Emotional Intelligence and Its Relationship to Stress and Transition Shock Amongst First-Year College Students

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ABSTRACT

Freshmen students often experience transition shock as their environment change from high school to college. They are also under the impression that success in college depends solely on their intellect and usually do not consider emotional intelligence a factor into the success of their academic endeavors. The purpose of this study was to investigate emotional intelligence and its relationship to stress and transition shock amongst first-year college students. A descriptive-correlational research design was employed. One hundred nineteen respondents were chosen using purposive sampling technique. Frequency, percentage distribution, weighted mean, standard deviation, and Pearson r correlation coefficient test were used to analyze and treat the collected data. Respondents showed a high emotional intelligence having an overall mean of 2.73 (SD = 0.35). The extent of the respondents' stress was also high with an overall mean of 2.61 (SD = 0.59). As for the extent of transition shock felt by the respondents, the overall mean found is at 2.55 (SD = 0.52) which is also interpreted as high. A moderate negative significant relationship between emotional intelligence and stress (r = -0.476), as well as the relationship between emotional intelligence and transition shock (r = -0.417) among the freshmen. It is recommended that nursing students and educators become aware of emotional intelligence as a factor that contributes to the success of the students' transition from high school to college. Also, it is emphasized to further develop the emotional intelligence of the students to manage their stress and transition shock to aid in the success of the students' academic endeavors.

Keywords: Nursing, Emotional Intelligence, Transition Shock, Stress

INTRODUCTION

Adapting to a new environment has always been a challenge, even more so when everything an individual has known is left behind. This is said to be true when a new high-school graduate thrusts into their first year in college. Nakalema and Ssenyonga (2014) explain that due to high expectations, information overload, academic pressure, impractical ambitions, limited prospects, and high competitiveness, academic stress weighs down on the students,

making the adjustment into their new academic environment difficult. Tinto (as cited in Watson & Watson, 2016) stated that the first year in college is a difficult and imperative transitional period that can be attributed to either the students' academic success or failure.

The purpose of this study was to determine the relationship of EI to stress and transition shock among first-year college students. This study answered the following research questions:

1. What is the extent of the emotional intelligence of the respondents?
2. What is the extent of the stress of the respondents?
3. What is the extent of transition shock among the respondents?
4. Is there a significant relationship between emotional intelligence and stress among the respondents?
5. Is there a significant relationship between emotional intelligence and transition shock among the respondents?

LITERATURE REVIEW

A study done by Holinka (2015) at the University of Connecticut explored EI and stress and their relation to a student's life satisfaction. Findings revealed that the students' level of EI does not affect the students' stress level. This study confirmed the results of the study by Watson and Watson (2016), stating that EI also does not affect the students' stress level. On the contrary, a more recent investigation done by Bowen, Pilkington, and Rose (2016) revealed that there was a positive correlation between EI and perceived stress. Moreover, the study posited that academic employees with high EI were able to manage stress better than those with low EI. In another study done by Kauts (2016), it found that students with high Emotional Intelligence experienced lower academic stress.

On the other hand, transition shock is commonly associated with the experience that newly graduated nurse feels among themselves when they are adjusting to their new working environment (Duchscher, as cited in University of Tasmania, 2014). The same feeling could also be experienced by first-year college students. They are faced with new challenges, goals, and responsibilities and struggles to adapt to their new environment. Both the nurse and the first-year college student strive to survive in the situations they are faced with.

As a result of the stress and transition shock that these first-year college students experience, they begin to feel the burden of being in college. In the survey done by the National Alliance on Mental Illnesses (2012), it was revealed that almost two-thirds (64%) of the students

dropped out of college due to mental health reasons. The American Psychological Association (2017) also stated that the common concerns reported by the college students seeking counseling were anxiety (61%), depression (49%), stress (45%), and academic performance (28%). The study conducted by American freshman in 2014 by the University of California-Los Angeles, showed that the students who began college entered with just 50.7% reporting above-average emotional health; the lowest-ever level of emotional health. In the Philippines, there is about 89% dropout rate which means that the country produces 2.13 million college dropouts annually (Manila Bulletin, as cited in Orion, Forosuelo & Cavalida, 2014).

