

# **Intervention Program Utilizing the Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Framework in Increasing Levels of Self-Esteem and Adaptation Among Freshman Students**

Marichu P. Diendo, Ramon Magsaysay Memorial Colleges, Inc., Philippines  
Ailene Grace T. Montejo, Ramon Magsaysay Memorial Colleges, Inc., Philippines

The Asian Conference on Psychology & the Behavioral Sciences 2026  
Official Conference Proceedings

## **Abstract**

This study implemented an evidence-based intervention program using the Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) framework to increase self-esteem and adaptation to college among Freshman students at Ramon Magsaysay Memorial Colleges, General Santos City, Philippines. It also determined its effectiveness in improving self-esteem and adaptation to college, and explored the insights and benefits gained by freshman students during the intervention. The researchers employed a mixed-methods research design, particularly the Embedded Design. The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) and Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ) were utilized to measure the levels of self-esteem and adaptation of 35 participants before and after the intervention. The intervention program, utilizing the Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) framework, was designed and developed by the researchers. Using the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test, there was a significant difference in participants' levels of self-esteem ( $Z = -2.816$ ,  $p = 0.005$ ) and in their adaptation to college before and after the implementation of the intervention program ( $Z = 2.47$ ,  $p = 0.0068$ ). Using the qualitative method, participants gained positive insights and benefits throughout the intervention. Themes generated revolved around how the Intervention Program helped participants improve their levels of self-esteem and adaptation to college. The Intervention Program was therefore found to be effective in improving the levels of Self-esteem and adaptation to college among the participants, as shown in the difference between pre- and post-intervention test scores, and in qualitative data on the insights and benefits gained by the participants during the course of the intervention program.

*Keywords:* intervention, self-esteem, adaptation to college, freshman students

**iafor**

The International Academic Forum  
[www.iafor.org](http://www.iafor.org)

## **Introduction**

In the Philippine context, where research reveals gaps in culturally sensitive SEL applications, an intervention program utilizing the Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) framework can be a potent tool to improve self-esteem and adaptation among first-year students. Research shows that although SEL programs are widely used worldwide, little is known about how they affect the adjustment and self-concept of Filipino students, making this a pertinent and timely area of study.

According to the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL, 2020), social and emotional learning (SEL) offers a framework for developing competencies in self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. Positive outcomes like resilience, confidence, and adaptation skills, all crucial for freshmen negotiating the move to higher education, are positively correlated with these characteristics.

SEL programs have been demonstrated worldwide to enhance academic performance, emotional control, and interpersonal skills in a variety of settings (Turan, 2021). However, most research is conducted in Western contexts, raising concerns about its cultural relevance.

Despite increased interest in SEL globally, a recent integrative review in the Philippine context highlighted the dearth of culturally and linguistically sensitive SEL interventions for Filipino students. Self-esteem and adjustment to college life were found to be significantly correlated in a study conducted in Calapan City, Philippines, highlighting the need for interventions that improve freshmen's self-concept and coping mechanisms (Hernandez, 2017).

Considering SEL's growing popularity, there is a dearth of scientific evidence about its efficacy in enhancing self-esteem and adaptability among first-year Filipino college students. The contextualization of current SEL programs to Filipino values, language, and sociocultural reality is frequently lacking. Few therapies specifically address the particular difficulties first-year college students encounter, such as peer integration, identity conflicts, and academic adjustment.

## **Research Objectives**

1. Study the level of self-esteem and college adaptation of the participants before and after the implementation of the Intervention Program.
2. Study how participants describe their insights and benefits gained during the implementation of the Intervention Program as an approach in improving their self-esteem and college adaptation.

## **Methodology**

This study employed a mixed-methods research design, particularly the Embedded Design, to determine the effectiveness of the Intervention Program, utilizing the Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) framework, in improving participants' self-esteem and college adaptation and their positive adjustment to college life. It explored the insights and benefits they gained, with reference to the Intervention Program as an approach to improving their self-esteem and college adaptation.

The researcher collected both quantitative and qualitative data. The two datasets were analyzed separately, and they addressed different research questions.

For quantitative data, a within-group experimental design, particularly the repeated-measures design, was used, in which participants in a single group receive all experimental treatments, with each group serving as its own control. The participants' levels of self-esteem and college adaptation were compared before and after the implementation of the Intervention Program. After the program was administered, the researcher obtained a measure or observation: the difference in the levels of self-esteem and college adaptation of the participants before and after the intervention program.

