



Struggles of Non-ABM Freshmen in College Course Mismatch

Amba, Jorilyn M¹ & Elle, Gelyn A² & Mangalon, Geraldine E³ & Quinimon, Jessica D⁴ & Gumalam, Vanesa Rose P⁵ & De Jesus, Shiela May R⁶ & Maicon, Delicious Mae G⁷

^{1,2,3,4,5,6,7} Faculty of the College of Teacher's Education, Pagadian Capitol College, Inc., Pagadian City, Philippines

Correspondence: Elle, Gelyn A, Pagadian Capitol College, Inc., Philippines

Email: gelynelle77@gmail.com

DOI: 10.53103/cjess.v6i3.514

Abstract

This study determines the struggles of non-ABM students in college course mismatch among non-ABM freshmen students. With the aid of semi-structured interviews, data were collected from a sample of 10 students through face-to-face interview. Results show that non-ABM students entering the Accountancy program face significant academic and emotional challenges due to their lack of prior exposure to accounting and business concepts, which often leads to stress, pressure, confusion, and lowered motivation. Furthermore, despite these challenges, students showed resilience by using different coping strategies this includes self-study, leaning on classmates and online resources, managing their time well, and balancing schoolwork with personal well-being. The findings underscore the struggles encountered by non-ABM student who take business-related programs in college and their coping strategies and recommendation for future students who will encounter course-mismatch.

Keywords: Course-Mismatch, Academic Struggles, Emotional Struggles, Coping Strategies

Introduction

The transition from senior high school to higher education is a critical period in a student's academic journey because consequential career decisions are taken, influencing future outcomes. In the K-12 curriculum, students choose strands like ABM, HUMSS, STEM, or TVL, which supposedly prepare students for appropriate college courses that they will take (Department of Education, 2016). To be sure, alignment is supposed to create preparedness and confidence, but misalignment or the failure to take up college courses aligned with one's SHS strand has now become an issue. This is true in the case of the increasing number of non-ABM freshmen taking up business-related courses when they

had no foundational exposure during their SHS years. Academic struggle, emotional burden, and adjustment difficulty are bound to be encountered by students in such cases (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2020).

Course mismatch may be due to inadequate career guidance, influence of parents and peers, financial constraints, and precipitate decision-making. Non-ABM students in business courses may have problems with quantitative disciplines and unfamiliar business concepts, resulting in decreased performance, reduced self-confidence, and increased anxiety (Ariani, 2018; Kim & Sax, 2017). These challenges, if left unattended, may cause course switching, delayed progression, or attrition (Schwartz et al., 2018). This study investigates the determinants of course mismatch, the challenges of non-ABM freshmen, and coping strategies that they employ.

International research suggests that misaligned academic pathways are linked with lower self-efficacy, increased academic stress, and adjustment problems (Porter & Umbach, 2019; Conley, 2018; Wang, 2021). Still, most studies only explore general college readiness without track-based systems, like the one in the Philippines. Few in depth studies examine the experiences of students entering business disciplines with no prior specialization.

In the Philippine context, research acknowledges the prevalence of course mismatch and its impact on student adjustment (Salazar & Quijano, 2020; Ocampo, 2019; Manalo & De la Cruz, 2021). Yet, existing studies rarely center on non-ABM students in business-related programs or integrate both academic and emotional dimensions of their struggles. A few also highlight students' own perspectives in identifying support needs.

Locally, ABM-trained students were found to have less difficulty than non-ABM freshmen on accounting principles, quantitative work, and level of confidence. This study attempts to fill this gap by exploring the academic and emotional difficulties of non-ABM freshmen, the reasons underlying the mismatch, and the support mechanisms facilitating their adjustment. Centering student voices, the study offers recommendations for career counseling, curriculum articulation, and first-year support programs in schools. Ultimately, the research hopes to help minimize course mismatch and improve college adjustment and success among future non-ABM students.

Theoretical Framework

This study is mainly based on Vincent Tinto's theory, known as the Theory of Student Integration (1975, 1993). He explained that student success in higher education depends on how well students fit in academically and socially with their chosen programs. Tinto (1975) noted that students are more likely to remain in school when they feel connected to the requirements of their courses and the social environment. When this connection is weak, students often experience challenges, dissatisfaction, and may leave.

Tinto (1993) further emphasized that students who enter programs without sufficient preparation typically struggle.

Additionally, this study also draws from the Person-Environment Fit Theory, which comes from the work of Kurt Lewin (1936). Lewin proposed that human behavior is influenced by both personal traits and environmental factors. This theory suggests that individual outcomes, such as performance, satisfaction, and well-being, are shaped by the interaction between personal abilities and environmental conditions.

The theory was later expanded by researchers such as John R. P. French Jr., Robert D. Caplan, and Robert R. Harrison, who explained that stress, satisfaction, and performance depend on how well an individual's abilities and needs match the demands and resources of the environment (French, Caplan, & Harrison, 1982; Edwards, Caplan, & Harrison, 1998). When there is a mismatch between personal characteristics and environmental demands, individuals may experience stress, reduced performance, and dissatisfaction. In the context of education, Person-Environment Fit Theory suggests that students are more likely to succeed when their academic preparation, abilities, and goals align with the expectations and requirements of their chosen academic program. When students experience a mismatch between their background and the learning environment, they may face difficulties in adapting to academic demands.

