ level of significance. Prior to conducting inferential analyses, data screening was performed to verify that key statistical assumptions required for Pearson's r including linearity, bivariate normality, and the absence of influential outliers were satisfied. The processed statistical findings were organized into formatted tables and interpreted in direct alignment with the specific research questions of the study.

Ethical Considerations

The study strictly adhered to the *2022 National Ethical Guidelines for Research Involving Human Participants* and obtained all required institutional approvals prior to data collection.

Participation was entirely voluntary. Eligible students received an Informed Consent Form detailing the study's purpose, procedures, confidentiality measures, and their right to decline or withdraw at any time without penalty or effect on their grades and university

standing. Respondents were not required to disclose exact monetary family income. The final sample comprised only those students who voluntarily consented to participate.

Respondents' privacy and confidentiality were safeguarded throughout. Names and personal identifiers were replaced with alphanumeric codes. Data collection and processing fully complied with the *Data Privacy Act of 2012 (Republic Act No. 10173)*. All digital and physical records were secured and accessible solely to the research team, with all findings reported strictly in aggregate form.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Level of Subjective Social Status of the Respondents using the MacArthur Scale of Subjective Social Status (SSS)

Table 3. *Subjective Social Status of College Freshmen Students*

Ladder	*Mean*	*SD*	Interpretation
A. Socioeconomic Status (relative to people in the Philippines)	6.09	1.45	Moderate
B. Community Social Status	6.12	1.50	Moderate

Note: Scores were interpreted as follows: 8.21–10.00= Very High; 6.41 – 8.20= High; 4.61–6.40= Moderate; 2.81–4.60= Low; 1.00–2.80= Very Low

Table 3 presents the respondents' level of Subjective Social Status (SSS) measured across two distinct dimensions (ladder) using the MacArthur Scale of Subjective Social Status: Socioeconomic Status relative to the national population and Community Social Status within their immediate social environment.

As shown in the table, the overall subjective socioeconomic status of the college freshmen students yielded an overall mean of 6.09 (*SD* = 1.45), which corresponds to a Moderate level. This indicates that when comparing themselves to the general population in the Philippines, the respondents perceived their families as occupying a middle-tier position on the societal ladder, neither experiencing severe economic deprivation nor holding elite socioeconomic privileges. Similarly, in terms of Community Social Status, the respondents recorded a mean score of 6.12 (*SD* = 1.50), which is likewise interpreted as Moderate. This demonstrates that the students perceived a balanced level of respect, standing, and social acceptance within their localized communities, school environments, or peer networks.

Taken together, the findings reveal a consistent pattern of self-perception across both global (national) and local (community) ladders. The moderate variation in scores, reflected by standard deviations of 1.45 and 1.50, highlights a relatively cohesive perception among the freshmen respondents regarding their social and economic standing.

These results aligns directly with Weber's (1922/1946) dual dimensions of stratification (*Class* and *Status*), demonstrating that students evaluate their material resources and localized social prestige in equal, middle-tier harmony. In the context of Manstead's (2018) Psychology of Social Class Theory, this balanced self-perception indicates that freshmen at a regional Private Higher Education Institution (PHEI) possess sufficient perceived economic security to navigate university life without experiencing severe "cultural mismatch" or socio-class alienation. Furthermore, within Schlossberg's (1981) Adaptation to Transition framework, these scores reflect the realistic economic capacity required to sustain tuition and living expenses in a private university setting, establishing a stable personal asset base that buffers students as they transition into the academic demands of higher education.

Level of Academic Adjustment of the Respondents using the Academic Adjustment Scale (AAS)

Table 4

Academic Adjustment of College Freshmen Students

Dimension	*Mean*	*SD*	Interpretation
Academic Lifestyle	3.15	0.56	Moderate
Academic Achievement	3.41	0.67	High
Academic Motivation	3.96	0.82	High
Overall Academic Adjustment	3.50	0.48	High

Note: Scores were interpreted as follows: 4.21 – 5.00 = Very High; 3.41 – 4.20 = High; 2.61 – 3.40 = Moderate; 1.81 – 2.60 = Low; 1.00 – 1.80 = Very Low

Table 4 presents the levels of academic adjustment among college freshmen students across three key dimensions: Academic Lifestyle, Academic Achievement, And Academic Motivation, along with their composite overall score.

