



Exploring Senior High School Students' Perceptions of Academic, Emotional, and Social College Readiness in the Philippine K–12 Context: A Phenomenological Study

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Abstract

Background and Aim: College readiness is a multidimensional construct encompassing academic preparedness, emotional resilience, and social support, all of which significantly influence students' success in higher education. In the Philippine context, the K–12 Basic Education Program is designed to equip Senior High School (SHS) learners with competencies necessary for a successful transition to tertiary education. However, existing research has predominantly focused on quantitative indicators, such as test scores, often neglecting students' lived experiences of readiness. This study aimed to explore how SHS students interpret and construct their college readiness within the K–12 system.

Materials and Methods: This study employed a descriptive phenomenological approach, guided by Moustakas (1994), to capture the essence of students' lived experiences. Ten Grade 12 SHS students ($n = 10$) from STEM, HUMSS, and ABM strands at Kapatagan National High School, Lanao del Norte, Philippines, were purposively selected based on their enrollment and preparation for college. Data were collected through semi-structured individual interviews lasting 15–20 minutes, supplemented by field notes documenting non-verbal cues. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Thematic analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework, including data familiarization, coding, and theme development and review. Epoché (bracketing) was employed to enhance rigor and minimize researcher bias. Ethical principles, including voluntary participation, confidentiality, and anonymity, were strictly observed.

Results: Findings indicate that college readiness is a dynamic and interconnected process shaped by academic preparedness, emotional readiness, social support, and external challenges. While participants demonstrated foundational academic competencies, many expressed uncertainty regarding higher-order thinking and independent learning. Emotional readiness was characterized by both facilitative and debilitating anxiety, influencing confidence and motivation. Social support from parents, teachers, and peers enhanced students' sense of preparedness but also contributed to perceived pressure. Additionally, external factors such as financial constraints and career uncertainty significantly influenced students' experiences. Overall, readiness was perceived as evolving, interdependent, and deeply embedded within sociocultural contexts.

Conclusion: College readiness extends beyond academic competence to include emotional resilience, social support, and the ability to navigate external challenges. From an education management perspective, the findings highlight the need for integrated, student-centered interventions. These include curriculum enhancements that promote higher-order thinking, comprehensive emotional and career guidance programs, and structured family engagement initiatives. Such efforts are essential in strengthening SHS students' preparedness for a successful transition to higher education.

Keywords: College Readiness, Academic preparedness, Emotional readiness, Social support, K-12 education, Phenomenology





Introduction

Education systems play a vital role in developing human capital by preparing students for higher education and future employment. In the Philippines, the implementation of the K-12 Basic Education Program was designed to strengthen this preparation by equipping learners with the knowledge, skills, and competencies necessary for successful transition to tertiary education and the workforce (Department of Education [DepEd], 2017). Within this system, Senior High School (SHS) serves as a critical stage that bridges basic education and higher education, aiming to develop not only students' academic competence but also their emotional maturity.

College readiness has emerged as a key concern among educators, policymakers, and institutions because it directly influences students' success, retention, and adjustment in higher education. It is widely recognized as a multidimensional construct that includes academic preparedness, emotional readiness, and self-management skills (Conley, 2012; Perna & Jones, 2013). Beyond academic achievement, college readiness also involves students' confidence in handling academic demands, their ability to adapt to new environments, and their capacity to manage personal responsibilities (Kuh et al., 2010). From an education management perspective, understanding college readiness is essential for designing effective curricula, student support systems, and transition programs that ensure learners are adequately prepared for post-secondary education.

Despite the intended goals of the K-12 program, concerns remain regarding the actual level of readiness among SHS graduates in the Philippine context. While many students demonstrate foundational knowledge and skills, several continue to experience difficulties in higher-order thinking skills, independent learning, and decision-making related to their future academic and career paths. In addition, students encounter emotional challenges such as uncertainty, anxiety, and pressure associated with transitioning to college, alongside external constraints. These issues indicate a gap between the intended outcomes of the K-12 system and the lived realities of students preparing for higher education.

Existing research on college readiness has predominantly relied on quantitative approaches, focusing on measurable indicators such as academic performance, standardized test scores, and skill assessments (Conley, 2012; Perna & Jones, 2013). While these studies provide valuable insights, they often overlook the subjective experiences, perceptions, and emotional dimensions of students' readiness. In the Philippine context, studies tend to assess program outcomes or academic preparedness without fully capturing how students interpret their readiness in relation to real-life challenges (DepEd, 2017; Talosig, 2019). Consequently, there remains a limited understanding of how academic, emotional, and social dimensions interact from the students' perspective.