Applying this theory to the present study, non-ABM freshmen who enroll in business-related programs may encounter challenges because their senior high school strand did not provide extensive preparation in subjects such as accounting, business mathematics, and financial management. As a result, these students may experience academic adjustment difficulties, lower confidence in their abilities, and increased academic stress compared to students who completed the ABM strand. The mismatch between their academic background and the program's requirements reflects the concept of person-environment misfit, which may contribute to the struggles experienced by non-ABM freshmen in their college courses.

These theories will justify and support the results and discussion of this study using both Tinto's Theory of Student Integration, and Person-Environment Fit Theory. Tinto outlines how institutions and social interacting can impact a student's sense of belonging and persistence. P-E Fit clarifies how personal-environment athletic fit can enhance levels of academic motivation and academic satisfaction. The integration of theories allows the researchers to examine the emergence of student engagement out of structural (institutional) and psychological (individual) dimensions. The mixed theoretical perspective yields clarity on student outcomes and a better understanding of the relationships among the gaps studied in the research.

Statement of the Problem

This study aims to determine the struggles faced by non-ABM freshmen students in college course mismatch. Specifically, this study will seek to answer the following questions:

1. How do non-ABM freshmen describe their academic and emotional struggles in a mismatched college course?
2. What factors do they perceive as causing course mismatch and affecting their confidence and motivation?
3. How do they explain the coping strategies and support system they use?
4. What recommendations do they suggest to help future non-ABM freshmen adjust to course mismatch?

Review of Related Literature and Studies Academic And Emotional Struggles of Non-ABM Freshmen

Wang (2021) points out that students who enter programs for which they are not academically prepared experience greater academic stress and lower academic self-efficacy, etc. This causes the students to want to catch up on foundational knowledge and skills. Just like business-related majors were studying technical analysis and other quantitative subjects for the first time, the students who have never had exposure to these subjects before finding it difficult to grasp the technical concept and will usually not catch up with the rest of the class most of the time. A preparedness gap can have ripple effects on students. Wang's study shows how this can decrease their emotional states like motivation and self-esteem. Nonetheless, the research did not consider experiences in specialized track-based mechanisms such as the Philippines K-12 system this gap is addressed by the present study with a focus on track-to-course mismatch.

According to Porter and Umbach (2019), students' perception of themselves to be underperformers in comparison to their peers causes psychological strain, or academic mismatch. Researchers discovered that mismatched students are more likely to experience anxiety, second-guessing themselves, and burnout because they see the academic atmosphere as either not helpful or too harsh. Non-ABM freshmen who have no prior experience with the subjects of accounting and business still struggle with them. According to the study, emotional problems arise not only from difficulty in academics, but also on social comparison, which is relevant at least in the Philippines to freshmen who often enter college with varying level of preparation. But most references were to a western world view. This means more work can be done in the Southeast Asia context.

Manalo and de la Cruz (2021) investigated adjustments of Filipino freshmen in college and learnt that students who entered courses outside of the program in which they finished senior high school often experienced academic shock. Students who were

misaligned had issues comprehending material on technical subjects. Moreover, they also showed lower confidence in their academic abilities. Similar to non-ABM students who take up business courses where the common challenges are on accounting, finance, and business math. The study however does look at mismatch generally and doesn't focus on just non-ABM students, which this research does.

According to Ocampo (2019), the mismatch of courses in higher education in the Philippines causes emotional frustration, sense of helplessness, and academic insecurity. Students were unprepared and afraid of failing because course expectations did not match their training background. The literature shows that emotional consequences are highly correlated with educational difficulties and related issues. The study does not, however, consider the particularities of students who shift from non-business disciplines to business-related ones, which this research seeks to investigate further.

Reasons for Difference in Course and Its Effect on Confidence and Motivation

According to Conley (2018), lack of career guidance in high school leads to students following college programs that do not match their interests or skills. Many students choose their courses not based on informed choices but due to external pressures. This affects their confidence and performance later. Non-ABM freshmen who may pick business-related courses without knowing their academic requirements can be guided by this. According to Kim and Sax (2017), family expectations and economic grounds influence students' choice of subjects leading to discrepancy in pathway selection. Students whose expectation mismatches are often less motivated and show less academic persistence, found the study. Non-ABM students face the same external pressures but mostly from their parents to take up business courses. However, the mismatch the study was looking at was overall mismatch in business and liberal arts. Salazar and Quijano (2020), stated that the high incidence of course mismatch in the Philippines is attributed to the loopholes in SHS career orientation. As per reports, the students lacked adequate information about comprehensive programs. As a result, they chose courses that did not match their abilities. The results directly relate to non-ABM first year students who take business courses without awareness of the workload and quantitative requirements. Nevertheless, the study did not look at the psychological impact of mismatch.

Alegre and Andres (2021), emphasized the choice of courses among Filipino students is most strongly determined by financial constraints, availability of programs, and the decision of their parents. Students often choose affordability or accessibility over interest alignment. This results in mismatch which in turn lowers the academic motivation. This literature review supports the current study's focus on perceived causes of mismatch while leaving a gap on the lived experiences of non-ABM students in business programs.