As presented in table, the respondents demonstrated an Overall Academic Adjustment mean score of 3.50 (*SD* = 0.48), which translates to a High level of overall adjustment. This

indicates that, on the whole, the freshmen students have effectively adapted to the academic demands and expectations of higher education.

Among the individual dimensions, Academic Motivation registered the highest mean score at 3.96 (*SD* = 0.82), interpreted as High. This reveals a strong internal drive, purpose, and commitment among the students toward pursuing their college studies. This is closely followed by Academic Achievement, which yielded a mean score of 3.41 (*SD* = 0.67), also interpreted as High. This suggests that the students perceive themselves as performing competently and achieving satisfactory academic results in their coursework.

Conversely, Academic Lifestyle obtained the lowest rating among the three dimensions, with a mean score of 3.15 (*SD* = 0.56), corresponding to a Moderate level. While still within a positive threshold, this relative decrease highlights that students encounter greater challenge when adapting their daily routines, study habits, time management practices, and personal schedules to meet the rigorous demands of college life.

The high overall level of academic adjustment demonstrates that freshmen college students at a Private Higher Education Institution (PHEI) have successfully navigated the initial transition into higher education, supporting Schlossberg's (1981) Adaptation to Transition Model, which posits that effective adaptation occurs when internal psychological assets outweigh transitional stress. The highest mean score in Academic Motivation, closely paired with Academic Achievement, reflects strong intrinsic goal orientation and perceived self-competence, key psychological drivers that Manstead (2018) identifies as critical for maintaining educational persistence and counteracting potential academic anxieties. Conversely, the lower, moderate score in Academic Lifestyle, highlights the specific operational bottleneck in the transition process: while students enter university with high drive and academic self-efficacy, they experience heightened structural pressure when restructuring their daily study routines, time management, and personal habits to meet the heightened self-directed demands of college life.

Relationship between Subjective Social Status and Academic Adjustment

Table 5

Correlation between Subjective Social Status and Academic Adjustment of College Freshmen Students

Sub	Pearson Correlation (r)	*p-value* (Sig. 2-tailed)	Decision on H_0	Interpretation

Socioeconomic Status	.33	.001	Reject	Significant
Community Social Status	.17	.059	Fail to Reject	Not Significant

Note. Pearson's product-moment correlation was used. Statistical significance was evaluated at α = .05.

Table 5 presents the bivariate correlation analysis examining the relationship between the respondents' Subjective Social Status and Academic Adjustment. Scatterplots confirmed a linear relationship between the variables, and normality testing indicated that the data were normally distributed. No influential outliers were detected. Having met all statistical assumptions, a Pearson correlation coefficient (*r*) was computed to examine the relationship between subjective social status and academic adjustment.

As shown in the table, the Socioeconomic Status Ladder demonstrated a statistically significant positive correlation with Academic Adjustment, $r(122) = .33$, $p = .001$. Since the *p*-value is below the established significance level (α = .05), the null hypothesis is rejected. This indicates a moderate positive relationship, suggesting that students who perceive their families to have a higher socioeconomic standing relative to the national population tend to report higher levels of overall academic adjustment in college.

In contrast, the Community Social Status Ladder yielded a positive but statistically nonsignificant correlation with Academic Adjustment, $r\ (122) = .17$, $p = .059$. Since the *p*-value exceeds the .05 significance level, the null hypothesis is not rejected. Although the correlation suggests a positive association, the evidence is insufficient to establish a statistically significant relationship between students' perceived social standing within their immediate communities and their overall academic adjustment.