Addressing this gap, a qualitative phenomenological approach is appropriate as it enables the exploration of students' lived experiences and the meanings they attach to their readiness for college (Moustakas, 1994). Unlike other qualitative approaches that aim to generate theory or examine cultural patterns, phenomenology focuses on describing the essence of experiences, making it suitable for understanding how students perceive and construct their readiness within their specific context. Therefore, this study aims to explore the perceptions of Senior High School students regarding their college readiness. The findings are expected to contribute to education management by informing the development of more responsive curriculum designs, student support programs, and transition strategies that enhance students' preparedness for higher education.

Objectives

This study aimed to explore and understand the perceptions of Senior High School students regarding their college readiness. It specifically sought to: (1) describe how SHS students understand the concept of college readiness; (2) explore students' perceptions of their academic preparedness for college; (3) examine students' emotional and social readiness as they transition to college; (4) identify challenges encountered by SHS students in preparing for college; and (5) determine the support systems that influence students' sense of readiness.

Literature review





This section presents and synthesizes related literature on college readiness, emphasizing its multidimensional nature and the interaction of academic, emotional, and social factors. It integrates theoretical perspectives and empirical findings to establish the foundation of the study and identify gaps addressed through a phenomenological approach.

College Readiness as a Multidimensional Construct. College readiness is widely recognized as a multidimensional concept that extends beyond academic performance to include cognitive, emotional, and social competencies necessary for success in higher education. Conley (2012) identifies four key dimensions: cognitive strategies, content knowledge, academic behaviors, and contextual skills. Similarly, Perna and Jones (2013) emphasize that readiness is shaped by both individual capacities and external influences such as institutional support and socio-economic conditions. From an education management perspective, these dimensions align with student development and transition theories, which emphasize that readiness is shaped through the interaction of personal attributes and environmental factors. This suggests that readiness is not a fixed outcome but a dynamic process influenced by learning experiences and support systems. However, while these frameworks provide structured definitions, they often rely on standardized indicators that may not fully capture students' lived experiences. In the Philippine context, although the K-12 program aims to develop holistic readiness, there remains a need to examine how these dimensions are experienced and interpreted by students themselves (DepEd, 2017).

Academic Preparedness and Cognitive Development. Academic preparedness remains a central component of college readiness, encompassing subject knowledge, critical thinking, research skills, and independent learning abilities (ACT, Inc., 2018; Yousef, 2024). These competencies are essential for meeting the demands of higher education, which require deeper analysis and self-directed learning.

Studies indicate that while students develop foundational skills, gaps persist in higher-order thinking and independent learning. Moritz and Digamon (2023) found that SHS graduates possess basic competencies but struggle with analytical thinking and research writing. Similarly, it was reported that K-12 graduates require better independent learning and time management skills despite academic specialization (Bistayan, 2025). These findings highlight a disconnect between structured SHS learning and the autonomous nature of tertiary education. This gap underscores the need for instructional strategies that promote higher-order thinking skills and authentic learning experiences aligned with college expectations.

Emotional and Social Readiness in Student Transition. Emotional and social readiness are critical components of a successful transition to college. Emotional readiness involves resilience, motivation, and stress management, while social readiness includes interpersonal skills and adaptability (Sy & Brenner, 2007). Research shows that students experience mixed emotions during transition. Dela Sierra and Pepito (2024) found that students often feel both excitement and anxiety, reflecting the complexity of emotional readiness. Similarly, Speckien and Ku (2023) emphasized the role of self-confidence and resilience in adapting to new academic environments. These findings align with transition theory, which posits that an individual's ability to cope with change depends on available resources and coping strategies (Meleis, 2010; Schumacher & Meleis, 1994). Significantly, anxiety can act as either facilitative or debilitating, emphasizing the importance of viewing emotional readiness as a complex and ever-changing process (Jones & Hanton, 1996).

Social Support and Environmental Influences. Social support significantly influences students' readiness for college. Support from parents, teachers, and peers enhances motivation, confidence, and decision-making (Briggs, 2017). Perna and Jones (2013) further emphasized the role of institutional and social contexts in shaping access to opportunities. In the Philippine setting, family plays a central role in students' educational experiences, providing both emotional and financial support (Tano & Tano, 2025; Fernandez et al., 2013). However, this support may also create pressure,





particularly when high expectations are high (Garcia et al., 2024). Schools assist with guidance and preparatory initiatives, but inconsistencies in implementation can impact their overall effectiveness (Dionardo & Espinosa, 2024). These findings suggest that social support is both an enabling and constraining factor, reinforcing the need to examine its role within specific contexts (Barrocamo, 2022; Fernandez et al., 2013).