Coping Strategies and Support Systems

According to Schwartz et al. (2018), students who face learning difficulties often depend on their peers and teachers for support. Findings suggest effective coping strategies tend to be collaborative rather than individualistic. First-year students may rely on peer study groups and faculty assistance to understand business-related subjects.

Domingo (2020) found that Filipino first year students use emotional and academic support from peers to cope with stress of college. This is especially relevant in mismatched settings where a student relies on a peer with greater knowledge. Backed this research the researchers think the support networks are really important in adjustment. According to their findings, Lazarte and Buenaventura (2021) noted that many students who were mismatched in their subject area used educational resilience strategies like tutorials to be more effective. Moreover, they increased the time to studying and asked help from professors. Even if various approaches aid in lessening the academic burden of students, students continue to feel anxious and uncertain. This indicates that merely using coping mechanisms will not suffice to lessen the disadvantages of mismatch. Students often face difficulties when they enroll on a course that is not aligned with their previous education. Holman and Hunt (2019) conducted a qualitative study on this issue. Students reported lower academic confidence, difficulty showcasing their competencies in tests, and emotional distress due to feeling incapable. The impact of Covid-19 lockdown on ABM Student.

Martinez and Lopez (2020) assert that systemic factors, such as variance in curricular preparation and weak transition planning, often cause course mismatch. Educational institutions can prevent mismatch, a finding that can help improve SHS career guidance in the Philippines. Dela Peña and Santos explored the lived experiences of mismatched Filipino college students and what they found out is that academic fear, difficulty adjusting, and emotional burden prevailed. Students said that mismatch affected their self-confidence and slowed their academic progress just like what non-ABM students experience in business courses. Mismatched students experience stress and other academic challenges that often lead them to consider shifting courses. (Cruz & Aguilar, 2021) Most participants felt frustrated with topics that were new and felt unprepared for their degree. Borja in 2022 studied the coping strategies of Filipino students who entered college programs outside their SHS track. The most commonly used strategies identified by the study were tutoring, peer collaboration and extra hours. This research looks into systems of coping, and this report backs it up.

The literature reviewed shows that mismatch of course creates several academic and emotional issues for students. According to both foreign sources and local studies, mismatched students have less confidence in their academic abilities, increased anxiety and struggle to cope with college-level work often due to not having the prerequisite

knowledge. Research shows that mismatch may often be due to lack of career counselling and advisory, socio-economic pressures and non-understanding.

Despite these findings, it is clear that gaps still exist particularly in literature focusing on non-ABM freshmen in business. The current research studies, views the lived experiences of non-ABM freshmen. It gathers how they describe their struggles, what they think are the causes, how they cope up with the mismatch, and what they recommend for future students. This finding adds a rich qualitative dimension which can be used for policy improvement, strengthening senior high school guidance programs and support systems for college mismatch students.

Research Methods

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative single-case study design to explore and understand the experiences and struggles of a non-ABM freshman enrolled in a business related college course. A case study approach is ideal for investigating a specific real-life context, particularly when the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context are not clear (Yin, 2018). With this approach, the researchers gathered rich, detailed insights into the academic, emotional, and social challenges faced by the participants.

Research Environment

The research was conducted at Pagadian Capitol College, located in Tuburan District, Pagadian City, Zamboanga del Sur, which offers business-related undergraduate programs. The institution serves students from various SHS strands. This makes a relevant setting for examining the issue of course mismatch, particularly among non-ABM students.

Research Instrument

An interview guide questionnaire was employed as the research instrument in this study. Before gathering important data, the researcher designed interview questions and had them validated. Each interview lasted about 30 to 45 minutes. All interviews were audio recorded with permission, transcribed word for word, and anonymized to protect privacy. Researchers used open-ended questions to let participants talk about their academic difficulties, emotional issues, and ways they cope. The interview guide was created by the researchers, based on the study's Statement of the Problem and a review of related literature. A panel of experts evaluated the questionnaire's content, criteria, and face validity.

Data Analysis

This research utilizes Thematic Analysis to interpret the data. Thematic Analysis is a technique for examining qualitative data, typically used with a collection of texts, such as transcripts from interviews. The investigators carefully analyze the data to uncover recurring themes, subjects, concepts, and patterns of significance. This approach was first established in psychological research by Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke in 2012. Nonetheless, thematic analysis is a versatile technique that can be customized for various types of research.

Data Gathering Procedure

In gathering data for this study, the researchers will create a letter asking permission to conduct and collect the needed data from the selected participants through a consent letter. The researchers will provide a letter of approval to the Dean of the CTE Department to get permission to administer the questionnaire. After purposively selecting the research participants, the researchers scheduled an appointment with the research participants and explained the purpose of the interview. As the data is gathered, the results will be collected and solved appropriately for better analysis.

Ethical Considerations in Research

The researchers are responsible for protecting the research participants from any risk and harm upon participating in this study. This will raise various ethical considerations when conducting the study (Cozy & Bates, 2018).

Respect for People's Rights and Dignity. In observance of research ethics, the researchers respected the rights and dignity of the participants to avoid any harm arising from their involvement in the research. The researchers respected religious affiliation, cultural identities, and gender preference.