The statistically significant moderate positive correlation between Socioeconomic Status domain of Subjective Social Status and Academic Adjustment (overall) aligns directly with Manstead's (2018) Psychology of Social Class Theory, demonstrating that subjective national economic standing provides a tangible psychological and material buffer that enhances students' capacity to adapt to university expectations. This supports previous empirical observations by Vázquez et al. (2024), Qiu and Ye (2023), and King et al. (2024), who established that higher perceived socioeconomic standing promotes intrinsic learning engagement, academic self-competence, and positive educational outcomes. In the context of a Private Higher Education Institution (PHEI), where financial obligations such as tuition, learning materials, and daily allowances are common (Del Rosario & Guerra, 2024), feeling economically secure on the national ladder (Socioeconomic Status) directly

alleviates financial anxiety, allowing freshmen to dedicate greater cognitive and motivational resources toward adapting to college demands. Conversely, the non-significant correlation observed between Community Social Status domain of Subjective Social Status and Academic Adjustment reflects Weber's (1922/1946) structural distinction between *Class* (economic order) and *Status* (social honor/prestige), revealing that localized social respect does not readily convert into functional academic coping mechanisms. Within Schlossberg's (1981) Adaptation to Transition Model, these contrasting outcomes indicate that while macro-level economic self-efficacy serves as a crucial internal asset for academic adaptation, micro-level community prestige remains secondary to structural support and personal study routines when navigating the specific academic demands of higher education.

General Discussion

This study investigated the relationship between Subjective Social Status (SSS) evaluated across the domains of Socioeconomic Status and Community Social Status ladders and Academic Adjustment among first-year college students at the University of Luzon, a Private Higher Education Institution (PHEI) (n = 124). Synthesizing the major results across all objectives revealed that while the predominantly 18-year-old male freshman cohort reported a balanced, middle-tier placement across both socioeconomic status (M = 6.09, SD = 1.45) and community social status (M = 6.12, SD = 1.50) ladders, their overall high academic adjustment (M = 3.50, SD = 0.48) was characterized by an operational disparity between strong intrinsic Academic Motivation (M = 3.96) and lower, moderate Academic Lifestyle adaptation (M = 3.15). Crucially, bivariate correlation analysis demonstrated a domain-specific effect: the Subjective Social Status domain, Socioeconomic Status yielded a statistically significant moderate positive relationship with academic adjustment (r = .33, p = .001, rejecting $H_0 1$), whereas Community Social Status showed no significant correlation (r = .17, p = .059, failing to reject $H_0 2$).

These findings collectively addressed the central research problem by demonstrating that the two dimensions of Subjective Social Status had different associations with academic adjustment. The significant relationship between the Socioeconomic Status Ladder and academic adjustment suggests that students' perceptions of their relative socioeconomic standing may be relevant to their experiences of university adaptation. In contrast, the nonsignificant relationship involving the Community Social Status Ladder indicates that perceived standing within one's immediate community was not significantly associated with academic adjustment in the present sample. This distinction may be understood in light of Max Weber's (1922/1946) differentiation between *class* and *status*, which recognizes economic position and social standing as distinct dimensions of social stratification. The

findings are also consistent with Manstead's (2018) Psychology of Social Class, which emphasizes the relevance of socioeconomic circumstances and perceptions to individuals' psychological experiences and behavior. Furthermore, within the framework of Schlossberg's (1981) Transition Theory, perceived socioeconomic standing may be considered one of the personal factors relevant to students' transition into higher education. Nevertheless, the relatively lower mean for Academic Lifestyle (M = 3.15) suggests that students' adjustment also involves the development of routines and behaviors that support their academic responsibilities. The nonsignificant relationship between community social status and academic adjustment (p = .059) further indicates that perceived social standing alone does not account for students' overall adjustment experiences. Taken together, these findings highlight the importance of considering both individual circumstances and institutional support in understanding students' transition to college.

Practically, these insights indicate that university student support services should move beyond general orientation by providing targeted time-management and routine-building workshops, as well as institutional financial advising and peer-mentorship programs. Methodologically, the study emphasized the necessity of disaggregating social status into dual ladders when evaluating multidimensional student transition outcomes. While limited by a cross-sectional correlational design and a single-institution PHEI sample (n = 124) bound by ethical voluntary consent, future research should adopt longitudinal tracking across both State Universities and Colleges (SUCs) and Private Higher Education Institutions (PHEIs), utilizing mixed-methods or structural equation modeling to explore mediating mechanisms such as peer support, institutional belongingness, and emotional regulation.

Conflict of Interest

The researchers declare no actual, potential, or perceived conflicts of interest that could have influenced the conduct, analysis, or reporting of this study.

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