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Challenges Faced by Irregular Students

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ABSTRACT

Higher education is an important phase among many individuals who aspire to achieve greater things in this life. This step serves as a preparatory stage for individuals to attain their dream profession. Throughout the academic journey, different challenges and obstacles are inevitable. In the light of this, the challenges of irregular students were given attention to. The goal of this study was to conduct a thematic analysis to determine the challenges of the irregular status of the students from the College of Education of Laguna University Academic Year 2023-2024. The study focused on the challenges and difficulties that irregular students encounter in terms of academic performance, finances, and schedule. To collect the necessary information based on each participant's experiences, a semi-structured open-ended questionnaire was constructed for data analysis. The findings of the study revealed that most irregular students under the College of Education have difficulties in terms of time management and students experiences stress due to various factors including the transition and adapting into the College of Education. Moreover, irregular students struggled financially due to various reasons including expenses associated with in-person classes and extended duration in college. Based on the results of this study, developing a peer-based program is recommended to help irregular students to catch-up with their classmates and build a strong relationship with their peers. Future researchers may also conduct further research on the challenges of irregular students from other college programs as it will help them identify other factors aside from the findings of this study.

Keywords: *Irregular students, Challenges, Thematic analysis, Higher education.*

INTRODUCTION

Nature and Scope of the Problem Investigated

Higher Education is a key to economic stability. It plays a vital role among many individuals not only with the younger generation but to those people who have great ambitions in life. It serves as a preparatory stage for their future endeavors, may it be their desired profession, career choice, or even their passion. College serves as an essential step to hone and practice what students want to be in the future, as different universities and college institutions offer numerous courses that focus on various sets of skills that are beneficial in the 21st century.

There are different factors that influence a student to pursue higher education. That is also the reason why every college student has their own story to tell. It differs from what they are experiencing throughout their journey. Some find college life enjoyable while some find it challenging. However, students' perception and outlook depend mainly on their personal experiences.

In college institutions, students can be classified as regular and irregular. Irregular students are much different from a regular student, these students take less or more than the desired load given the dean's permission. Being an irregular student is a real challenge, this may be due to overlapping schedules, new environments, and new faces because there are tendencies that they are enrolled in different classes and programs. Due to the researchers found the need to conduct this study, to determine the different challenges of irregular students and its effect.

The current situation of irregular students regarding the difficulties that they encounter must be addressed and should not be overlooked. The issue of students being irregular seems to be interminable as there are different factors as to why students decided to be irregular. This issue caught the interest of the researchers to discover the experiences of the students after becoming an irregular student.

Research Problem and Objectives

The aim of this study is to identify the adversities, its effect and coping mechanisms of irregular students at Laguna University.

Specifically, it seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What are the challenges encountered by irregular students in terms of:

1.1 Academic performance

1.2 Financial status

1.3 Schedule

2. What are the effects of being an irregular student based on the following dimensions:

2.1 Intellectual

2.2 Emotional

2.3 Social

3. Is there a significant relationship between the challenges of being an irregular student?

4. Based on the findings of the study, what seminar could be proposed to help overcome the challenges of being an irregular student.

Research Framework

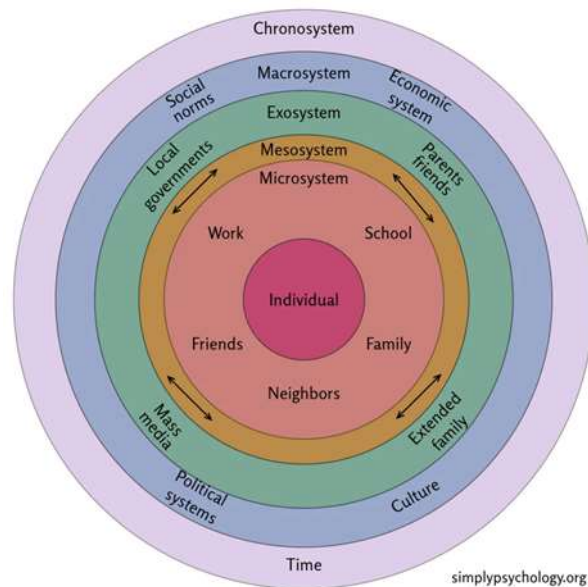


Figure 1: Bronfenbrenner's Ecological System Theory.

