

Senior High School Students' Perspectives on Classroom Challenges and Adaptation Strategies

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Abstract

This study examines the differences in classroom challenges and adaptation strategies among Senior High School (SHS) students across STEM, ABM, and HUMSS strands at Holy Cross of Mintal, Inc. (HCMI). Anchored in the Dunn and Dunn Learning Styles Model and Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory, the research explores how strand-specific academic demands influence students' experiences and coping mechanisms. A quantitative descriptive-comparative design was employed, involving 165 SHS students selected through stratified random sampling. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire adapted from validated instruments (Bernardo et al., 2024; Gonzales et al., 2024; Albastro et al., 2023; Costambienes, 2024), with reliability confirmed through Cronbach's alpha above 0.85. Descriptive and inferential statistics, including mean, standard deviation, t-test, and ANOVA, were used for analysis. Findings revealed a high level of classroom challenges, particularly in emotional/cognitive and instructional domains, while environmental challenges were moderate. Students demonstrated a high level of adaptation strategies, with emotional and cognitive coping being most prominent. No significant differences in challenges were found across age, grade level, or academic strand, although female students reported higher emotional/cognitive challenges. Adaptation strategies were generally consistent across profiles, except for significant differences across strands, where STEM and HUMSS students exhibited higher adaptation levels than ABM students. The study also established a direct relationship between high challenges and high adaptation, indicating strong student resilience. The study aligns with SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) by promoting effective learning environments and student preparedness. Its sustainability impact lies in strengthening educational and institutional sustainability through improved instructional practices, student support systems, and adaptive learning strategies that enhance long-term academic success and resilience.

Keywords: Adaptation strategies, Classroom challenges, Descriptive-comparative design, Experiential learning theory, Learning styles model, Senior High School students, STEM ABM HUMSS strands

1. Introduction

This study examines the differences in classroom challenges and adaptation strategies among Senior High School (SHS) students across STEM, ABM, and HUMSS strands. It recognizes that strand-specific academic demands shape both the difficulties students encounter and the coping mechanisms they employ. By integrating theoretical perspectives and existing literature, the study aims to provide a comparative understanding of how students adapt within specialized learning environments, particularly in the context of Holy Cross of Mintal, Inc. (HCMI).

1.1 Background of Classroom Challenges and Adaptation Strategies among SHS Students in STEM, ABM, and HUMSS

The academic experiences of SHS students are shaped by instructional quality and emotional support within strand-specific environments. The variation in cognitive demands—quantitative in STEM and ABM and qualitative in HUMSS—renders uniform teaching approaches ineffective. Students actively respond to these challenges through diverse adaptation strategies, highlighting the need to understand how discipline-specific contexts influence resilience and coping. Globally, classroom dynamics significantly influence student engagement. Yu and Singh (2025) found that classroom management and teacher-student rapport explain over half of engagement variability. Similarly, studies in Europe and Southeast Asia identify pedagogical inconsistency and teacher burnout as key barriers to student motivation (Ginting, 2021; Madigan et al., 2023). In the Philippines, research on SHS preparedness remains limited, with earlier insights by Manlapig (2018) lacking post-pandemic updates and comparative strand analysis. At the local level, Pondang (2025) emphasizes the role of the learning environment in shaping student self-efficacy, though strand-specific strategies remain insufficient. Institutions like HCMI face intensified academic pressures, yet lack quantitative comparisons of challenges across strands. This study addresses this gap by analyzing how different academic tracks influence students' challenges and adaptive responses.

1.2 Themes on Classroom Challenges and Adaptation Strategies across STEM, ABM, and HUMSS Strands

Existing literature highlights the interdependence between classroom challenges and adaptation strategies. Classroom challenges—such as instructional difficulties, emotional stressors, and environmental constraints—act as stressors, while adaptation strategies function as responses. According to Augusta University (2021), student-centered approaches reduce the negative effects of high-pressure academic environments. Research suggests that adaptation strategies vary by academic context. STEM students tend to rely on cognitive strategies for problem-solving, while HUMSS students utilize social and collaborative approaches. This indicates that adaptation is not merely reactive but is shaped by the nature of academic demands, reinforcing the need for strand-specific instructional approaches.

1.3 Local, National, and Global Context of SHS Classroom Challenges and Adaptation Strategies

Globally, the importance of classroom environment and pedagogy is widely recognized as a determinant of student performance (Yu and Singh, 2025; Ginting, 2021; Madigan et al., 2023). Nationally, the Philippine SHS system continues to face challenges in student readiness, with limited updated research on how students adapt across strands (Manlapig, 2018). Locally, studies in Davao City highlight the influence of learning environments on student self-efficacy, though gaps remain in strand-specific analysis (Pondang, 2025). At HCMI, competitive academic expectations further intensify student challenges, emphasizing the need for data-driven interventions tailored to each strand.