Barriers to College Readiness. Students' readiness for higher education is influenced by multiple, intersecting barriers, including academic pressure, financial constraints, and career uncertainty (Doe & Smith, 2025; Lee, 2025; Briggs, 2017; Sy & Brenner, 2007). In the Philippine context, financial limitations continue to pose a significant challenge, affecting both access to education and students' confidence in pursuing college (Polinar et al., 2023; Philippine Statistics Authority, 2024). Moreover, difficulties in selecting appropriate career paths contribute to heightened uncertainty and stress, further complicating students' transition to post-secondary education (Fernandez et al., 2025). Collectively, these findings underscore that readiness is shaped not only by internal competencies but also by external socioeconomic conditions, emphasizing the importance of addressing both personal and contextual factors in supporting student success.

Synthesis and Research Gap. Most research emphasized measurable indicators, such as academic performance, skills development, or assessments, over students' lived experiences. In the Philippines, there were only a few studies that explored SHS students' subjective perceptions of readiness. Surveys and statistical analyses dominate, leaving emotional and social readiness under-explored (Talosig, 2019; DepEd, 2017). This gap highlights the need for qualitative research capturing students' reflections and insights on college readiness.

Conceptual Framework

This study is anchored in phenomenological theory, which focuses on understanding individuals' lived experiences and the meanings they attach to those experiences (Moustakas, 1994). In this research, the phenomenon explored is college readiness, particularly how Senior High School students interpret and make sense of their preparedness for higher education within the Philippine K-12 context.

The framework is further informed by the multidimensional model of college readiness proposed by Conley (2012) and expanded by Perna and Jones (2013), which emphasizes that readiness is shaped through the interaction of academic competencies, personal attributes, and contextual factors. In addition, student development theory and transition theory suggest that successful transition to higher education depends on how learners integrate cognitive skills, emotional resilience, and social support within changing environments.

This study conceptualizes college readiness as a dynamic and interconnected system consisting of these dimensions: (1) Academic preparedness; (2) Emotional readiness; (3) Social support; (4) Challenges and external constraints; and (5) Students' interpretive understanding of college readiness. These dimensions are interdependent rather than linear. Readiness is dynamic and interdependent: academic, emotional, and social dimensions interact continuously, while external challenges influence both engagement and emotional responses. Guided by this framework, the study investigates how SHS students understand and define college readiness; perceive academic readiness; experience emotional and social readiness; encounter challenges; and utilize support systems. Using a phenomenological approach, the framework allows in-depth exploration of how these dimensions are experienced, interpreted, and negotiated, highlighting the multidimensional, interconnected nature of college readiness in the Philippine context.