ECOLOGICAL SYSTEM THEORY

According to Bronfenbrenner (1977), ecological system theory is the foundation of this study because it is used to understand and support irregular students. There is a common problem that may impact their educational journey and influence their academic experiences. According to this theory, the development of individuals is influenced by a variety of interrelated systems or five environmental systems. First, the microsystems of family, friends, classmates, teachers, neighbors, and other persons that have direct contact all impact the participation of irregular students especially in parental and school involvement and peer relationships. Second, is the mesosystem and the microsystem interconnections, which also impact the experiences of irregular students between family and school because some of the irregular students may have the possibility to enter a new journey or not. Third, the exosystem, the indirect factors, the community where the services undergo such as mentoring programs that might help irregular students. Fourth, the macrosystem is the actual culture of an individual, the academic progress, school views, and societal expectations affect decisions and life experiences of irregular students. The last one is the chronosystem, which involves transitions and adjustments that occur throughout one's life. Some of them go through some family problems, relocating to a new environment or school that may affect academic achievement.

Schlossberg's Transition Theory by Nancy Schlossberg is a theory of understanding for people who negotiate and adjust to life transitions, it investigates the diverse experiences of Irregular students from higher education who change their path when it comes to their courses and encounter challenges such as balancing their work, study commitments, family responsibilities, and dealing with personal or private lives. It provides a complete framework for specific issues and experiences that are linked with non-traditional paths. The key factors that influenced the transition process of irregular students are support mechanisms through their family support, mentorship for all successful individuals who can be their guide, and the institutional assistance that will help them negotiate the hurdles of higher education. The fourth component of the model in this theory is coping methods that play a crucial role when irregular students deal with stress, time management, and competing demands on their resources. The approach encourages educational institutions to take the initiative in identifying and providing the required support mechanisms for this distinct student group.

Conceptual Framework

This section presents the conceptual framework of this study.

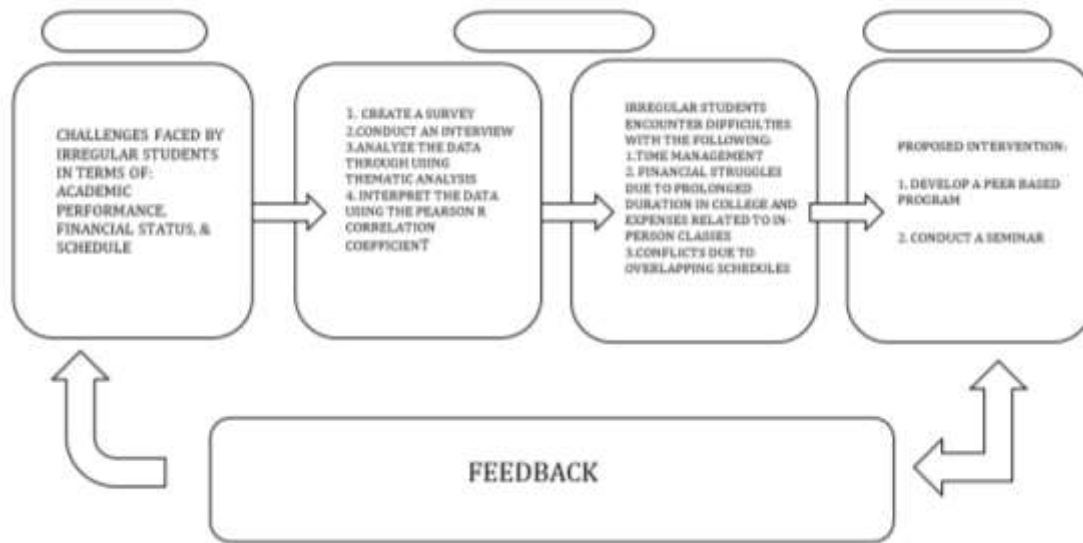


Figure 2. Conceptual Framework

The framework shown above illustrates the systematic process and path of this research that features four frames, the input, process, and output.

The input frame shows the significant data for evaluation. The data to be assessed are the specific challenges encountered by irregular students at Laguna University in terms of their academic performance, financial status, and schedule.

The process frame displays the methods for data gathering and data analysis including the Thematic analysis and the statistical method to be employed which is the Pearson r Correlation Coefficient. It also includes the findings from the collected data.