Though studies have been done to explore the relationship between students' emotional intelligence (EI) and stress, there is a dearth in the literature correlating EI to transition shock. Currently, there is a dearth of literature correlating EI to stress among first-year college students. Furthermore, no studies have been conducted to correlate EI and transition shock. Thus, this study was conducted. This study looked into the relationship between the EI and the stresses experienced by first-year college students. This study also investigated the relationship of emotional intelligence to the transition shock felt by the first-year college students.

METHODS

This study utilized the descriptive-evaluative design to determine the emotional intelligence, level of stress and level of transition shock of the respondents. The study also used the descriptive-comparative research design, in which the extent of the variables was compared according to their age, gender, ethnicity and family income. Also, it compared the effect of the emotional intelligence of an individual on the stress level and transition shock level. The study first observed a difference that exists within a group of people and then looked back in time to determine possible conditions that might have resulted in this observed difference (Mertler, 2014). Lastly, the study used a descriptive-correlational design to determine the relationship between emotional intelligence to level of stress and the relationship of emotional intelligence to transition shock among the respondentsCorrelational studies do not test the casual relationship but rather test the extent of the relationship between variables.

The target population for this study was the first-year college students who are staying in-campus. A purposive sampling technique had been utilized to select the respondents who met the following criteria: The first-year college students who were enrolled during the inter-

semester of 2018, stayed in-campus, 16-22 years old, could read and understand English, and were willing to participate First year college students that are more than 22 years, staying with parents or living off-campus, taking second courses, married or with small children, and from the college of medicine, are all excluded from the study.

The instrument that has been used in the study is the questionnaire-checklist, which is composed of three parts namely:

1. The first part includes a demographic profile to collect the information on the respondents such as age, sex, ethnicity, and family income.

2. The second part of the questionnaire assesses the dimension of emotional intelligence. The questionnaire was adapted from the Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire-Short Form (TEIQue-SF). The test is predicated on trait EI theory, which conceptualizes emotional intelligence as a personality trait, located at the lower levels of personality hierarchies (Petrides, Pita & Kokkinaki, 2007). The TEIQue- SF consists of 30-items including two items from each of the 15 facets of the TEIQue. Whereas global trait EI is the average score of all 30 items, the four subscale scores are derived from 26 of these items: Well-Being, Self-Control, Emotionality, and Sociability (Petrides& Furnham, 2006). The statements ask the emotion-related aspects of the personality of the respondents.

3. The third part of the questionnaire measured the individual's stress levels. The questionnaire had been adapted from the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) which was originally developed in 1983 that remains to help understand how different situations affect people's feelings and their perceived stress. It includes ten questions that ask about the feelings and thoughts that the respondents have experienced in the last month. For each question, the frequency of thoughts and feelings was asked to be indicated.

To interpret the results and findings, a Likert-type scale with its verbal interpretation had been used. A four-point Likert scale and the degree of intensity together with the verbal interpretation are explained in Tables 1, 2 and 3 below.

Table 1. **EI Assessment Criteria**

LIKERT SCALE		Verbal Interpretation	Weighted Mean Interval
Response Scale	**Degree of Intensity**		
4	Strongly Agree	Very High	3.50 - 4.00
3	Agree	High	2.50 - 3.49
2	Disagree	Low	1.50 - 2.49
1	Strongly Disagree	Very Low	1.00 - 1.49

Table 2. **Extend of Stress Assessment Criteria**

LIKERT SCALE		Verbal Interpretation	Weighted Mean Interval
Response Scale	**Degree of Intensity**		
4	Always	Very High	3.50 - 4.00
3	Often	High	2.50 - 3.49
2	Sometimes	Low	1.50 - 2.49
1	Never	Very Low	1.00 - 1.49