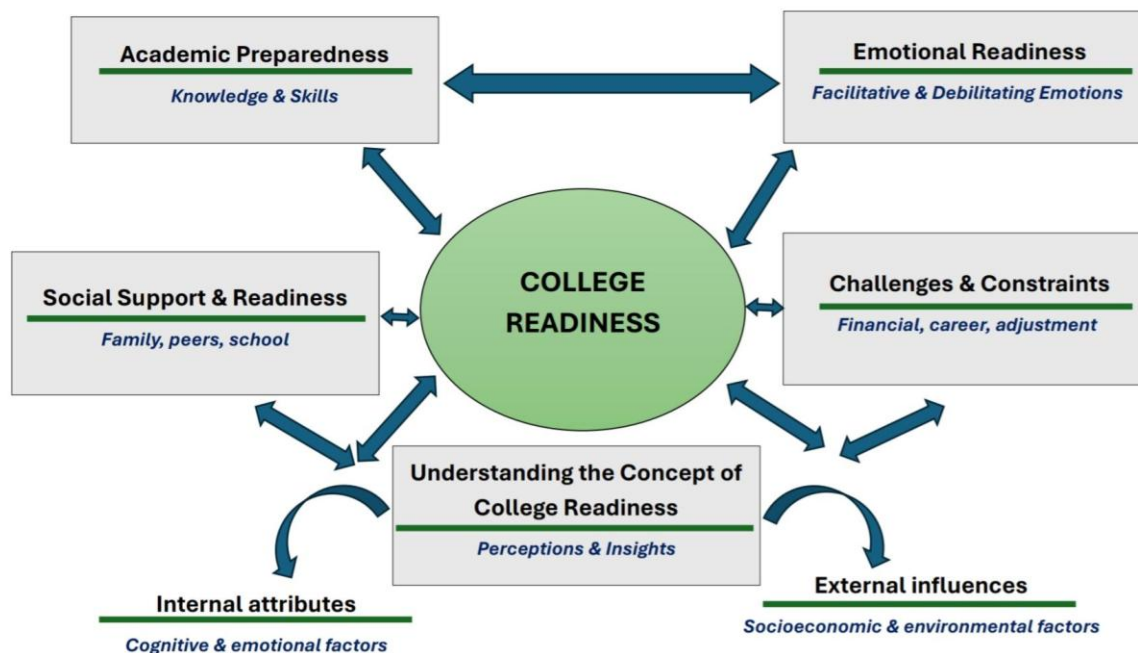


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of Senior High School Students' Perceptions of Academic, Emotional, and Social College Readiness

Methodology

This study employed a descriptive phenomenological design to explore Senior High School (SHS) students' lived experiences and perceptions of college readiness. Grounded in Moustakas (1994), phenomenology seeks to capture the essence of a phenomenon through epoché (bracketing), a process in which researchers consciously set aside their assumptions, prior knowledge, and biases. Unlike grounded theory or case studies, it emphasizes describing shared experiences rather than generating theory. Researchers engaged in bracketing, reflective journaling, and peer debriefing to minimize bias.

The study was conducted at Kapatagan National High School, a public secondary school located in Poblacion, Kapatagan, Lanao del Norte, Philippines, offering the K-12 Senior High School program. Ten Grade 12 students (n=10) were purposively selected based on enrollment, college preparation, and willingness to participate. Participants represented STEM, HUMSS, and ABM strands to capture variations in academic strands. The sample size was deemed sufficient based on the principle of data saturation and is consistent with phenomenological research, where smaller sizes (typically 5-15 participants) are appropriate for obtaining rich and detailed descriptions of lived experiences.

The researchers collected data using a semi-structured interview guide anchored in the study's conceptual framework, highlighting academic, emotional, and social readiness. Interviews were conducted individually in a quiet setting, lasting 15-20 minutes. This duration allowed participants to provide focused and meaningful responses without fatigue, balancing rich data collection with respect for students' workload and impending graduation. Interviews were audio-recorded with consent and transcribed verbatim, and supplemented with field notes capturing non-verbal cues.

Data were analyzed thematically following Braun and Clarke (2006) through familiarization, coding, theme development, review, and naming. Horizontalization ensured all statements were treated equally, preserving the authenticity of participants' experiences. The study maintained rigor through the application of credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Reflexivity minimizes researchers' bias. Ethical standards, including informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality, and anonymity, were strictly observed.

Overall, this methodological approach — phenomenology, purposive sampling, semi-structured interviews, and thematic analysis — aligned with the study's objectives, enabling a focused, trustworthy understanding of SHS students' perceptions and experiences of college readiness.



Results

This section presents the findings of the study based on the responses of the selected Senior High School students regarding their experiences and perceptions of college readiness. The themes were generated through thematic analysis of the interview data. This allowed the researchers to identify patterns and common meanings from the responses of the participants. The findings are organized in relation to the study's conceptual framework. The themes that emerged from the analysis were (1) College Readiness as a Holistic and Multidimensional Process, (2) Academic Preparedness as Foundational but Requiring Higher-Order and Independent Skills, (3) Emotional Readiness as a Dynamic Balance of Facilitative and Debilitating Anxiety, (4) External Challenges as Structural Constraints to Readiness, (5) and Social Support as Both Enabling and Potentially Pressuring. Participants are labeled as Participant 1 (P1), Participant 2 (P2), Participant 3 (P3), and so on to maintain anonymity and confidentiality.

Theme 1: College Readiness as a Holistic and Multidimensional Process

Participants consistently described college readiness as more than academic preparation, emphasizing responsibility, independence, and emotional maturity. As expressed by P1, "College readiness means being prepared... having knowledge and skills and being responsible," while P3 shared that it involves being ready academically, emotionally, and socially. Similarly, P8 highlighted the importance of independence and being able to adjust to new environments.

These responses were generally expressed with a steady and confident tone, suggesting that students have a clear and internalized understanding of readiness. Their perspectives reflect a holistic and multidimensional view, consistent with the model of college readiness proposed by Conley, where academic, emotional, and social dimensions interact. This indicates that students recognize that success in college requires more than academic competence alone, reinforcing the dimension of students' understanding of readiness within the conceptual framework.