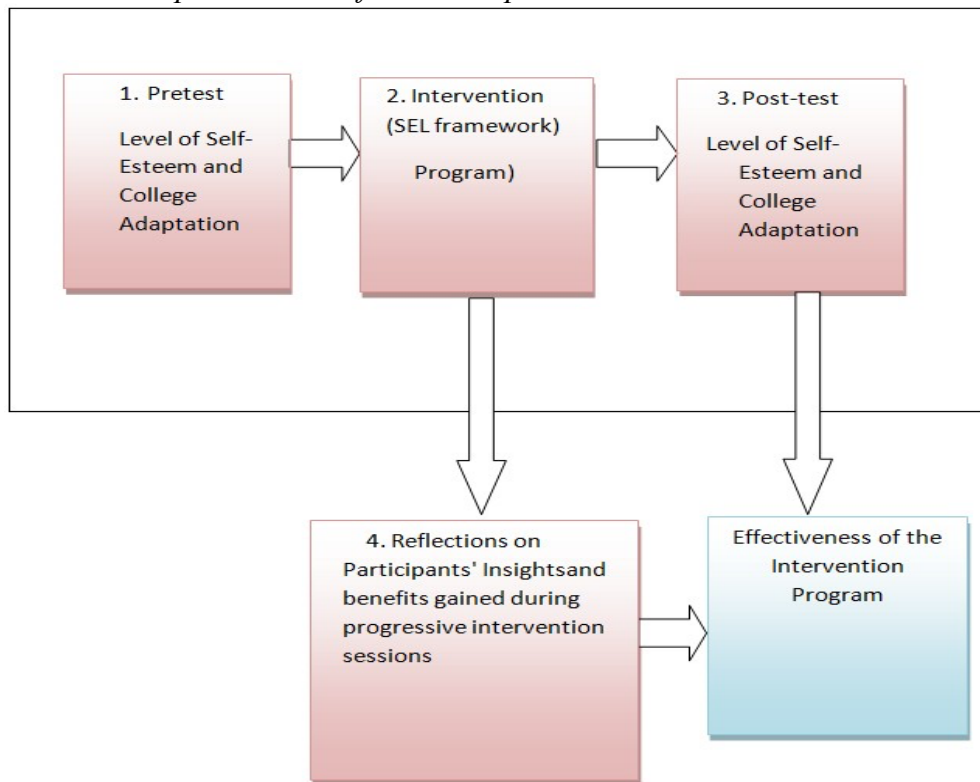
For qualitative data, an embedded design was used to identify relevant and consistent themes that would help generate an integrative explanation of the study. They were gathered during the implementation of the Intervention Program.

### **Conceptual Framework of Research**

The first box showed the participants' levels of self-esteem and college adaptation during the pretest. The second box contained the processes employed in implementing the Intervention Program, using the Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Framework to improve the subjects' self-esteem and college adaptation. The third box determined the participants' levels of self-esteem and college adaptation during the post-test. The first and third boxes underwent similar procedures and are referred to as the before and after the intervention boxes. The condition is also known as a within-subject quasi-experimental design. The fourth box, which is connected to the implementation of the Intervention Program, focuses on participants' reflections and insights, and the benefits they gained, which lead to more accurate self-assessment and are likely to increase their self-esteem and college adaptation.

Positive outcomes are realized when there is an increase in self-esteem and college adaptation among the participants after the Intervention Program is implemented. The effectiveness of the Intervention Program is further determined by exploring the insights and benefits gained by participants during program implementation.

**Figure 1**  
*Schematic Representation of the Conceptual Framework*



## Participants

The participants of the study were freshman female college students taking up a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology during the school year 2025–2026 at Ramon Magsaysay Memorial Colleges, General Santos City, Philippines.

The qualifications needed to be included as participants of this study were:

- 1) Those who are living in the boarding house due to the distance of their residences located outside the city
- 2) Those who obtained a rating of “low average” on the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire, which was administered during the Freshman College Orientation Program

Based on the inclusion criteria, there were thirty-five (35) female freshman college students who participated in the study.

The exclusion criteria of the participants were: 1) shifting of course from BA Psychology to another course during the second semester; and 2) failure to attend the intervention sessions for more than one session.

To describe the participants, their profiles were extracted from the Registrar's Office files with their consent and reported anonymously. Pseudonyms were assigned to each participant to ensure their identities remained confidential.

## **Research Instruments**

The following tools to collect pertinent data for this study: 1) the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) to gauge participants' self-esteem before and after interventions. (2) the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire; and (3) an intervention program that made use of the Social and Emotional Learning framework. The researchers created and developed this intervention program, and before it was put into practice, three (3) psychologists evaluated its content validity.

The researcher gathered qualitative data during the synthesis, integration, and debriefing phases of each Intervention Program session.