Table 3. **Transition Shock Assessment Criteria**

LIKERT SCALE		Verbal Interpretation	Weighted Mean Interval
Response Scale	**Degree of Intensity**		
4	Strongly Agree	Very High	3.50 - 4.00
3	Agree	High	2.50 - 3.49
2	Disagree	Low	1.50 - 2.49
1	Strongly Disagree	Very Low	1.00 - 1.49

This study was subjected to Ethics Review by the Ethics Review Board (ERB) of the Adventist University of the Philippines. The ERB then issued a certification to conduct the study. As part of the ethical consideration of the study, informed consent was secured from the respondents to voluntarily participate in the study. Before the study was conducted, a complete explanation of the purpose and nature of the study had been given to the respondents. A verbal consent had also been given to the respondents, indicating that all data

collected will be kept with confidentiality, specifically by removing the names of the respondents. Confidentiality in dealing with the data that was gathered was also observed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Extent of Emotional Intelligence

Table 4 shows the perceived extent of the first-year college students' emotional intelligence and the analysis and interpretation of the results. It presents that the majority of the respondents "generally believe that things will work out fine in their life", with a mean of 3.26 (SD = .6946). It is followed by the responses of the respondents that they "feel that they have a number of good qualities" giving the mean of 3.19 (SD = .7281). The third highest item is "generally, I'm able to adapt to new environments", having a mean of 3.08(SD = .8198). These items were all interpreted as *high*.

However, the item that ranked lowest has a mean of 2.10(SD = .7961) stating "I tend to change my mind frequently". The second to the lowest in rank is "I tend to get involved in things I later wish I could get out of", with a mean of 2.24(SD = .8127). The item that ranks third to the lowest states "many times, I can't figure out what emotion I'm feeling" and presents the mean of 2.26(SD = .8969). These are all interpreted as *low*.

The over-all mean score of emotional intelligence of the respondents is 2.73(SD = .3505) and is interpreted as *high*.

Table 4. **The Extent of Emotional Intelligence of the Respondents**

Item No.	Emotional Intelligence	WM	SD	VR	VI
2.	I generally believe that things will work out fine in my life.	3.26	.6946	Agree	High
3.	I feel that I have a number of good qualities.	3.19	.7281	Agree	High
29	Generally, I'm able to adapt to new environments.	3.08	.7544	Agree	High
6.	I generally don't find life enjoyable.	3.08	.9350	Agree	High
1.	On the whole, I'm pleased with my life.	3.08	.7720	Agree	High
18	I often pause and think about my feelings.	3.06	.7951	Agree	High
20	I can deal with people effectively.	3.01	.7865	Agree	High
10.	I'm usually able to find ways to control my emotions when I want to.	3.00	.8025	Agree	High
4.	I believe I'm full of personal strengths.	2.98	.7477	Agree	High
11.	On the whole, I'm able to deal with stress.	2.98	.7700	Agree	High

21	I would describe myself as a good negotiator.	2.92	.7497	Agree	High
19	Those close to me often complain that I don't treat them right.	2.91	.9387	Agree	High
30	On the whole, I'm a highly motivated person.	2.82	.8198	Agree	High
12	Others admire me for being relaxed.	2.78	.8147	Agree	High
13	Expressing my emotions with words is not a problem for me.	2.76	.9385	Agree	High
16	I often find it difficult to see things from another person's viewpoint.	2.73	.7778	Agree	High
28	I find it difficult to bond well even with those close to me.	2.67	.9030	Agree	High
22	I often find it difficult to stand up for my rights.	2.57	.8789	Agree	High
15	I often find it difficult to show my affection to those close to me.	2.50	.9286	Disagree	Low
26	I often find it difficult to adjust my life according to the circumstances.	2.49	.8011	Disagree	Low
25	I don't seem to have any power at all over other people's feelings.	2.45	.7784	Disagree	Low
7.	I usually find it difficult to regulate my emotions.	2.40	.8048	Disagree	Low
27	I normally find it difficult to keep myself motivated.	2.34	.8952	Disagree	Low
23	I tend to "back down" even if I know I'm right.	2.34	.8856	Disagree	Low
17	Many times, I can't figure out what emotion I'm feeling.	2.26	.8969	Disagree	Low
8.	I tend to get involved in things I later wish I could get out of.	2.24	.8127	Disagree	Low
9.	I tend to change my mind frequently.	2.10	.7961	Disagree	Low
Overall Emotional Intelligence		**2.73**	**.3505**	**Agree**	**High**