Theme 2: Academic Preparedness as Foundational but Requiring Higher-Order and Independent Skills

Participants acknowledged that Senior High School helped them develop essential academic skills such as research, writing, and communication. P2 shared, "Senior High School helped me in research, writing reports, and presenting in front of the class", while P6 noted improvements in study habits and subject understanding. However, some participants expressed uncertainty about their readiness for college-level tasks. P4 stated, "I think I am somewhat ready..." and briefly paused before adding that college would be more challenging.

This hesitation reflects that students view their preparedness as partial rather than complete. A distinction emerges between basic skills (e.g., reporting, structured writing, guided tasks) and more advanced or independent skills (e.g., critical thinking, self-directed learning, and research work). While foundational competencies are present, confidence in applying these skills independently remains limited. This reflects a transitional stage in learner development and aligns with student development perspectives that emphasize progression toward autonomy. The findings highlight a gap in the academic preparedness dimension, particularly in developing higher-order thinking and independent learning expected in college.

Theme 3: Emotional Readiness as a Dynamic Balance of Facilitative and Debilitating Anxiety

Participants expressed mixed emotions when discussing their transition to college, often describing both excitement and nervousness. P1 shared feeling "excited but also nervous", while P7 mentioned being excited about going to college but also feeling pressure. P8, speaking in a slightly slower and more reflective tone, expressed concerns about handling the academic workload.

These responses indicate that emotional readiness involves both facilitative anxiety and debilitating anxiety. Facilitative anxiety, reflected in excitement and anticipation, motivates students to prepare and strive for success. In contrast, debilitating anxiety, reflected in worry and self-doubt, may





hinder confidence and adjustment. The pauses and shifts in tone suggest deeper emotional processing, indicating that students are actively evaluating their ability to cope with future demands. This aligns with transition theory, which highlights how emotional responses influence individuals' adaptation during major life changes. The findings strengthen the emotional readiness dimension, emphasizing that emotional experiences are complex and central to readiness.

Theme 4: External Challenges as Structural Constraints to Readiness

Participants identified several challenges that may affect their readiness, particularly financial concerns and uncertainty in choosing a course. P7 shared that selecting a course can feel overwhelming, while P2 stated, "Financial problems worry me". P10 also mentioned financial pressure as a concern when thinking about college.

The direct yet concerned way these responses were expressed suggests that these challenges are immediate and significant. These findings demonstrate that readiness is influenced not only by personal ability but also by external and structural factors. Financial limitations may affect access to opportunities, while uncertainty in decision-making reflects development challenges in planning for the future. This supports the challenges and external constraints dimension of the framework and reinforces the view that college readiness must be understood within broader socioeconomic conditions.

Theme 5: Social Support as Both Enabling and Potentially Pressuring

Participants highlighted the critical role of parents, teachers, and peers in facilitating their transition to college. P1 shared that support from others "gives me motivation and confidence", while P6 noted that constant encouragement from parents and teachers helps students "stay focused on their goals". For many, this support functions as a safety net; P5 described emotional security as "knowing that they'll always support me no matter what my fears of failure are". P8 also mentioned that teachers provide both academic guidance and advice on college expectations, further enhancing readiness.

However, a deeper narrative revealed that social support can also act as a source of pressure. The same encouragement that motivates students may intensify anxiety and feelings of obligation. P5 explicitly stated that "overthinking the future" is exacerbated by "family expectations", indicating that support can simultaneously create concern over meeting others' standards. Similarly, P4 described feeling "overwhelmed" during discussions with parents, realizing that her choices "could affect my future", and that striving to meet expectations was "stressful". P10 also identified her mother's support as motivating, yet she immediately linked this to feeling "overwhelmed" by the "pressure" of fulfilling financial and academic responsibilities for her family's sake.

These responses, often delivered with gratitude but accompanied by subtle tension or pauses, demonstrate that social support is not purely facilitative. While it clearly enhances confidence and motivation, it may also introduce a "debt of gratitude" or fear of disappointing significant others, which can heighten anxiety during the transition to college. This dual effect underscores the complex role of social support: it both bolsters readiness and increases the emotional weight of preparing for college. These findings align with the social support dimension of the framework, highlighting how external encouragement interacts with a student's internal pressures to succeed.

Overall, the findings indicate that college readiness is a multidimensional and evolving process shaped by the interaction of academic preparedness, emotional readiness, social support, external challenges, and students' own understanding of readiness, with most participants perceiving themselves as "somewhat ready", reflecting ongoing development. These dimensions interact dynamically; academic preparedness is influenced by emotional confidence, social support enhances motivation and helps manage anxiety, and external challenges can affect both emotional and academic readiness, illustrating a systems perspective consistent with multidimensional models of college readiness. The results underscore the need for educational practices that strengthen higher-order thinking and independent learning, integrate emotional readiness and mental health support, and provide structured career guidance and financial awareness, emphasizing a holistic and integrated approach to supporting students' successful transition to higher education.