The researcher designed the Intervention Program to enhance participants' levels of self-worth and college readiness. A set of psycho-educational materials is provided in five (5) formal sessions as part of this therapeutic program. Every session focuses on a different facet of participants' experiences. Each session's progressing topic is articulated as follows:

- Session 1: Defining self provides opportunities for participants to comfort or soothe uncomfortable or anxious feelings in the group, and feel more grounded through exercises/techniques, and to develop a more complete, whole picture of self.
- Session 2: Sense of Self explores participants' thoughts and feelings about themselves and how to feel better about themselves.
- Session 3: Accurate Self-Assessment provides participants with opportunities to create a clear, accurate self-description and to learn to recognize and value the person they really are, rather than filtering out their strengths and magnifying their weaknesses.
- Session 4: Developing Self-Acceptance focuses on exploring participants' assumptions about themselves through “self-talk” and reinforces ways to become more aware of their choices to be more positive and less comparative to others.
- Session 5: Creating Healthy Relationships provides opportunities for participants to create a relationship map, identify the qualities of healthy and unhealthy relationships, and think of the relationships they want to continue and strengthen.

All sessions involve sharing, feedback, and creative representations, such as journaling in writing or drawing whatever feels right, to provide them with an opportunity for positive self-talk.

The last part of each session provides an opportunity for individual participants to reflect on the insights and benefits gained. Specific sessions are also formulated for Orientation and Pre-Assessment, Post-Program Assessment, and Program Debriefing.

## **Research Findings**

### **Level of Self-Esteem and College Adaptation of the Participants Before the Implementation of the Intervention Program**

The results indicate a statistically significant increase in participants' RSES mean scores from 21.4 to 28.7 ( $p < 0.05$ ) following the implementation of the intervention program, demonstrating notable improvements in self-esteem. Similarly, SACQ mean scores also increased significantly (65.2 to 78.9,  $p < 0.05$ ), suggesting enhanced overall adjustment to college life across academic, social, personal, emotional, and institutional domains.

Qualitative feedback further reinforces these quantitative findings. Students consistently reported feeling more confident, more socially connected, and better equipped to manage stress after participating in the program. Many described gaining practical strategies for navigating interpersonal challenges and maintaining emotional balance during the transition to university life.

Taken together, these findings support the hypothesis that SEL-based interventions effectively strengthen both self-esteem and college adaptation among freshmen. The structured program equipped students with essential competencies, such as emotional regulation, relationship building, and responsible decision-making, which directly contributed to their improved well-being. Importantly, the intervention's cultural relevance played a critical role in its success. By integrating Filipino values such as *pakikipagkapwa* (shared identity, empathy, and interconnectedness) and community support, the program resonated more deeply with participants. It fostered a sense of belonging that is vital during their first year in college.

**Test of Significant Difference in the Level of Self-Esteem of the Participants Before and After the Implementation of the Intervention Program**

**Table 1**

*Test of Significant Difference in the Level of Self-Esteem of the Participants Before and After the Implementation of the Intervention Program*

|                   | N  | Mean | Standard Deviation | Z (Asymp. Sig. 2-tailed) | p- value | Decision  |
|-------------------|----|------|--------------------|--------------------------|----------|-----------|
| Pre-Intervention  | 35 | 21.4 | 2.15               | -2.816                   | .005     | Reject Ho |
| Post-intervention | 35 | 28.7 | 1.48               |                          |          |           |

Table 2 presents the test of the significant difference in the subjects' self-esteem levels before and after the implementation of the Eye Freedom Program. Based on the results of the Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test, the computed mean in the pre-intervention is 13.64 with a standard deviation of 2.15. On the other hand, the computed mean after the intervention is 19.27, with a standard deviation of 1.48. The Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) The value in this case was .005, the p-value for the test. The significance level is less than .05, indicating a difference between pre-intervention and post-intervention self-esteem test scores. The test showed that the intervention produced a statistically significant difference in the subjects' self-esteem test scores ( $Z = -2.816, p = 0.005$ ).

## Test of Significant Difference in the Level of College Adaptation of the Participants Before and After the Implementation of the Intervention Program

**Table 2**

*Test of Significant Difference in the Level of College Adaptation of the Participants Before and After the Implementation of the Intervention Program*

|                   | N  | Mean  | Standard Deviation | Z (Asymp. Sig. 2-tailed) | p-value | Decision  |
|-------------------|----|-------|--------------------|--------------------------|---------|-----------|
| Pre-Intervention  | 35 | 13.64 | 1.8                | 2.47                     | .0068   | Reject Ho |
| Post-Intervention | 35 | 19.27 | 1.72               |                          |         |           |

Table 2 shows the test of significance for the difference in the level of college adaptation of the participants before and after the implementation of the Intervention Program. Based on the results of the Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test, the computed mean in the pre-intervention is 13.64 with a standard deviation of 1.8. On the other hand, the computed mean after the intervention is 19.27, with a standard deviation of 1.72. The Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) The value in this case was 0.0068, the p-value for the test. The significance level is less than .05, indicating a difference between pre-intervention and post-intervention self-esteem test scores. The test showed that the intervention produced a statistically significant difference in the subjects' self-esteem test scores ( $Z = 2.47$ ,  $p = 0.0068$ ).