Legend: 1.00-1.49 = strongly disagree; 1.50-2.49 = disagree; 2.50-3.49 = agree; 3.50-4.00 = strongly agree
WM-Weighted Mean; SD-Standard Deviation; VR: Verbal Response; VI-Verbal Interpretation.

According to Petrides (2013), people with high EI own a perceived capacity to understand, process, and use information about their and other people's emotions in their everyday life. The findings showed that the majority of the freshman students can monitor own and other people's emotions, to discriminate between different emotions and label them appropriately and to use emotional information to guide thinking and behavior. Also, the EI score reflects

that they have abilities to join intelligence, empathy, and emotions to enhance thought and understanding of interpersonal dynamics.

People with high scores on EI can recognize and express feelings and utilize these characteristics to develop and maintain close relationships with significant others. Also, they have a strong level of controlling their urges and wants and can adjust to external pressures and stress (Petrides as cited in Andrei, Smith, Surcinelli, Baldaro, & Saklofske, 2015).

Andrei et al. (2015) also described that EI also includes sociability factor, which indicates that higher EI better the social interactions they have in society. They can communicate and express themselves clearly and confidently, which closely links with leadership as well.

The Extent of Stress of the Respondents

As inferred from Table 5, the item which ranked highest has a mean of 2.92 (*SD* = .819.), the question states "How often have you felt nervous and stressed?" and is interpreted as *high*. The second highest item states, "How often have you felt that you were unable to control the important things in your life?", is interpreted as *high* and has a mean of 2.65 (*SD* = .829).

On the contrary, the item which ranks second to the lowest states, "How often have you felt difficulties were piling up so high that you could not overcome them?", has a mean score of 2.45 (*SD* = .861) and is interpreted as *low*. The item which had the lowest mean of 2.43 (*SD* = .94) states "How often have you found that you could not cope with all the things you had to do?", is also interpreted only as *low*.

Lastly, the table also indicates that the overall mean of the perceived stress level of the respondents has a mean of 2.61 (*SD* = .5913) which is interpreted as *high*.

Table 5. **The Extent of Stress of the Respondents**

Item No.	Perceived Stress	WM	SD	VR	VI
3	How often have you felt nervous and stressed?	2.92	.819	Often	High
2	How often have you felt that you were unable to control the important things in your life?	2.65	.829	Often	High
1	How often have you been upset because of something that happened unexpectedly?	2.61	.805	Often	High
9	How often have you been angered because of things that happened	2.59	.858	Often	High

	outside of your control?				
10	How often have you felt difficulties were piling up so high that you could not overcome them?	2.45	.861	Sometimes	Low
6	How often have you found that you could not cope with all the things that you had to do?	2.43	.720	Sometimes	Low
	Overall Perceived Stress Level	**2.61**	**0.5913**	**Often**	**High**

Legend: 1.00-1.49 = Never; 1.50-2.49 = Sometimes; 2.50-3.49 = Often; 3.50-4.00 = Always
WM-Weighted Mean; SD-Standard Deviation; VR: Verbal Response; VI-Verbal Interpretation.

The results of the study showed that the respondents often feel stressed and nervous during their first year in college. This is expected from incoming students who are still trying to cope with their new responsibilities, academic requirements, and overall living environment. All these things bring about stresses and nervousness to the students. First-year students often feel stresses, loneliness, and the new responsibilities they undertake may at times overwhelm them (Bhujade, 2017).