1.4 Theoretical Basis of Classroom Challenges and Adaptation Strategies among SHS Strands

This study is anchored in the Dunn and Dunn Learning Styles Model (1978), which posits that learning is optimized when instructional methods align with students' environmental, emotional, sociological, physiological, and psychological preferences. Misalignment between these factors and instructional approaches can result in classroom challenges. Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (1984) complements this framework by explaining how students develop adaptation strategies through a cycle of experience, reflection, conceptualization, and experimentation. This model highlights how learners transform challenges into adaptive behaviors. Together, these frameworks explain both the causes of classroom challenges and the processes through which students adapt, providing a comprehensive lens for analyzing strand-specific differences.

1.5 Research Gaps on Comparative Classroom Challenges and Adaptation Strategies among STEM, ABM, and HUMSS

Despite extensive research on classroom environments, there is a lack of comparative, strand-based studies examining both challenges and adaptation strategies among SHS students. Existing literature often focuses on single strands or teacher perspectives, limiting understanding of student-centered adaptation processes. Additionally, there is limited post-pandemic data in the Philippine context, particularly in private institutions like HCMI. The absence of quantitative comparisons across STEM, ABM, and HUMSS creates a gap in identifying which strands require more targeted support. This study addresses these gaps by providing a comparative analysis of classroom challenges and adaptation strategies across academic strands.

1.6 Alignment of SHS Classroom Challenges and Adaptation Strategies Study with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

This study aligns primarily with SDG 4 – Quality Education, which promotes inclusive and equitable education and effective learning environments. By examining strand-specific challenges and adaptation strategies, the research contributes to improving instructional practices and student support systems. It also supports SDG 8 – Decent Work and Economic Growth, as effective SHS education prepares students with the resilience and skills needed for higher education and future employment.

1.7 Importance of the Study on Classroom Challenges and Adaptation Strategies to Multidisciplinary Sustainability

This study contributes to educational sustainability by promoting differentiated instruction and responsive learning environments tailored to diverse student needs. It also supports socio-economic sustainability, as improved academic adaptation enhances student success and long-term productivity. Furthermore, the research informs institutional sustainability by guiding policy development, curriculum planning, and student support services within HCMI and similar institutions. By strengthening the alignment between instructional strategies and student needs, the study fosters resilient and inclusive educational systems.

2. Material and methods

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a quantitative descriptive-comparative research design to identify and explain differences among pre-existing groups without manipulating variables. This approach is appropriate for examining naturally occurring conditions in educational settings, as supported by Cantrell (2011). The design enabled the analysis of variations in classroom

challenges and adaptation strategies across STEM, ABM, and HUMSS strands, allowing the researchers to determine whether differences in academic environments influence students' perceptions and coping mechanisms.

2.2 Locale of the Study

The study was conducted at Holy Cross of Mintal, Inc. (HCMI) in Mintal, Davao City, Philippines. As a Level 2 PAASCU-accredited private sectarian institution, HCMI provides a structured academic environment with well-developed facilities, including laboratories, libraries, and modern classrooms. The school's rigorous curriculum and active participation in extracurricular activities create a demanding academic and social setting, making it an appropriate context for examining how students experience classroom challenges and develop adaptation strategies.

2.3 Respondents of the Study

The respondents were Senior High School students from Grades 11 and 12 enrolled in the STEM, ABM, and HUMSS strands at HCMI during the Academic Year 2025–2026. These students were selected because they are exposed to specialized curricula that require distinct strategies to manage strand-specific academic challenges.

2.4 Sample and Sampling Procedure

A total of 165 respondents participated in the study. A stratified equal allocation sampling technique was used, wherein the population was grouped according to grade level and academic strand. From each section, 15 students were selected through simple random sampling to ensure equal representation across strands and to minimize sampling bias. This method provided a balanced dataset suitable for comparative analysis of classroom challenges and adaptation strategies.

2.5 Research Instrument

Data were collected using a structured survey questionnaire adapted from the validated works of Bernardo et al. (2024), Gonzales et al. (2024), Albastro et al. (2023), and Costambienes (2024). These instruments were chosen for their reliability in assessing academic performance, motivation, and coping strategies. The adapted questionnaire underwent reliability testing using Cronbach's Alpha, yielding scores above 0.85, indicating high reliability. The instrument consisted of three parts: demographic profile, classroom challenges, and adaptation strategies. It measured instructional, emotional/cognitive, and environmental/social dimensions of challenges, as well as corresponding adaptation strategies. Responses were recorded using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree, allowing subjective perceptions to be quantified for statistical analysis. Mean scores were interpreted using defined ranges to determine the level of challenges and adaptation strategies from very low to very high.