Honesty and Integrity. The researchers also operate with honesty and integrity (Denscombe, 2003). These principles were followed in this research to guarantee that all participants participated of their own free will and that they were fully informed regarding the procedures of the research projects and any risk transpired in the informed consent they signed.

Confidentiality and Anonymity. These ethical standards also protected the confidentiality and anonymity of their participation. Because of these, the participants' names or any sort of identification was not mentioned in the study. As a matter of fact, each of the study's participants is represented by code names (R01-R10).

Findings and Discussion

Academic and Emotional Struggles in a Mismatched College Course

The experiences shared by the respondents show that they struggle to keep up with business- and accounting-related subjects. These concepts were completely new to them when they started the program. As a result, they often felt confused, pressured, stressed, and less confident, especially when they compared themselves to peers who had a background in ABM.

Academic Shock and Lack of Foundational Knowledge

A significant challenge faced by participants is the academic shock they encounter when they begin business and accounting courses without the foundational skills typically obtained in the ABM strand. It shows that students who do not have an ABM background often lack important knowledge. This makes it much more difficult for them to understand business-related subjects (Francisco & Buenavista, 2019).

“Well of course obviously when it comes to academics it's very much challenging to us the accounting related subjects because it's very much new to us, we don't discuss numbers back in senior high so that's one of the challenges that we face starting this school year.” [Well, of course, when it comes to academics, the accounting-related subjects are very challenging for us because they're completely new. We didn't deal with numbers back in senior high, so that's one of the challenges we've been facing at the start of this school year.] R01

“Daghan kaayog ideas na dili ko kasabot and dili sab ko fast learner.” [There are many ideas that I don't understand, and I am also not a fast learner.] R3

“I struggle when it comes to major lang the rest of my like bridging subjects and just like the introduction of the business is so far, wala rako naglisod man and for the accounting is ump yes, I don't have any background, I don't have any knowledge about just in a little wala jud. So, struggle siya for me in the rate of 10 over 10.” [I struggle mainly with the major subjects. The rest, like my bridging subjects or Introduction to Business, are fine I don't really have a hard time with them. But with accounting, yes, I really struggle because I have no background or knowledge at all, not even a little. So, it's really a struggle for me like a rate of 10 over 10.] R5

“The difficulty especially in the major of this course because in our financial

accounting reporting is very hard and very difficult to understand in the beginning because we don't know what word to start because we are non-ABM and we don't have experience like the ABM student. [The difficulty, especially in the major subjects of this course. Our Financial Accounting and Reporting is very hard and difficult to understand at first because we don't know where to start, since we are non-ABM and we don't have the same experience as ABM students.] R4

Students in mismatched courses often struggle to meet academic expectations (Sidek et al., 2023). The respondent's emphasis on having "no background at all" shows a complete lack of connection between their prior academic experience and the demands of the accounting curriculum. This finding is in line with Tinto's (1993) Student Integration Theory. It indicates that a student's inability to adjust to the academic environment due to inadequate academic preparation impacts their persistence and confidence. Similarly, the Person-Environment Fit (P-E Fit) Theory (Caplan, 1987) states that when a person's skills are not consistent with the expectations of his/her educational setting, it can result in increased stress, poor adjustment, and lower academic performance.

Overload, Confusion, and Time Pressure

Another challenge raised by participants was how to deal with several topics, tight deadlines and the increasing amount of work both in major and minor subjects. The rapid tempo of lessons and the constant emergence of new content led to cognitive overload, particularly for the students without basic knowledge.

"Then to be honest maglibog nalang ko kay naa sab mga minor subjects which is usahay daghan activities and everytime magtapok ang mga deadline apil ang mga major subject usahay kay kapoy at kailangan pa kong mag study kay kung mag study pud ko makasabot rapud ko and daghan napuy ihatag nga topics pagka next meeting nga kailangan napud tun-an that's why malibog nako kung unsa angay buhaton." [To be honest, I get confused, especially because there are also minor subjects that sometimes have many activities. And whenever deadlines pile up, including those from major subjects, it becomes tiring. I still need to study, and when I study, I can understand but then by the next meeting, there are already many new topics that we need to learn again. That's why I get confused about what I should do first.] R3

"There are times that challenge me especially in our major subject especially work sheet because it needs a lot of focus and deeper understanding. [There were times when I felt challenged, especially in our major subject particularly

the worksheet, because it needs a lot of focus and deeper understanding.] R7

Recent studies indicate that students who are exposed to fast topic shifts without proper support struggle to comprehend and handle tasks, especially in difficult technical courses (Alfonso, 2022; De la Cruz & Caballero, 2023). Such a statement demonstrates the mental pressure brought on by environmental demands that are more than the student's perceived skills and academic preparedness. This is an example of ability-demand misfit, which is a key component of P-E Fit Theory (Edwards et al., 2021). The accumulation of tasks in different subjects further disrupts academic integration.

Emotional Struggles: Pressure, Anxiety, and Loss of Motivation

When students began the Accountancy program, emotional challenges became an important part of their experience. They felt emotional stress related to academic pressures and the need to adjust to a new school environment. When students face emotional struggles, their academic continuation is at risk. Stories from the respondents show the influence of pressure, uncertainty and changing motivation on their adjustment.

