



ASSESSING COLLEGE READINESS AMONG INCOMING FRESHMEN: A STUDY AT JOSE RIZAL MEMORIAL STATE UNIVERSITY-SIOCON CAMPUS

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Abstract

This study aimed to determine the level of readiness among incoming freshmen college students at Jose Rizal Memorial State University-Siocon Campus for the academic year 2023-2024. The research employed a quantitative approach using a survey method, targeting 100 respondents selected through quota sampling. The survey instrument, which underwent validity and reliability testing, assessed four key dimensions of college readiness: contextualized skills and awareness, academic behavior, key cognitive knowledge, and key cognitive strategies. The main statistical tools used were weighted mean and pairwise correlations. Results indicated that students exhibited strong readiness across all four dimensions, with the highest levels observed in contextualized skills and awareness, and academic behavior. The study also revealed a preference for programs culminating in board examinations, such as Midwifery and Bachelor of Science in Criminology. However, no statistically significant correlation was found between students' College Admission Test (CAT) ratings and their readiness levels, nor between their preferred courses and readiness levels. These findings align with existing literature that emphasizes the multifaceted nature of college readiness, which includes both cognitive and non-cognitive factors. The study concludes that while students generally feel prepared for college, additional support and targeted guidance could further enhance their readiness. Recommendations include enhanced career guidance, comprehensive preparatory programs, and the use of multiple measures to assess readiness, ensuring a holistic understanding of student preparedness. These measures aim to ensure that students are well-equipped to succeed in their academic and professional endeavors.

Keywords and phrases: *College readiness, Contextualized skills and awareness, Academic behavior, Key cognitive strategies, Preferred courses*

Introduction

College readiness pertains to a student's ability to enroll in and complete foundational courses leading to a baccalaureate or certificate degree (Conley, 2014). Every student harbors a genuine aspiration to attend college and earn a degree, recognizing the potential for future success in both career and life. The primary motivation for most students in pursuing higher education is to enhance their prospects for better employment opportunities. Upon graduating from senior high school, individuals decide to continue their college education or enter the workforce. Those aspiring to pursue college must transition from high school to college. This transitional period allows students to explore their interests, delve into sociocultural experiences, and lay the



groundwork for more promising careers (Kuh, 2016).

Comprehending the concept of "college readiness" is essential for achieving preparedness for higher education. Previous research has concentrated on examining individual-level indicators to determine whether a student is progressing toward being college-ready. The term "college ready" encompasses the academic and practical skills required for success in a college environment. Attaining this level of readiness is imperative for students to succeed in college without needing remediation. Factors such as academic readiness, preparedness, expected behavior, attitudes, and college and career knowledge contribute to college readiness (Redford, Hoyer, & Ralph, 2017).

Several research studies have been undertaken to assess preparedness for college. As outlined by Nagaoka et al. (2015), success in college is contingent not only on academic knowledge but also on a range of non-cognitive factors encompassing behaviors, skills, attitudes, and strategies. Being college-ready is a prerequisite for completing a degree. A student's probability of successfully obtaining a college degree is higher when they possess solid academic preparation, reducing persistence and degree attainment disparities among various racial and socioeconomic groups.

To ensure the preparedness of students for college, Conley (2014) introduced a four-part paradigm of college readiness encompassing: 1) cognitive strategies, denoting academic behaviors that enhance the skills necessary for college work; 2) content knowledge, involving understanding in academic disciplines like English, Mathematics, and Sciences; 3) academic behavior, which entails students taking responsibility for their learning; and 4) contextual skills, including an understanding of choosing a college, its operational system and culture, and familiarity with financial aid programs.

As per Johnson and Stage (2018), the transition from high school to college is a pivotal moment characterized by significant differences, including shifts in expectations for engagement, independent work, motivation, intellectual development, and the dynamics of the student-teacher relationship. This crucial transition occurs as young individuals, for the first time, encounter substantial independence from their families and the traditional role of a child, rendering the move from high school to college a challenging and transformative experience for many.