The output of the study includes the proposed intervention after identifying the challenges encountered by irregular students. The proposed intervention is to develop a peer based program and conduct a seminar for irregular students to help them catch up with their classmates and guide them in navigating the university system for them to avoid encountering challenges regarding their schedule and help them manage their time effectively.

Research Significance

This study aims to provide relevant information regarding the life experiences of irregular students. The findings of this study will greatly contribute to the following:

1. **Students.** This study will benefit the students by giving insight that will help them understand the situation of irregular students as it will focus on the life experiences of their fellow students on a daily basis. This will help the students to differentiate their status compared to irregular students and encourage them to persevere and give more importance to their studies.
2. **Teachers.** This will guide the teachers to handle situations concerning irregular students. This will also provide a different perspective towards irregular students in their class.
3. **Administrators and Staff.** This study will give awareness about the experiences of irregular students in the university. This may serve as a guide and reference to improve and develop school policies to support and provide immediate attention with regards to the concerns of irregular students.
4. **The Researchers.** This study will be beneficial to the researchers by looking into the experiences of their fellow irregular students. This will help the researchers to seek strong evidence that will support the claims of this research. The researchers will also gain relevant information and knowledge about the respondents to finish this study.
5. **Future Researchers.** This study will serve as a useful reference for future researchers who plan to conduct any related study about irregular students.

Scope and Limitations

This study focuses on the challenges faced by irregular students from the College of Education in Laguna University. Irregular students including the students with back subjects, students who shift from other programs or departments to the college of education, returnees and transferees will be the

respondents of this study. The researchers will provide an insight and have a broader perspective on the situation of irregular students in the College of Education.

The target population are the first year, second year, third year irregular students from the programs Bachelor of Secondary Education (BSED) Majors in English, Math and Science and Elementary Education (BEED) under the College of Education during the Academic Year 2023-2024.

This study may encounter potential limitations throughout the procedure of this research. The availability of the respondents may impact this study because some students may not be available due to their tight schedule.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are defined for a better understanding of this study:

Challenges. Difficulties and struggles encountered by irregular students. This is one of the factors determined in the study.

Experiences. Day-to-day events encountered by irregular students inside the university.

Irregular Student. It refers to transferees, continuers, students who shifted from a different program, and students with back subjects who enrolled under the College of Education in Laguna University.

Social Inclusion. Refers to the interactions of the irregular students in the university, their social relationships, including friendships, participation and cooperation towards their fellow students.

Review of Relevant Literatures.

In the University of the Philippines Diliman, college students are classified differently. Students of UP Diliman can be classified as regular and irregular. A student can be classified as irregular when the student is registered for formal credit but carries less than the full load given in a semester by the curriculum in which the student is registered (UPD Office of the Registrar, n.d.).

Student irregularity is one of the primary issues among college students globally. Kalita (2022) conducted a study focusing on the issue of student irregularity in India. Despite their government's efforts to provide free and compulsory education, student irregularity remained a challenge in many schools. This study identified the factors that affects students irregularity including poor economic condition, personal, home, school, and peer factors, and being neglected by their classmates.

Shifting of programs is one of the common factors on how college students become irregular. Jareta et al., (2019) looked into the motivations behind the switching of their majors of students at University of Santo Tomas Faculty of Arts where they uncovered the obstacles to the completion of their bachelor's degree which is having the feeling of stigma.

Additionally, in a study conducted by Halasz & Bloom (2019), revealed that there are various factors on how students become irregular, one of these is when a student shifts from one course to another, the adjustments made by undergraduate students' transition as they leave their selective degree programs. The results of their research showed that there are two main factors that cause the students to switch programs. 64% of the participants lack interest in their major related courses while the remaining 46% switch programs due to academic difficulty. Additionally it also showed that the students who switched to a new program encountered setbacks in the process because some found their situation complex and frustrating. In addition, based on the results, students also found switching of programs "inconvenient" because of the paperwork that should be accomplished to be released and be admitted to a new program.

Similarly, in the doctoral thesis by Almuarik (2019) examined the repatriation experience of eight Saudi postgraduate students who studied in the UK. The research focused on the challenges they encountered and the need for readjustment upon their return in Saudi Arabia. The analysis revealed the interplay of psychological and sociocultural in the repatriation experience which supports the concepts of spill-over and crossover.

However, Ivancevic et al., (2020) highlights concerns regarding the relationship between the students' workloads and their stress related burn-out.