“I would say that it's pressuring of course it's much pressured because just from you know hearing the um advice among mga senior nga ano lisod jud daw so makapressure siya.” [It's stressful, especially after hearing advice from seniors saying that the course is difficult, so that adds to the pressure.] R1

“Well, since the beginning my emotion was very unstable, I feel so stress.” R4
“Pag start sa first sem especially sa major kay kanang wala pako naglisod kay nag advance study pako pero pag na sa tunga² na kay murag na anuhan ko kanang na mawala akung motivation maotong murag naa lay down murag wako ganahan mag study pero dapat mag study jud.” [At the start of the first semester, especially in the major subject, I wasn't struggling because I did advance studying. But when we reached the middle part, I started to feel like losing motivation. There were days when I felt down and didn't feel like studying, even though I knew I had to.] R8

“To be honest during this whole duration for the first semester I just feel quite numb, and when it comes in emotional aspect kay wala kayo siya nakaapekto pero ano kanang maka drained siya.” [To be honest, during the whole first semester, I mostly felt numb. Emotionally, it didn't affect me that much, but it can be draining.] R7

Overall, the emotional experiences reported by the participants suggest that the transition into Accountancy entailed, not only cognitive and academic effort, but a considerable amount of emotional adjustment. These results support Tinto's (1993) position that emotional well-being is critical to academic persistence, as well as Garcia and Reyes' (2022) finding that the perceived gap between students' expectations and the course increases emotional distress.

Social Comparison and Self-Doubt

The theme that emerged from the participants' experiences was the impact of social comparison on their emotions and self-confidence in academics. Students frequently evaluated their abilities in relation to their peers, and this evaluation resulted in feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt.

“Naa man jud nga estudyante fast learner btaw sila kuwan jud sila ba sa accountancy biskan non- ABM sila pero mas dali sila makasabot, ako nga dili kayo makasabot not a fast learner maka ask kos akong kaugalingon nga para diri kaha ko? And sometimes mas dako silage score then ako kay gamay kag score, murag ako kabagsakon mas naka feel kog pressure.” [Some students are fast learners, even if they are non-ABM, and they easily understand accountancy. But for me, since I'm not a fast learner, I sometimes ask myself if this course is really for me. And sometimes, they get high scores, and mine is low, so I feel like I might fail. That adds pressure to me.] R3

“It makes me feel so dumb, it made me doubt myself, my capabilities and confidence.” R9

This pattern indicates that social comparison had a major impact on emotional experiences. It reinforced feelings of inadequacy and challenged the students' sense of academic identity. This is consistent with Wyness (2019) who mentioned that academic mismatch not only affects academic performance but also harms academic identity, especially when students perceive themselves as less capable than their peers.

Factors Leading to Course Mismatch and Its Effects on Motivation and Confidence

The findings show that course choice was influenced by personal preference, practical limitations, economic challenges, and outside pressures. These factors often led to a gap between students' goals and the programs they ultimately enrolled in.

Practical and Economic Considerations

The practicality of the courses was a major factor in the students' decision-making, as they sought job security, employability, and financial stability. Many favored programs that seemed to provide stable job opportunities, even if these options clashed with their personal interests or high school track.

“So I think what really lead me to enroll this um course even though it's you know a big difference from my senior high school life maybe because ang practicality na nasa kong utok because when it comes to practicality I know na I have a lot of opportunities when once I graduate BSA although it's very challenging man pud but I always try to think positively and differently to see myself you know in the future that's why it keeps me from pushing na although very different kay siya niganahan pud ko na mo enroll and take the challenge as well.” [So, I think what really led me to enroll in this course, even though it is very different from my senior high school background, is the practicality I have in mind. When it comes to being practical, I know that I will have many opportunities once I graduate with BSA. Although it is very challenging, I always try to think positively and envision myself in the future. That motivates me to keep pushing. Even if it's very different, I still liked the idea of enrolling and taking the challenge.] R1

“Like I said there are many opportunities when you graduate in this course so it's very easy to get a job.” R4

This matches the finding by Rosenbaum et al. (2006) that economic opportunities have a strong impact on course selection, especially in situations where students are looking for long-term financial security. However, economic constraints also limited students' choices. They had to pick more affordable programs instead of the ones that matched their dreams.

“My first choice was to become a tourism student but I wasn't able to because it was too expensive for us so we basically went here in PCC back then and we check the courses and the two courses nga murag ning okay akong mom and akoa pud is EDUC or BSA so I give it a bit of time to decide kung unsa jud akong gusto.” [My first choice was to take Tourism, but I couldn't because it was too expensive for us. So, we went here to PCC back then and checked the courses offered. The two courses that seemed okay for my mom and for me were either Education or BSA. I took some time to decide what I really wanted.] R1

“Yes, naay pressure from the family akong mga kuan mga pamilya dili sila mosugot nga BSMAR-E kuan daw risky daw kaayo then gasto.” [Yes, there was pressure from my family. My family didn’t want me to take BSMAR-E because they said it was very risky and expensive.] R2

These responses indicate that practical reasoning, economic limitations, and family influence all played a role in choices that led to eventual course mismatch. Although these practical motivations helped students explain their enrollment, they often resulted in lower intrinsic motivation and reduced academic confidence over time. This effect aligns with earlier research showing that structural constraints can lead to later academic disengagement (Rosenbaum et al., 2006).