## Participants' Insights and Benefits Gained During the Implementation of the Intervention Program as an Approach to Improving Their Self-Esteem and College Adaptation

**Table 3**

*Themes Generated Around How the Intervention Program Helped Them Improve Their Self-Esteem and College Adaptation*

| Theme                                       | Description   |
|---|---|
| 1. Enhanced Self-Awareness                  | Participants reported gaining a deeper understanding of their emotions, thoughts, strengths, and personal challenges. This awareness helped them recognize how their internal states influence behavior and academic functioning. |
| 2. Improved Emotional Regulation            | Participants described learning strategies to manage stress, anxiety, and overwhelming situations. They reported feeling more capable of controlling emotional reactions and applying coping skills learned in the program.       |
| 3. Strengthened Interpersonal Relationships | Participants noted improvements in empathy, communication, and social interaction. They felt more connected to peers and experienced a greater sense of belonging within the group.   |

|  |   |
|--|---|
| 4. Increased Confidence and Self-Esteem          | Participants expressed feeling more confident, capable, and positive about themselves. They attributed this growth to affirmations, self-reflection, and recognition of personal strengths.                                 |
| 5. Better College Adaptation                     | Participants shared that the program helped them adjust more effectively to academic demands, manage time better, and stay motivated. They felt more prepared to navigate college life.                                     |
| 6. Meaningful Personal Insights and Life Lessons | Participants articulated realizations about self-care, resilience, emotional balance, and the importance of supportive relationships. These insights extended beyond the program and influenced their personal development. |

The qualitative data gathered from participants' reflections during and after the SEL-based Intervention Program revealed several interconnected themes. These themes illustrate how the program contributed to improvements in their self-esteem, emotional awareness, and college adaptation. The analysis highlights the internal processes participants experienced as they engaged with SEL competencies.

The SEL intervention program facilitated transformative learning experiences that participants perceived as beneficial for both personal and academic life. Overall, the qualitative findings suggest that participants experienced the SEL-based Intervention Program as empowering, supportive, and transformative. Their insights reflect meaningful growth in:

- Emotional awareness
- Self-regulation
- Social connectedness
- Confidence
- Academic adjustment

These perceived benefits align with the program's goals and reinforce the quantitative improvements observed in self-esteem and college adaptation.

### **Conclusions**

The intervention program, utilizing an SEL framework, has been shown to significantly enhance female freshman students' self-esteem, emotional regulation, and overall adaptation to college life. By intentionally cultivating skills such as self-awareness, responsible decision-making, and interpersonal communication, SEL-based programs help students navigate the social and academic challenges that often accompany the transition to higher education. These benefits extend beyond personal well-being; students who feel more confident and emotionally supported are better equipped to engage in coursework, build healthy peer relationships, and persist through academic obstacles.

Participants' reflections revealed that the program not only improved their emotional and social competencies but also fostered deeper personal insights and life lessons that extended beyond the intervention period. They described feeling more capable of managing stress, more connected to peers, and more confident in navigating college challenges. These qualitative

insights reinforce the quantitative improvements observed in self-esteem and college adaptation, confirming the program's effectiveness.

It would be beneficial for colleges and universities to incorporate SEL principles into orientation programs, freshmen seminars, and continuing student support programs given the significance of these results. In addition to facilitating a more easy transition, doing this also helps students succeed academically in time and feel like they belong on a regular school. SEL provides a useful, empirically supported approach for enhancing both individual resilience and the larger learning environment as educational institutions continue to place a high priority on holistic student development.

Given these outcomes, colleges and universities would be wise to embed SEL principles into orientation activities, freshmen seminars, and ongoing student support initiatives. Doing so not only promotes a smoother adjustment period but also contributes to long-term academic success and campus belonging. As institutions continue to prioritize holistic student development, SEL offers a practical, evidence-based pathway for strengthening both individual resilience and the broader learning environment.

## References

- CASEL. (2020). *What is SEL?* Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning.
- Pascarella, E. T., & Terenzini, P. T. (2005). *How College Affects Students: A Third Decade of Research*. Jossey-Bass.
- Rosenberg, M. (1965). *Society and the Adolescent Self-Image*. Princeton University Press.
- Taylor, R. D., Oberle, E., Durlak, J. A., & Weissberg, R. P. (2017). Promoting positive youth development through school-based social and emotional learning interventions: A meta-analysis. *Child Development, 88*(4), 1156–1171.