Discussion

This study provides a detailed insight into college readiness by analyzing how Senior High School (SHS) students perceive their preparedness in real-life situations. In alignment with multidimensional readiness frameworks, notably those proposed by Conley (2012) and expanded upon in empirical studies, the findings characterize college readiness not as a static result but as a fluid, context-dependent process influenced by the interplay of academic, emotional, and social factors (Kuh et al., 2010; Perna & Jones, 2013; Savitz-Romer & Bouffard, 2012). This viewpoint corresponds with modern higher education research that underscores preparation as a developmental and ecological phenomenon, rather than solely a cognitive assessment (Byrd & MacDonald, 2005; Credé & Niehorster, 2012).

The results confirm that academic readiness alone is inadequate for a smooth transition to higher education. Participants indicated the acquisition of fundamental competencies; nonetheless, their confusion about higher-order thinking and autonomous learning highlights a continuing disparity between organized secondary school and the requirements of higher education. This discovery aligns with Scopus-indexed research indicating shortcomings in critical thinking, self-regulation, and autonomous learning among secondary school graduates (Zimmerman, 2002; Pintrich, 2004; van Rooij et al., 2018; Heikkilä et al., 2012). Furthermore, research conducted by David T. Conley and later empirical studies (ACT, 2018; Pellegrino & Hilton, 2012) emphasize the necessity for congruence between curriculum design and collegiate expectations, especially in cultivating analytical thinking and self-directed learning competencies.

This study enhances the literature by emphasizing the emotional intricacies associated with college readiness, in addition to cognitive preparedness. Participants' experiences illustrate the simultaneous presence of facilitative and debilitating worry, wherein excitement can drive preparation, but dread and uncertainty may erode confidence. Research in educational psychology substantiates this dichotomy, recognizing anxiety as a factor that can either enhance or impede performance, contingent upon its interpretation and intensity (Pekrun et al., 2007; Putwain et al., 2013). Moreover, transition theory (Meleis, 2010) and research on student adjustment (Baker & Siryk, 1984; Credé & Niehorster, 2012) indicate that emotional reactions during transitional phases are influenced by perceived competence and accessible coping tools. This study enhances the existing information by illustrating that emotional preparation is not solely transitional but is profoundly connected to academic self-perception and external influences.

The data indicate that the characteristics of readiness function interactively rather than independently. Academic confidence is intricately connected to emotional states, whereas social support systems concurrently bolster motivation and exacerbate anxiety. This connection embodies a systems view aligned with ecological models of student development (Bronfenbrenner, 1994; Tinto, 1993). Empirical research corroborates this link, demonstrating that parental involvement and teacher support substantially affect both academic engagement and emotional well-being (Fan & Chen, 2001; Wang & Eccles, 2012; Jeynes, 2012). This study also indicates that social support may create pressure when coupled with elevated expectations, corroborating research on familial obligation and academic stress in collectivist settings (Chao, 2001; Ang & Huan, 2006; Liem et al., 2008).

The research highlights the influence of external challenges—especially financial limitations and job ambiguity—on students' preparedness. These elements are often inadequately reflected in ready frameworks yet have gained prominence in worldwide higher education research (Goldrick-Rab, 2016; Perna, 2006; Cabrera et al., 2006). Financial stress adversely impacts access to education, persistence, and psychological well-being (Joo et al., 2008; Richardson et al., 2012). Career indecision has been associated with anxiety and diminished academic motivation among transitional students (Gati et al., 2011; Lent et al., 2008). In the Philippine setting, these problems are further influenced by sociocultural beliefs that prioritize family responsibility and reliance, thus amplifying both incentive and perceived pressure. This contextual factor enhances existing models by placing college preparation within culturally ingrained realities.

The results both corroborate and expand upon existing material. They bolster the often acknowledged multifaceted aspect of college readiness while providing novel perspectives on emotional subtleties, the





dual function of social support, and the influence of structural limitations. In contrast to primarily quantitative studies (Credé & Niehorster, 2012; Richardson et al., 2012), this research elucidates students' lived experiences, offering a more nuanced and contextually aware comprehension of preparation.