Parental Influence and External Pressure

Another significant factor in students’ course selection was the strong influence of parents and other authority figures. For several respondents, their academic path was not entirely self-determined; it reflected familial expectations or parental aspirations.

“My mom influenced me kay naa siya’y background sa accounting.” [My mom influences me since she has some background knowledge about accounting.] R3

“My family wants another course like med ilang gusto tas wala ko ni align sa ilang gusto but actually na low moral gyud pero its fine at least it's a sign nga nag grow gapon ko even though negative sya nga effect nga emotion, I know nga ning grow ko as person and as a student.” [My family wanted me to take another course, something related to medicine. Their wishes didn’t align with mine, so it made me feel demotivated and my morale went down. But it’s fine because I see it as a sign that I’m still growing, even though the emotional effect was negative. I know I’m growing as a person and as a student.] R6

The emotional cost of other people's decisions is demonstrated by this incident. According to Cheng and Yuen's (2020) research, parental pressure can cause stress and discouragement when it conflicts with students' true desires. The results corroborate the P–E Fit Theory, which holds that poor fit happens when individuals are assigned to environments that do not align with their personal preferences. This mismatch frequently results in decreased motivation, emotional distress, and academic difficulties (Kristof-Brown et al., 2022).

Low Interest in the Course

Several respondents openly admitted that they had little interest in the course. Their choice to enroll was based on practicality rather than passion.

“Dili kay ko performer dire nga kuan since diko ganahan sa kani nga course, no choice lang.” [I’m not really performing well in this course now since I don’t like it, but I had no choice.]

“Based on my life here the current struggle that I’m currently facing is probably the level of interest that I have so since I’m not into this kind of course because I was actually choosing practically over my passion the level of interest that I have is very low and because of that I wasn’t able to perform my best duties here in school and I feel like I’m just doing the bare minimum and that actually affect my academic in term of my grades.” [In my current life here, the struggle I’m currently facing is the level of interest I have in this course. Since I’m not really into this field and I chose practicality over my passion, my interest is very low. Because of that, I couldn’t perform my duties well in school. I feel like I’m just doing the bare minimum, and that has affected my academics, especially my grades.] R8

This reflects the main idea of Person-Environment Fit Theory. It suggests that people perform best when their personal interests match the demands and values of their surroundings (Edwards et al., 2021). When students take a course that does not fit their intrinsic motivations, they are more likely to disengage, perform poorly, and show less persistence.

Impact on Self-Confidence and Motivation

The difference between what students can do, what they are interested in, and what their courses require directly impacts their confidence and motivation. Some respondents shared that they felt a lot of self-doubt and had low motivation.

“It makes me feel so dumb it made me doubt myself, my capabilities and confidence.” R9

“Yes, unmotivated, parang walang gana kayo di kayo participate sa mga kuan klase.” [Yes, I feel unmotivated, like I have no energy or interest, and I don’t feel like participating in class.] R2

Collectively, these responses highlight that course mismatch not only affects academic performance but also undermines students’ internal resources, such as

confidence, self-belief, and motivation. These qualities are crucial for handling demanding programs.

Coping Strategies and Support Systems

This study's results highlight how students deal with the academic difficulties and feelings of upset that come when a course isn't a good fit. Despite a lot of stress, being confused, and a drop in how they felt about themselves, the students in the study were surprisingly able to adjust. They managed things on their own using strategies to control their learning, got help from other people, and did what they could to keep a sense of stability in their lives. The ways they dealt with things show what students do when the academic environment doesn't suit their previous experience or abilities.

Self-Study, Use of Supplementary Resources and Time Management

A key strategy reported by the respondents was self-directed learning, especially using online platforms like YouTube. Students said they depended on these extra resources to make up for their gaps in foundational knowledge.

“Mag adto sa youtube kay mas didto ang mas more nga masabtan ang mga difficult.” [I go to YouTube because that's where I understand the difficult topics more.] R7

“What I do or help me to see cope with the challenges of the mismatch of my course is that I tried to watch some Youtube tutorials which is actually related to my course of in order for me to understand it more clearly and easily and others ways that I did is probably I convince myself in a way that I read some motivational books in order to make myself like this course actually because in the first start I'm not really into this.” [What I do to cope with the challenges of the course mismatch is watch YouTube tutorials related to my course so I can understand the lessons more clearly and easily. Another thing I do is convince myself by reading motivational books to help me like this course, because at first, I wasn't really into it.] R8

Similarly, Tinto's Student Integration Theory emphasizes the importance of academic and social support in helping students persist, particularly during times of academic mismatch or difficulty (Tinto, 2017).