2.6 Data Gathering Procedure

The data collection process involved administering the survey questionnaire to the selected respondents, followed by systematic screening, encoding, and preparation of the data for statistical analysis. The procedure ensured accuracy and completeness in capturing students' responses regarding classroom challenges and adaptation strategies.

2.7 Data Analysis Techniques

The collected data were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistical tools. Frequency and percentage were used to describe the demographic profile of respondents. Mean and standard deviation measured the level and variability of classroom challenges and adaptation strategies. For inferential analysis, an independent samples t-test was used to determine significant differences when respondents were grouped according to sex. Additionally, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was applied to identify differences across the three academic strands (STEM, ABM, and HUMSS). These statistical methods enabled a comprehensive comparison of students' experiences and coping strategies across different groups.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Classroom Challenges and Adaptation Strategies of SHS Students

3.1.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

The data show that most respondents were below 18 years old (95.20%), with a smaller proportion aged 18 and above (4.80%). Females comprised the majority (63.60%), while males accounted for 36.40%. The distribution between Grade 11 (53.90%) and Grade 12 (46.10%) was relatively balanced. In terms of academic strand, most students were from STEM (54.50%), followed by HUMSS (27.30%) and ABM (18.20%). This distribution indicates that the sample reflects the typical SHS population in the K–12 system, where students are predominantly within the expected age range and where female enrollment is higher. The balanced grade-level representation ensures that both early and advanced SHS experiences are captured, while the dominance of STEM students reflects the strand's popularity and its perceived academic rigor.

3.1.2 Level of Classroom Challenges

The findings indicate an overall high level of classroom challenges ($M = 3.78$, $SD = 0.56$). Emotional and cognitive challenges recorded the highest mean ($M = 4.03$), followed closely by instructional challenges ($M = 4.01$), both categorized as high. Environmental challenges were rated moderate ($M = 3.30$), indicating relatively lower perceived difficulty in this dimension. These results suggest that students primarily struggle with internal and instructional demands rather than environmental factors. The high emotional and cognitive burden reflects academic anxiety and mental fatigue, consistent with the increasing complexity of specialized curricula. This aligns with Chen and Tan (2023) and Reyes and Villanueva (2024), who emphasize that rapid instructional pacing and hybrid learning intensify academic pressure. The moderate environmental rating indicates that school facilities and social conditions serve as secondary stressors. Furthermore, the dominance of cognitive challenges supports the Cognitive Load Theory discussed by Li (2025), highlighting the need for instructional scaffolding and socio-emotional support.

3.1.3 Level of Adaptation Strategies

The results reveal an overall high level of adaptation strategies ($M = 3.83$, $SD = 0.55$). Emotional and cognitive strategies were most frequently used ($M = 3.93$), followed by instructional and behavioral strategies ($M = 3.84$), while environmental and social strategies, though slightly lower ($M = 3.73$), remained at a high level. This indicates that students actively employ coping mechanisms to manage academic challenges. The prominence of emotional and cognitive strategies reflects students' reliance on internal resilience, consistent with the Self-Regulated Learning framework (Zimmerman & Schunk, 2021). This aligns with Lim and Tan (2024), who emphasize cognitive persistence as critical in high-pressure contexts. The use of instructional and behavioral strategies supports Dela Cruz (2023), highlighting proactive learning behaviors such as adjusting study habits. Meanwhile, the continued use of social strategies confirms Brooks (2022), who underscores the importance of peer support. These findings suggest that students possess a balanced adaptive capacity, which can be further strengthened through metacognitive training as proposed by Lopez & Garcia (2025).

3.2 Differences in Classroom Challenges by Profile

3.2.1 Differences According to Age

The analysis showed no significant differences in classroom challenges when grouped by age ($p = 0.96$). All indicators, including instructional, emotional/cognitive, and environmental challenges, were non-significant. This suggests that classroom challenges are consistent across age groups within SHS. The similarity indicates that slight age differences do not influence how students perceive academic difficulty, implying that curriculum demands are uniformly experienced regardless of maturity level.

3.2.2 Differences According to Sex

The results revealed no significant difference in overall classroom challenges by sex ($p = 0.57$). However, a significant difference was found in emotional/cognitive challenges ($p = 0.03$), with females reporting higher levels than males. This indicates that while both sexes experience similar academic demands, female students are more affected by psychological pressures. This may reflect greater emotional sensitivity or expression, highlighting the need for gender-responsive support systems, particularly in addressing academic anxiety and mental fatigue.

3.2.3 Differences According to Grade Level

There was no significant difference in classroom challenges between Grade 11 and Grade 12 students ($p = 0.28$), with all indicators showing non-significant results. This suggests that the level of academic difficulty remains consistent throughout SHS. The sustained level of challenge implies that both grade levels experience similar instructional and cognitive demands, indicating a uniformly rigorous curriculum.