Aside from stress related to their academic workloads and the transitioning into their new college program, students also experiences challenges regarding their social relationships. Existing researches by Ching et al., (2021) suggested that transfer students in universities experiences restricted social integration due to restricted social circles and having a sense of inferiority. According to Moeller and Seehuus (2019) improving students' social skills could help in reducing mental health burdens and will help improve overall well-being.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

To determine the life experience of irregular students from college of education in Laguna University. The researchers employed a mixed method design which is a combination of qualitative and quantitative approach in gathering data from the respondents.

The researchers sought permission from the students of the College of Education at Laguna University to conduct a survey. They explained the importance of the study to the respondents and clarified certain terms to ensure they understood their role as participants. Also, the researchers emphasized the need for honest responses. The data was collected through a focus group where irregular students shared their experiences and responses to the challenges they faced. By presenting these experiences, the study aims to inform others about the circumstances faced by irregular students. Following the interviews, the data was organized and analyzed. Researchers identified key viewpoints to include in the study and discarded those that were not relevant to the research.

Management and Treatment of Data

Researchers interviewed a group of Irregular Students from the College of Education and asked the students open-ended questions about their experiences. The interview should be designed to obtain information about the students' experiences such as the challenges they face in balancing their studies with other commitments, their motivations for becoming irregular students, and their relationships with their professors and classmates. The researchers may use the Thematic Analysis method. This is a useful tool for studying the life experiences of Irregular Students from the College of Education. It can help to identify the challenges that irregular students face. With the use of this data, development of service and programs to irregular students can be enhanced and this enables them to succeed in college. Thematic analysis is a method that can be used to analyze a wide variety of data sources like interviews, focus groups, and surveys Kiger, M., & Varpio, L. (2020).

Results and Discussion

The results from the data gathered are presented in this chapter. The presentation, the results of the thematic analysis, and interpretation of data collected by the researchers are also presented in this chapter. The responses of the respondents are presented in tabular form.

The findings are based on the research statement of the problem where the research questionnaires are aligned.

Table 1. *Challenges encountered by Irregular students*

Aspect	Frequency	Percentage
Time Management	7	43.75%
Financial Struggles	8	50%
Schedule conflicts	10	62.5%
Total	25	

Table 1. shows that 7 students (i.e. 43.75%) out of 16 encounters difficulty in terms of time management. Based on the study conducted by Alyami et al. (2021), results revealed that an effective time management such as pre-planning studies, maintaining to-do lists, managing workloads efficiently, and meeting deadline were associated with higher GPAs. This indicates that time management is found to be beneficial for the academic achievement and overall success in the academic performance of the students. Aside from time management, 8 students (i.e. 50%) out of 16, experiences financial struggles due to differing reasons. 10 students (i.e. 62.5%) which is more than half of the sample addressed having stressful situations due to schedule conflicts.

Themes	Statements	Descriptions
Struggle with Time Management	Participant 3: <i>"As an irregular student, I encounter difficulties when it comes to my academics are time management."</i>	Students expressed complexities in balancing their schedules and managing time.
	Participant 5: <i>"Time management is a challenge for me."</i>	
	Participant 7: <i>"I think its the different subjects and time management as well."</i>	
	Participant 8: <i>"For me, its just time management that makes being an irregular student more challenging."</i>	

	<p>Participant 10: <i>"Due to overload subjects, I find it hard to manage my time efficiently."</i></p> <p>Participant 11: <i>"Time management is one of the most difficult thing that I experience."</i></p> <p>Participant 16: <i>"Time management and conflicting schedules in subjects are the challenges that I experience as an irregular student."</i></p>	
Financial Difficulties	<p>Participant 4: <i>"I do experience difficulties when it comes to my finances because I had no choice but to attend a single class in a day."</i></p> <p>Participant 6: <i>"I have more expenses because there are lot of days scheduled for face to face classes."</i></p> <p>Participant 7: <i>"I will have more expenses because I will study for more than 4 years in college."</i></p> <p>Participant 11: <i>"I've experienced attending classes for only one subject in a day and it affects my budget and finances."</i></p> <p>Participant 12: <i>"I experience difficulties in terms of finances during reporting and demo seasons."</i></p> <p>Participant 16: <i>"There are subjects that we need to file for a petition and pay for it."</i></p>	Students experiences differing levels of financial difficulties which are expenses associated with face-to-face classes, extended duration in college, and additional expenses for certain subjects.
Conflicting Schedules	<p>Participant 11: <i>"I find it stressful when my schedules overlap and I had to deal with overwhelming activities."</i></p> <p>Participant 14: <i>"It's a bit challenging because I had to deal with new subjects and there are busy days because of overlapping schedules. P14."</i></p>	Conflicting and overlapping schedules are challenges common among irregular students.