In the context of Jose Rizal Memorial State University-Siocon Campus, data from the guidance office shows that 181 students got 75% and above, and 703 got 70%-74% students passed the college admission test. Despite this data, it is still unknown whether these students who passed the admission test are indeed ready for college, considering that this evaluation does not encompass many facets of college readiness.

This prompted the researchers to conduct the present study. Hence, the researchers looked into the readiness level of incoming first-year college students of Jose Rizal Memorial State University with 1011 takers. They also sought to ascertain whether there is a relationship between the rating of students in their college admission test and the level of readiness, and the relationship between preferred courses and the level of preparedness.



Methods

The research at Jose Rizal Memorial State University-Siocon Campus employed a quantitative approach using a survey method to assess the preparedness of incoming first-year students. Conducted in Manaol, Siocon, Zamboanga del Norte, the study focused on Conley's four key dimensions of college readiness: cognitive strategies, content knowledge, academic behavior, and contextual skills (Conley, 2014). The university, established in 1996, accommodates a diverse student population of 1011 first-year students in various programs.

Quota sampling was employed, targeting specific score ranges, resulting in a sample of 100 respondents. The researchers engaged incoming students at the guidance office who had successfully passed the College Admission Test (CAT) for the academic year 2023-2024. The survey questionnaire, consisting of 28 items, was adapted from the College-Going Self-Efficacy Scale (Gibbons, Borders, Wiles, Stephan, & Davis, 2006) and the Academic Behavioral Confidence Scale (Sander & Sanders, 2009). These instruments underwent expert-driven validation and pilot testing, achieving a 94.56% reliability rate.

Recent studies have continued to validate and use these instruments. For instance, the College-Going Self-Efficacy Scale has been shortened and validated for different populations, confirming its reliability and applicability in various educational settings (Hardin et al., 2021). Similarly, interventions using the scale have been studied to assess their impact on student self-efficacy, showing its continued relevance in educational research (Mitchell, 2017).

The scoring procedure utilized a Four-Point Likert Scale categorizing questions into dimensions such as contextualized skills, academic behavior, key cognitive knowledge, and key cognitive strategies. Ethical considerations included informed consent, assent forms, and transparency. The research followed a structured procedure for data gathering, including approval processes, permission from the guidance office, administering the instrument, data tabulation, and submission. Statistical treatment involved Cronbach's Alpha, weighted mean, and pairwise correlations. These meticulous steps aimed to maintain transparency, ethical integrity, and precision in the research process.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were central to the study's design and implementation. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring they were fully aware of the study's purpose, procedures, and potential risks. Data confidentiality was strictly maintained, with all identifying information anonymized in the analysis and reporting. The study adhered to the ethical guidelines set forth by the institutional review board and relevant national and international regulations.

Results

The study sought to determine the level of readiness among incoming freshmen college students at Jose Rizal Memorial State University-Siocon Campus. The findings revealed several key insights into the students' preparedness for college across multiple dimensions, including contextualized skills and awareness, academic behavior, key cognitive knowledge, and key cognitive strategies.

Contextualized Skills and Awareness

The respondents demonstrated a high level of readiness in terms of contextualized skills and awareness. Most students agreed that they understood the college admission process, felt confident about their academic performance in high school, and were aware of financial aid options. They also showed a strong understanding of academic culture norms and had a list of potential college courses they could take. The overall positive responses indicate that students are well-prepared in this dimension, aligning with the emphasis on contextual skills in Conley's college readiness framework (Conley, 2014).

Academic Behavior

In terms of academic behavior, the students displayed proactive attitudes towards their studies. They reported having good study habits, such as taking notes and seeking clarification from teachers when needed. Additionally, they were aware of their mastery levels in subjects, reflected on their performance, and persisted with tasks despite difficulties. This proactive academic behavior aligns with findings by Smith et al. (2018), who noted that such behaviors are significant predictors of college success.