“So the coping strategy and support system that I use in this course as non-ABM is to manage my time and to challenge myself talaga na I have to learn, I have to work hard even though that some of my instructor said that okay you will study this, you will study that umpp sometimes I get bored because I don't

know how to start naman so but, with the sources in technology or the references of the Youtube and other from the books I challenge myself talaga na okay I try my best whatever it takes the result is at least worth it naman kasi pinaghirapan ko kasi kahit na hindi naman siya gaano ka taas yung score at least you try your best man.” [My coping strategy and support system as a non-ABM student is time management and challenging myself. I tell myself that I need to learn and work hard even if instructors give a lot to study. Sometimes I get bored because I don’t know how to start but using technology like YouTube and books, I push myself to try my best. Whatever the result is, at least it’s worth it because I worked for it, even if the score isn’t that high, at least I tried my best.] R5

“I ask my classmates then search some tutorials and learning lessons about accounting so I would be able to cope up with the lessons.” R9

This matches findings by Sidek et al. (2023), who found that mismatched students often depend on independent learning to fill knowledge gaps. This is in line with Person Environment Fit Theory. This theory suggests that people use adaptive strategies when the demands of their environment are greater than their current abilities (Edwards et al., 2021).

Peer and Classmate Support

Getting help from each other was important for doing well in their studies. Quite a few students relied on people in their class who had studied accounting before to help them understand the harder parts of the course.

“Depend ko sa classmates with accounting background.” [I depend on my classmates who have accounting knowledge.] R5

“Mangutana ko sa uban para ma-enlighten ko.” [I ask others to be enlighten] R6

This is what we called collaboration, and it makes the material clearer and stops students from feeling so alone with their work. Tinto (2017) says that collaborating with each other at school helps with fitting in academically and socially integration, and those two things are essential if students are going to keep going. When students are struggling, their friends are there to explain things and offer encouragement, and this makes them feel less unsure of themselves and less puzzled.

Family and Instructor Support

Individuals also highlighted the significance of emotional and educational assistance from both family members and teachers.

“Akong mama and classmates pud since naa sab silay idea maka share and dali ra maduolan labaw nas akong mga problems sa subjects.” [My mother and my classmates help me since they also have ideas they can share, and they’re easy to approach especially when I have problems with the subjects.]

R3

“Supportive instructors lessen the pressure.” R1

Supportive faculty help create a more welcoming academic environment. This aligns with Tinto’s claim that positive academic interactions enhance students’ sense of belonging and commitment to their institution (Tinto, 2017). When instructors offer emotional support and clear guidance, students feel less overwhelmed by structural challenges, such as course mismatch.

Recommendations for Future Non-ABM Freshmen

This theme emphasizes the suggestions made by the students aimed at future non-ABM enrollees and their educators. These recommendations focus on aspects such as academic readiness, motivation, modifications in teaching methods, and systemic changes.

Do Advance Study Before Entering the Course

Most of the respondents highlighted the importance of preparing in advance, especially in fundamental accounting knowledge. Numerous individuals mentioned that starting the program without a solid foundation leads to considerable academic stress.

“Pagtuon gyud mo daan since non-ABM man mo kay kung anha pamo magtuon malisoran gyud maglisod ug apas dapat mag self-study.” [Study in advance because since you are non-ABM, if you only study once you’re already here, you will really have difficulty catching up. You need to do self-study.] R3

“I gonna tell them to do uhh advance study in 1 month before the 1st semester, so have the knowledge kahit maliit lang for example the theories, the concept, the conceptualization of the subject especially when it comes to basic

accounting since basic accounting is very deep source or deep foundation to your next semester or next level of your courses so from the 1st year, 2nd year, and 3rd year 4th year it is easy for you na kung meron kang knowledge about that kahit little lang then hindi mahirapan yung self.” [I would tell them to do advance study one month before the first semester, so they will already have knowledge even just a little. For example, the theories, concepts, and foundations of basic accounting. Basic accounting is a very deep foundation for the next semesters and levels of the course, so from first year to fourth year, it will be easier if they have at least some prior knowledge.] R5

The Person–Environment Fit Theory (Holland, 1997) suggests that a lack of academic alignment results in reduced performance and satisfaction, highlighting the necessity of preparatory education for learners who are not well-matched.

Strengthen Motivation and Commitment

Participants also emphasized the significance of intrinsic motivation and emotional resilience when following a path different from their senior high school specialization.

“I would tell them that nothing in this life is easy so you have to become strong do it with fear but do it with courage as well um I would advise them to always um go out to your comfort zones because I know that life has a lot to offer for you so that's all. [I would tell them that nothing in life is easy, so you must be strong. Do it even if you are afraid but do it with courage. I would advise them to step out of their comfort zones because life has a lot to offer. That’s all.] R1

“Siguro para sa akung ge ingun ganina kay dapat isa puso nila ang ilang ge take na course bisag dili siya align sa track na ilang gikuha before.” [Maybe, like what I said earlier, they need to put their heart into the course they’re taking even if it’s not aligned with the track they took before.] R7

What students said really shows why Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) is important; this theory says that being motivated from within is central to keeping going in your studies. The students understood that truly caring about what they’re doing is essential when dealing with the problems that come with a course not being a good fit. And the way they see things illustrates that being internally motivated lessens the uncomfortable feeling of a difference between what they want and what the school is asking of them.

Teacher Support Through Slower Pacing and Clearer Instruction

Respondents also suggested changes in teaching methods, especially regarding the speed of instruction and the clarity of explanations.