This table presents the thematic analysis providing the overview of challenges encountered by irregular students in the College of Education. Within the themes found, the following are the most common among the students: Difficulty in time management, financial struggles, and schedule conflicts. Most of the participants have trouble managing their time efficiently. This aspect is very essential in relation to the study of Ayami et al. (2021) that having an effective time management is associated with higher GPAs, indicating its importance in the academic achievement and overall performance of the student.

Moreover, some students are struggling financially which are commonly associated with their educational expenses ranging from transportation fees, additional expenses for other subjects, and future expenses due to the prolonged duration in college. Furthermore, conflicting schedule is a notable challenge among irregular students. Based on the analysis, students become stressed-out and frustrated when their schedules overlap. This leads to overwhelming workloads and difficulties in the efficient management of their academic responsibilities. These challenges impact the academic experience and well-being of the students, emphasizing the need for the adequate support and intervention to address the diverse needs of these students

Table 2. *Effects of being an Irregular Student*

Dimensions	Frequency	Percentage
Intellectual: Negative Impact on Academic Performance	7	43.75%
Emotional: Stress	7	43.75%
Social: Close relationship with peers	13	81.25%
Total	27	

Table 2. shows the effects of being an irregular student on different dimensions including intellectual, emotional, and social. It was revealed that among the 16 students, 7 of them (i.e. 43.75%) are being affected negatively on the academic performance. Aside from their academic achievement, the students' are affected emotionally, as some students stated that they are experiencing stress due to their state of being irregular. Despite its negative effects, being

an irregular student exhibits a positive effect on some students. 13 out of 16 students (i.e. 81.25%) expressed that they have a close relationship with their peers and classmates indicating its positive impact among the students.

Themes	Statements	Descriptions
Impacts on Academic Achievement	<p>Participant 2: <i>"I got lower grades."</i></p> <p>Participant 6: <i>"It does have an impact on my academic performance, changes in subjects and schedules sometimes make it a bit harder to do well in my studies."</i></p> <p>Participant 14: <i>"I do find it stressful for the reason that it is not just about my academic performance it is also about my well being."</i></p>	Students voiced worries on the negative impacts of being an irregular students to their academic performance.
Stress	<p>Participant 2: <i>"I find being an irregular student, stressful because of my schedule."</i></p> <p>Participant 4: <i>"It is stressful because I have to consider many things aside from my assessment tasks and projects."</i></p> <p>Participant 5: <i>"It feel stressed because I wasn't able to graduate on time and had a feeling of being left out by my former classmates."</i></p> <p>Participant 6: <i>"I do find it stressful. Being irregular means I'm constantly adapting to new subjects and schedules, and the need for frequent adjustments adds extra pressure and stress."</i></p> <p>Participant 9: <i>"It is stressful because of the schedules and academic requirements."</i></p> <p>Participant 10: <i>"It is stressful somehow because I have limited time."</i></p> <p>Participant 15: <i>"I find it stressful sometimes like for example your subjects are overloaded."</i></p>	Students emphasized stressors associated with being an irregular student.
Close Relationship with Peers	<p>Participant 3: <i>"I made friends from different years."</i></p> <p>Participant 5: <i>"I became close to them and gained some friends."</i></p> <p>Participant 9: <i>"I'm close to them. In the first place it's not easy to get close to them but as time goes by and being with them when they have class they become close to me."</i></p> <p>Participant 11: <i>"Even though I am an irregular student I manage to be close or get along with my classmates."</i></p>	Students despite being irregular successfully formed a strong social relationship.

The table above shows the thematic analysis of the effects of being an irregular student. Results from the study revealed that the state of being irregular of the students from the College of Education has both positive and negative impacts.

It was indicated that being an irregular student has an impact on the academic achievement of some students. Most of the students expressed worries and concerns as the state of being irregular affects their overall academic performance negatively.