Key Cognitive Knowledge

The assessment of key cognitive knowledge indicated that students felt well-prepared in understanding the academic content necessary for college. They demonstrated confidence in their knowledge of the college admission process and academic standards. This finding supports Anderson et al. (2017), who emphasized that a solid understanding of fundamental concepts enhances students' ability to handle advanced coursework.

Key Cognitive Strategies

The respondents also showed strong readiness in terms of key cognitive strategies. They were open to feedback, curious about learning, and applied appropriate problem-solving strategies. These cognitive strategies are crucial for academic success, as highlighted by Peterson and Brown (2022), who emphasized the role of metacognition and other cognitive strategies in overcoming academic challenges.

Preferred Courses

The study found that Midwifery, Bachelor of Science in Criminology, and Bachelor of Science in Education major in English were the most preferred courses among respondents. This preference indicates that students are inclined towards programs that culminate in board examinations, which they perceive as offering clear career paths and job security (Smith J. A., 2023). On the other hand, programs like Automotive Technology, Bachelor of Elementary Education, and Bachelor of Science in Hospitality Management attracted the least attention, possibly due to their shorter duration or lack of board exams.

Statistical Relationships

The study revealed no statistically significant correlation between students' College Admission Test (CAT) ratings and their readiness levels. Additionally, there was no significant relationship between the preferred courses and the students' readiness levels. These findings suggest that factors other than CAT scores and course preferences play a crucial role in determining college readiness. This aligns with Nagaoka et al. (2015), who emphasized that non-cognitive factors are also significant in predicting college success.

Discussion

The study's findings provide significant insights into the readiness of incoming freshmen college students at Jose Rizal Memorial State University-Siocon Campus and their alignment with existing literature on college readiness.

The high level of contextualized skills and awareness among students aligns with Conley's (2014) framework, which emphasizes the importance of understanding the college admission process, academic culture, and financial aid options. This readiness dimension is critical for a smooth transition to college, as supported by Kuh (2016), who found that students with a thorough understanding of college processes are better prepared for the academic challenges they will face. The strong agreement among respondents regarding their knowledge of these processes suggests that the university's guidance and preparatory efforts are effective.

The proactive academic behaviors reported by students, such as good study habits and persistence in tasks, reflect the findings of Smith et al. (2018), who noted that such behaviors are crucial for college success. The ability to reflect on performance and seek help when needed indicates a level of self-regulation and responsibility that is essential for academic achievement. These behaviors are consistent with the Academic Behavioral Confidence Scale's focus on self-efficacy and confidence in academic tasks (Sander & Sanders, 2009).

Students' confidence in their key cognitive knowledge supports Anderson et al. (2017), who highlighted the importance of foundational academic knowledge for handling

advanced coursework. The respondents' understanding of academic standards and content knowledge aligns with the goals of college preparatory programs, which aim to equip students with the necessary skills and knowledge for college-level work. This readiness dimension underscores the effectiveness of the academic preparation provided by the university.

The strong readiness in key cognitive strategies among students indicates their ability to apply problem-solving techniques and openness to feedback, which are critical for academic success. This finding is consistent with Peterson and Brown (2022), who emphasized the role of metacognitive strategies in overcoming academic challenges. The students' curiosity and desire for continuous learning reflect the principles of social cognitive theory, which posits that self-efficacy and cognitive strategies are vital for academic achievement (Bandura, 2012).

The preference for courses leading to board examinations, such as Midwifery and Bachelor of Science in Criminology, aligns with Smith J. A. (2023), who found that students often choose programs that offer clear career paths and job security. This preference highlights the pragmatic considerations students have when selecting their courses, emphasizing the need for career guidance to align their academic choices with their long-term goals. The lesser preference for non-board programs like Automotive Technology and Bachelor of Elementary Education suggests that students are more inclined towards degrees that promise professional certification and better employment prospects.