The findings underscore the necessity for cohesive, student-focused interventions from an educational management standpoint. Curriculum design should emphasize higher-order thinking and autonomous learning, in alignment with global education framework recommendations (Pellegrino & Hilton, 2012; OECD, 2019). Furthermore, educational institutions ought to establish organized initiatives that focus on emotional preparedness, vocational decision-making, and financial literacy, as evidenced by studies on comprehensive student development (Durlak et al., 2011; Savitz-Romer & Bouffard, 2012). Enhancing school–family collaborations is essential to guarantee that support systems are facilitative rather than coercive.

Notwithstanding these advances, many limits must be recognized. The limited sample size and singular site of the study restrict generalizability, and the dependence on self-reported statistics may indicate perceived rather than actual readiness. Future research may mitigate these constraints by employing multi-site and longitudinal designs, alongside integrating viewpoints from educators, parents, and policymakers to cultivate a more holistic knowledge of preparation.

This study underscores that college readiness encompasses more than mere academic preparation. It entails preparing pupils to manage intricate intellectual, emotional, and social challenges. The findings highlight the necessity of implementing a comprehensive, context-aware, and culturally attuned strategy to facilitate students' transition to higher education.

Conclusion

This study revealed that college readiness is a multidimensional and evolving process shaped by the interaction of academic preparedness, emotional readiness, social support, and external challenges. Consistent with Conley's model of college readiness, the findings show that while students possess foundational academic skills, gaps remain in higher-order and independent learning, alongside the presence of both facilitative and debilitating anxiety that influences confidence and adjustment. Social support enhances motivation but may also introduce pressure, reflecting its complex role. Within the Philippine context, readiness is further shaped by sociocultural factors such as family influence, financial responsibility, and career uncertainty, highlighting that students' preparedness is deeply embedded in their lived realities. The study contributes to theory by reinforcing the multidimensional and interactive nature of readiness, and to practice by informing curriculum design, student support systems, and transition programs. However, the findings are limited by the study's small size and contextual scope, suggesting the need for broader and longitudinal research. Overall, preparing students for higher education requires a holistic, integrated, and context-responsive approach that aligns policy, curriculum, and support systems to effectively address the academic, emotional, and social dimensions of college transition.

Knowledge Contribution

This study contributes to the existing body of knowledge on college readiness by providing a phenomenological and contextualized understanding of how Senior High School (SHS) students in the Philippine K-12 system perceive and interpret their preparedness for higher education.

First, the study advances theory by demonstrating that college readiness is a multidimensional, dynamic, and interconnected process, where academic preparedness, emotional readiness, social support, and structural challenges continuously interact. By emphasizing the interdependence of readiness dimensions, rather than treating them as isolated factors, the study extends existing models and provides a more integrated perspective on student preparedness. Second, the study highlights the emotional complexity of readiness, particularly the coexistence of facilitative and debilitating anxiety. It illustrates how confidence, hesitation, and anxiety simultaneously shape students' perceptions, offering a nuanced view of emotional readiness often overlooked in traditional models. Third, this study



situates college readiness within the Philippine sociocultural context, emphasizing the influence of family expectations, financial responsibilities, and career uncertainties on students' experiences. This contextual contribution addresses the limited qualitative research on college readiness in the Philippines and underscores how culture and local realities shape readiness. Fourth, the study contributes methodologically by using a descriptive phenomenological approach, capturing students' lived experiences, meanings, and emotional nuances. By giving voice to participants' perspectives, it provides insights that quantitative measures alone cannot reveal, enriching the literature on college readiness. Finally, the study offers practical contributions for education management, including curriculum design, student support programs, and policy initiatives. By identifying gaps in higher-order thinking skills, emotional preparedness, and access-related challenges, it provides actionable directions to strengthen the alignment between SHS education and college expectations.

Overall, this study presents college readiness as a holistic, evolving, and context-dependent process, making meaningful contributions to theory, methodology, contextual understanding, and practical applications in education.