3.2.4 Differences According to Academic Strand

The findings showed no significant differences in classroom challenges across STEM, HUMSS, and ABM strands ($p = 0.28$). All indicators were also non-significant. This indicates that despite differences in subject focus, all strands present comparable levels of difficulty. The results suggest that academic rigor is a systemic characteristic of the SHS program rather than strand-specific, supporting the need for school-wide interventions.

3.3 Differences in Adaptation Strategies by Profile

3.3.1 Differences According to Age

The results indicated no significant difference in overall adaptation strategies by age ($p = 0.46$). However, emotional and cognitive strategies showed a significant difference ($p = 0.04$), with younger students reporting higher usage. This suggests that while general coping behaviors are consistent, younger students exert more psychological effort in adapting. This may indicate a greater need for emotional regulation among younger learners, requiring targeted support.

3.3.2 Differences According to Sex

There was no significant difference in adaptation strategies between male and female students ($p = 0.22$), with all indicators remaining non-significant. This implies that both sexes demonstrate similar levels of resilience and adaptive behavior. The consistency suggests that the school environment fosters uniform coping strategies regardless of gender.

3.3.3 Differences According to Grade Level

The analysis revealed no significant differences in adaptation strategies between Grade 11 and Grade 12 students ($p = 0.36$), with all indicators showing non-significant results. This indicates that students develop adaptive strategies early in SHS and maintain them throughout their academic progression. The stability suggests effective institutional support in fostering resilience.

3.3.4 Differences According to Academic Strand

The results showed a significant difference in overall adaptation strategies across strands ($p = 0.01$). Emotional and cognitive strategies were also significantly different ($p = 0.002$), with HUMSS and STEM students reporting higher levels than ABM students. This finding indicates that adaptation strategies are strand-dependent. Students in STEM and HUMSS exhibit stronger coping mechanisms, likely due to higher cognitive and emotional demands. This supports Kolb's experiential learning perspective, where increased academic challenges promote active adaptation, as discussed by Gomez et al. (2024). The lower adaptation levels in ABM suggest the need for targeted interventions to enhance coping strategies in this group.

3.4 Relationship Between Classroom Challenges and Adaptation Strategies

The study found that high levels of classroom challenges correspond with high levels of adaptation strategies among students. This relationship supports the Dunn and Dunn Learning Styles Model, where mismatches between instructional methods and learner preferences increase academic stress, and Kolb's Experiential Learning Model, where students adapt through reflective and active learning processes. Studies by Patel and Nguyen (2024), Hansen (2023), and Thompson (2025) further explain that effective adaptation depends on the alignment between learning styles and academic demands. These findings highlight that students' resilience is shaped by both environmental pressures and their ability to adjust cognitively and behaviorally.

4. Conclusion & Recommendations

The study concludes that Senior High School students at Holy Cross of Mintal, Inc. experience a high level of classroom challenges, particularly in emotional, cognitive, and instructional domains, indicating a demanding academic environment. Despite these pressures, students demonstrate a high level of adaptation strategies, reflecting strong resilience and active coping across all strands. Differences were observed among specific groups, particularly among female and younger learners and across academic strands, highlighting variations in how challenges are experienced and managed. Overall, the findings emphasize that while the SHS curriculum presents consistent academic rigor, students are able to respond effectively through cognitive, emotional, and behavioral adjustments, underscoring the importance of aligning instructional approaches with diverse learning needs.

It is recommended that Holy Cross of Mintal, Inc. strengthen its support systems by implementing integrated and strand-specific interventions that address students' adaptation needs. This includes enhancing mental health support, incorporating metacognitive training, and adopting differentiated instructional strategies aligned with students' learning preferences. Program coordinators and teachers should provide targeted guidance and scaffolding to improve coping strategies, particularly for strands with lower adaptation levels. Students should be encouraged to engage in collaborative and peer-supported learning environments to strengthen adaptive behaviors. Future research is recommended to further examine adaptation patterns across strands and explore the relationship between instructional approaches and student coping mechanisms.

The study is limited to Senior High School students at Holy Cross of Mintal, Inc., which may restrict the generalizability of the findings to other institutions or contexts. Additionally, the use of a quantitative survey design focuses on measurable responses and may not fully capture the depth of students' experiences and perceptions.

Compliance with ethical standards

This study was conducted in an academic setting involving Senior High School students from Holy Cross of Mintal, Inc. (HCMI). Data were collected through the administration of structured survey questionnaires to selected respondents and were subjected to systematic screening, encoding, and statistical analysis. The procedures followed were aligned with the methodological framework of the study and ensured the proper collection and handling of data within the institutional context.

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