In addition, the feeling of stress is prevalent among irregular students in the College of Education. Too much workload, overlapping schedules, transitioning and adapting to a new program, as well as the feeling of being left-out by former classmates, are some of the stressors mentioned by the students. Also, in the study conducted by Ramon-Arbues et al. (2018), stress, anxiety, and depression are prevalent among college undergraduate students. Additionally, Ivancevic et al. (2020) revealed that stress-related burnout is linked with the student's workload, supporting the results of this study.

In line with this, despite its negative effects, there is a positive effect attributed to being an irregular student. Majority of the participants revealed that they have a close relationship with their peers, indicating that the students developed a good rapport with their classmates.

Table 3. *Significant relationship between the challenges and the effects of being an irregular student.*

	<i>Challenges encountered by irregular students</i>			
<i>Criteria</i>	<i>Computed r-value</i>	<i>Critical Value</i>	<i>p-value</i>	<i>Analysis</i>
<i>Effects of being an irregular student</i>	0.815	0.213	0.00	<i>Significant</i>

The table reveals that the computed r-computed value of 0.815 is greater than the r-critical value of ± 0.213 with a p-value of 0.00 at 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, the hypothesis stating that there is a significant relationship between the challenges and the effects of being an irregular student is rejected. It implies that there are factors of challenges and effects of irregular students that affect the study to make the results significant. Based on the given data, it can be concluded that there is correlation between challenges and effects of irregular students and have significance.

Research Implications

Summary of Findings

This study aimed to determine the challenges faced by irregular students of Laguna University College of Education for the Academic Year 2022-2023. Specifically, this study sought to: 1.) Determine the challenges encountered by Irregular students of Laguna University under the College of Education for the Academic Year 2022-2023 in terms of their academic performance, finances, and schedule. 2.) Determine the effects of being an Irregular student in terms of their emotional well being and their social relationships. 3.) Determine the if there is a significant relationship between the challenges and the effects of being an irregular student and propose an intervention program that will help in solving the difficulties and effects of being an irregular student.

Navigating and transitioning to university life can already be challenging for some people. Tertiary education is way different compared to elementary and high school. It goes beyond with what the student have learned in secondary education, it is a formal education that will help someone acquire better opportunities and pursue their career path. And being an irregular student poses a much greater challenge because these students have different status compared to regular students who follow the curriculum. These challenges ranges from having difficulties in terms of time management, difficulties in terms of finances, and experiencing conflicts with their schedule.

In addition, being an irregular students affects the students on different dimensions and manner which includes negative impacts on their academic performance such as getting lower grades. Stress is also prevalent and common among irregular students under the College of Education due to their workloads, schedules, and difficulties in transitioning and adapting into their new program. But despite these negative effects, being an irregular student can create a positive impact because it was revealed that most of students managed to build rapport with their classmates.

Conclusions from Research Data

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions were drawn:

The results of the research study clearly showed that irregular students in Laguna University College of Education experiences different challenges which vary from their personal experiences. The thematic analysis revealed that students experience challenges in terms of their academic performance. The findings revealed that students have difficulty in time management. Some students also experience difficulties in balancing their schedules and transitioning and adjusting from new subjects and fields of study. Some students also addressed financial difficulties due varied reasons such as prolonged academic journey and the expenses during in-person classes such as attending a single class a day. In terms of socialization, most of the participants revealed that they have a positive relationship with their classmates.

The findings on the effect of being an irregular student on their emotional well being is worth noting. Findings revealed that being an irregular student is stressful due to their academic workloads and the difference on their schedule.

Irregular students despite having difficulties, managed to have different coping mechanisms and developed different strategies to manage their academic workloads. Findings revealed that irregular students were able to adapt with different situations that they were in and deal with the changes in their environment.

These findings emphasized the great need to address the issues encountered by irregular students. Through collaborative efforts, with their peers, environment, and within themselves, they may overcome the challenges and the effects of being an irregular student.

Research and Policy Recommendation

Based on the results and conclusions that were mentioned above, the following recommendations are hereby suggested:

1. Develop peer-based programs that will help irregular students in catching up with their classmates while also allowing them to create a strong relationship with their peers.

2. Conduct a seminar for irregular students that focuses on guiding them in navigating the university system for them to avoid encountering challenges regarding their schedule and help them manage their time effectively.
3. Future researchers may conduct further research on the challenges faced by irregular students in college education programs, as there will be a time in the future when the students will have more reasons to become irregular students.
4. Future researchers may also focus on irregular students from other programs because this will help them identify other factors aside from the findings of this study.

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