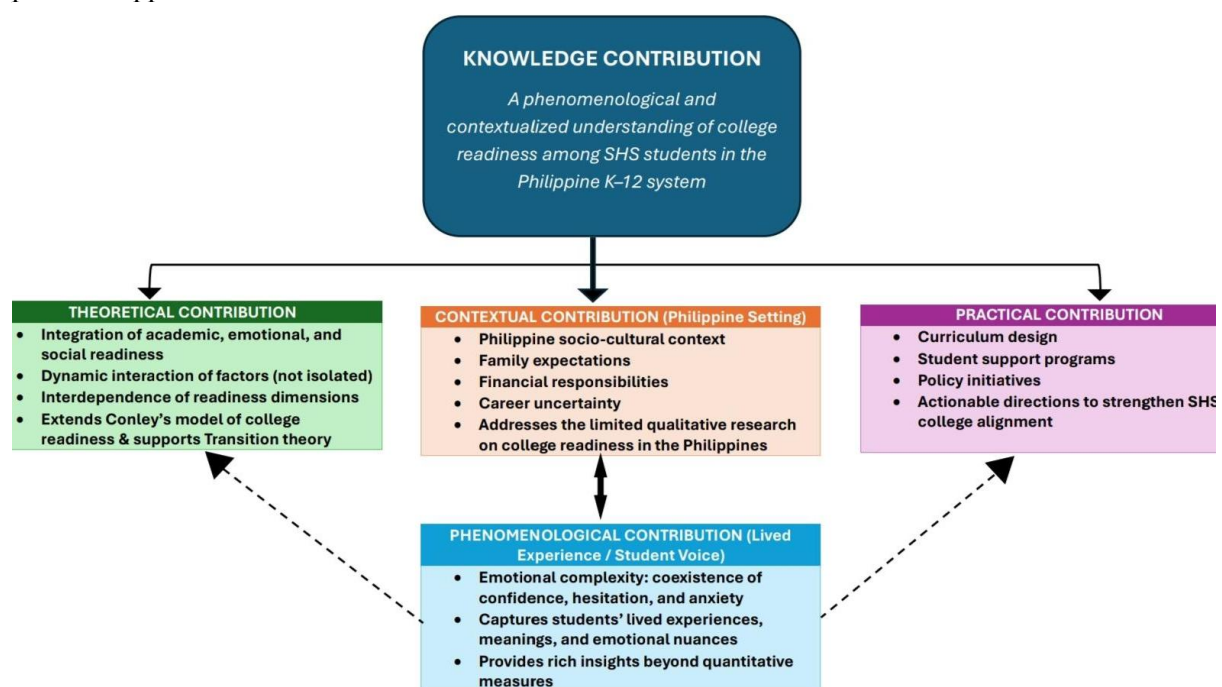


Figure 2. Knowledge Contribution of Senior High School Students' Perceptions of Academic, Emotional, and Social College Readiness

Recommendations

Grounded in the results of this study, the following recommendations are put forward:

Strengthen Higher-Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) and Independent Learning

To address the gap between foundational knowledge and advanced academic demands, schools are encouraged to implement instructional strategies that develop higher-order thinking skills and independent learning. Teachers may integrate inquiry-based learning, research-intensive tasks, performance-based assessments, and analytical activities that stimulate college-level expectations, particularly in thesis writing, critical analysis, and problem solving. These practices may be embedded across analytical subjects to better prepare students for rigorous academic work.

Integrate Emotional Readiness and Resilience Programs

Given the presence of both facilitative and debilitating anxiety among students, schools may establish structured programs that promote emotional readiness and resilience. Guidance offices may conduct emotional resilience workshops, stress management sessions, and counseling services that help



students manage academic pressure, build confidence, and adapt to new learning environments. These initiatives support the DepEd's goal of fostering learners' socioemotional development.

Enhance Career Guidance and Decision-Making

To address students' uncertainty in course selection, schools may strengthen career guidance programs by providing career assessments, mentoring programs, college orientation activities, and exposure to various professions. These initiatives will enable students to make informed and realistic decisions aligned with their interests, skills, and long-term goals.

Strengthen School-Family-Community Partnerships

Recognizing that social support can both enable and pressure students, schools may implement parent engagement programs, orientations, and regular communication initiatives to guide families in providing constructive and balanced support. Strengthening school-family-community partnerships ensures that students receive encouragement that promotes autonomy, motivation, and well-being rather than undue pressure.

Expand Financial Support and Financial Literacy Programs

In response to financial constraints identified as a major barrier, schools and policymakers may improve access to scholarships, financial aid programs, and funding opportunities. Additionally, schools may integrate financial literacy programs that teach budgeting, planning, and resource management to help students and families prepare for the financial demands of higher education.

Align SHS Curriculum with College Expectations and DepEd Standards

To bridge the gap between SHS preparation and college demands, curriculum developers and policymakers may strengthen alignment between SHS and higher education by integrating advanced academic tasks, such as research writing, independent projects, and analytical coursework. These enhancements may be implemented in accordance with DepEd K-12 curriculum standards, ensuring that SHS graduates are equipped with the competencies required for college success.

Promote Continuous and Reflective Development of College Readiness

Since college readiness is a dynamic and evolving process, schools may encourage students to enhance continuous self-assessment and reflection. The use of readiness checklists, reflective journals, and portfolio-based assessments can help students monitor their development across academic, emotional, and social domains, fostering lifelong learning and adaptability.

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