The lack of significant correlation between CAT ratings and readiness levels suggests that standardized test scores alone may not fully capture the multifaceted nature of college readiness. This finding aligns with Nagaoka et al. (2015), who emphasized that non-cognitive factors, such as academic behaviors and cognitive strategies, play a crucial role in determining college success. The absence of a significant relationship between preferred courses and readiness levels further supports the idea that college readiness is influenced by a broad range of factors beyond academic metrics.

Conclusions

The study on the level of readiness among incoming freshmen college students at Jose Rizal Memorial State University-Siocon Campus yielded several key conclusions:

High Readiness Levels: Students demonstrated strong readiness across multiple dimensions, including contextualized skills and awareness, academic behavior, key cognitive knowledge, and key cognitive strategies. This suggests that the preparatory measures in place are effectively equipping students for the transition to college.

Preferred Courses: The most preferred programs among respondents were those leading to board examinations, such as Midwifery and Bachelor of Science in Criminology. This preference indicates that students are motivated by clear career paths and potential job security.



No Significant Correlation: There was no statistically significant correlation between students' College Admission Test (CAT) ratings and their level of readiness, nor between their preferred courses and readiness levels. This implies that factors other than CAT scores and course preferences are influential in determining college readiness.

Holistic Readiness: The findings underscore the multifaceted nature of college readiness, which includes cognitive strategies, content knowledge, academic behaviors, and contextual skills. These dimensions collectively contribute to a student's preparedness for college-level work.

Based on the study's findings, several recommendations are proposed:

Enhanced Career Guidance: Instructors and counselors should provide robust career guidance to help students make informed decisions about their academic paths, aligning their course preferences with their long-term career goals. This guidance can help students understand the benefits and challenges of various career paths, enhancing their overall readiness and satisfaction with their chosen fields.

Comprehensive Preparatory Programs: The university should continue to develop and implement comprehensive preparatory programs that address both cognitive and non-cognitive aspects of college readiness. This includes enhancing academic behaviors, cognitive strategies, and contextual skills. Programs could include workshops on study skills, time management, and college navigation.

Multiple Measures of Readiness: Admissions processes should consider multiple measures of readiness beyond standardized test scores to capture the diverse dimensions of student preparedness. This approach would provide a more holistic understanding of each student's readiness for college and could include assessments of non-cognitive skills and academic behaviors.

Targeted Support and Interventions: Targeted support and interventions should be provided to students who may need additional assistance in specific areas of readiness. This could include academic tutoring, mentoring programs, and resources tailored to address gaps in readiness.

Continuous Assessment and Improvement: Regular assessments should be conducted to monitor the effectiveness of preparatory programs and make necessary adjustments. This iterative process will ensure that the programs remain relevant and effective in meeting the evolving needs of incoming students.

Community and Parental Involvement: Engage the community and parents in the preparatory process to create a supportive environment for students. Their involvement can enhance the overall readiness of students by providing additional support and resources.

By implementing these recommendations, Jose Rizal Memorial State University-Siocon Campus can further enhance the readiness levels of its incoming freshmen, ensuring they are well-prepared to succeed in their academic and professional endeavors.

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Disclosure: Use of AI Tools

In compliance with Threshold's guidelines for the ethical use of artificial intelligence (AI) and automated tools in academic research, the authors disclose the use of OpenAI's ChatGPT for enhancing the quality and clarity of the manuscript. ChatGPT was utilized to assist in refining the language, structure, and formatting of the text, ensuring a high level of academic rigor and coherence. The authors confirm that all data analysis, critical interpretations, and conclusions presented in this manuscript were conducted independently by the research team. The AI tool was employed strictly for editorial assistance and did not influence the scientific content or ethical considerations of the study. All intellectual contributions from the AI tool are in accordance with the authors' original intentions and have been reviewed and approved by all co-authors. The use of ChatGPT complies with Threshold's ethical standards and guidelines for transparent reporting of AI involvement in research. The authors remain fully responsible for the integrity and accuracy of the content presented in this paper.

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