“I think for teachers mas nindot nga hinayhinayon nila since nay mga non- ABM nga dili dayon ka gets sa topic.” [For

teachers, I think it would be better if they explain lessons slowly because there are non-ABM students who cannot immediately understand the topic.] R3

“Teachers should understand our situation.” R9

These suggestions align with the results of Padilla et al. (2019), who emphasize the importance of differentiated instruction in classrooms with diverse student backgrounds and varying levels of prior knowledge. A slower pace and more explicit scaffolding assist learners who may not have foundational skills, minimize cognitive overload and enhance academic integration as a crucial aspect of Tinto’s framework. Making these instructional modifications boosts students’ feelings of support and belonging, which in turn fosters better retention rates.

Bridging Programs and Separate Classes

Some participants advocated for structural interventions such as bridging courses or separate classes for non-ABM students

“Since we are not ABM. I guess we have to be separated from those who take ABM strand because we need more knowledge about some business-related terms and subjects and dapat isa puso nila ang ilang ge take na course bisag dili siya align sa track na ilang gikuha before.” [Since we are not from ABM, I think we should be separated from those who took ABM because we need more knowledge about business-related terms and subjects. And they should also put their heart into the course they’re taking, even if it’s not aligned with their previous track.] R10

“If the Institution have enough fund to cater those non-ABM who take BSA or business-related programs they should separate them from those ABM students so they would be able to fill the gap, give enough attention and knowledge” R9

These recommendations are in accordance with existing studies advocating for bridging or transition initiatives that aid students stepping into areas where they lack prior knowledge. Research indicates that such initiatives minimize academic disparities, boost

self-confidence, and enhance persistence among students moving between tracks or fields (e.g., Cabardo, 2021; Dela Cruz, 2020). Through the lens of Person–Environment Fit Theory, bridging programs alleviate mismatches by developing the necessary skills to meet course requirements.

Implications of the Study

The results of this study show the different academic, emotional and motivational problems faced by non-ABM freshmen taking business-related subjects in college. The findings offer important insights into the impact of such mismatches on students' academic performance, emotional well-being, confidence and overall commitment. This requires differentiated instruction and scaffolded teaching. That is, educators need to slow down, explain concepts more clearly, and provide systematic guidance, especially in the case of technical subjects. To improve students' self-efficacy, encourage positive feedback and readily available support.

Additionally, this study also provides information about the struggles of students with strand-course mismatch, especially the non-ABM students who are taking business related courses in college which means that there is a need for early academic preparation before entering Accountancy. Students are encouraged to employ self-regulated learning strategies such as proactive studying, good time management, and use of additional resources that can help to bridge capability gaps and improve student adaptation. Emotional health is important to develop coping strategies to build emotional resilience, seek help, and manage stress to protect their overall health.

Lastly, for school administration, they could introduce bridging or transition programs for fundamental accounting, remedial classes for core subjects, diagnostic evaluations to identify students' skill deficiencies early on, and improve academic advising and orientation programs that assist students in making informed decisions, setting achievable goals, and understanding course requirements.

Conclusion

The findings of this study show that non-ABM students entering the Accountancy program face significant academic and emotional challenges due to their lack of prior exposure to accounting and business concepts. Major subjects, especially Financial Accounting and Reporting, were found to be the most difficult, often leading to stress, pressure, confusion, and lowered motivation. Despite these challenges, students showed resilience by using different coping strategies. This included self-study, leaning on classmates and online resources, managing their time well, and balancing schoolwork with personal well-being. Their choices to pursue Accountancy were mainly influenced by

perceived practicality, job opportunities, or outside pressures such as family expectations. However, these factors sometimes resulted in mismatches between their interests and confidence.

Overall, the experiences of the respondents emphasize the need for proper academic preparation, supportive learning environments, and strong personal commitment for non-ABM students moving into accountancy. The study concludes that while the path is tough, proper guidance, foundational learning, and persistent effort can help students tackle challenges and succeed in the program. The insights gained also indicate a need for changes in instruction, such as slower pacing or tailored support, to better meet the needs of non-ABM learners and improve their academic adjustment and performance.

Recommendations

From the findings and conclusions of the study, the researcher has formulated the following recommendations:

1. Senior high schools should strengthen career guidance programs to help students make better informed decisions. There should be a closer partnership between Senior High Schools and Higher Education Institutions for an easier transition.

2. Higher Education Institutions should offer bridging programs for students who do not have any accounting or business background. They have to do diagnostic assessments to see which students need extra support. It might be useful to have separate foundation classes for ABM and non-ABM students. The academic advising and career guidance programmes should be increased.

3. Students should study at an advanced level for at least one month before entering business-related programs. They need to develop self-discipline, good study habits, and time management. They can also turn to YouTube, online learning modules, business textbooks, and more. They must seek help early from peers, instructors, and other guidance services.

4. Teachers should slow down lessons and provide scaffolding for non-ABM students. They should have remedial classes, consultations, and some simple examples. Teachers should not assume that students have previous knowledge of accounting and business concepts. Teachers should create a non-judgmental environment that encourages students to share their ideas, ask questions, and seek clarification.

5. Further studies should broaden the examination to incorporate more schools for comparative purposes. They should use mixed methods to measure the extent of struggle and examine the long-term impact of mismatch on academic performance and retention.

Declaration of AI-Assisted Editing

AI tools were used solely to improve the grammar, clarity, and readability of this manuscript. All scientific content and interpretations are the original work of the authors.

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