The respondents also seem to feel that they are unable to control important aspects of their lives. A survey conducted by the Jed Foundation (2015) reported that about 51% of the first-year students surveyed felt stressed most of the time and 36% felt like they did not have control over things in their lives; the results of the survey corresponds to the findings of the study. This indicates that the respondents may have different decisions made for them, perhaps by their guardians or parents. This makes them feel that they have no independence or control over the things they would like to do in life. Overall, the results of this study show that the respondents often feel stressed in their day to day lives.

The Extent of Transition Shock of the Respondents

Table 6 shows that the item that ranks the highest is "I miss my parents". This item has a mean of 3.51 (*SD* = .72) and is interpreted as *very high*. The item that ranks second is the item that states "I miss my family members", with a mean of 3.44 (*SD* = .7880), interpreted as *high*. The third highest item is the item "I miss my friends from high-school" with a mean of 3.40 (*SD* =. 73.90) and is also interpreted as *high*.

The table also reflects items that rank lowest in mean scores. The lowest item found in the table is the item "I think about dropping out" with a mean of 1.61 (*SD* = .9123), interpreted as *low*. The second lowest item is "I don't like my course" which has a mean score of 1.89 (*SD* = .1.0151) and is interpreted as *low*. And lastly, the item with the third lowest mean score of

2.03 (*SD* = .1.0246) and interpreted as *low*, "I feel like my absences have increased since I got to college".

The overall transition shock level of the respondents has a mean score of 2.55 (*SD* = .5230) which is interpreted as *high*.

Table 6. **The Extent of Transition Shock of the Respondents**

Item No.	Perceived Stress	WM	SD	VR	VI
2.	I miss my parents.	3.51	.7233	Strongly Agree	Very High
3.	I miss my family members.	3.44	.7880	Agree	High
1.	I miss my friends from high school.	3.40	.7390	Agree	High
4.	I felt like I want to go back home.	3.08	.9843	Agree	High
13	I'm worried about how I'll perform academically.	2.91	.9477	Agree	High
19	I feel exhausted from my academic responsibilities.	2.57	.9073	Agree	High
8	I like being away from my parents.	2.55	.9455	Agree	High
18	I'm worried about being in college in general.	2.37	.9731	Disagree	Low
14	It's hard for me to get along with new people.	2.35	1.005	Disagree	Low
17	Since coming to college, I have difficulty sleeping.	2.33	1.0585	Disagree	Low
9	I feel lonely at school.	2.29	.9945	Disagree	Low
10	Since starting my first year, I feel depressed about being in college.	2.25	.9848	Disagree	Low
15	I'm easily irritated by my peers.	2.19	.8663	Disagree	Low
12	I feel like my absences have increased since I got to college.	2.03	1.0246	Disagree	Low
5	I don't like my course.	1.89	1.0151	Disagree	Low
16	I think about dropping out.	1.61	.9123	Disagree	Low
	Overall Transition Shock Level	**2.55**	**.5230**	**Agree**	**High**

Legend: 1.00-1.49 = strongly disagree; 1.50-2.49 = disagree; 2.50-3.49 = agree; 3.50-4.00 = strongly agree
WM-Weighted Mean; SD-Standard Deviation; VR: Verbal Response; VI-Verbal Interpretation

The respondents perceived that they are experiencing transition shock. They strongly feel a sense of separation from their parents and miss their other family members and friends.

The research understands the college freshman experience as an identifiable period of transition. Students need to make their adjustments and to be supported by people and systems surrounded by them. According to Tinto, as cited in Brooman and Darwent(2013), students need to negotiate three separate stages: separation, transition, and incorporation.

Conley, travers, and Bryant (2013) discusses that college students often report loneliness, homesickness, and distress with interpersonal relationships, which is expected considering the respondents live in the dormitories and are away from home. The results showed that the students have not fully adjusted to their living situation and have not formed new friends due to still missing their old high-school friends. Adjusting to a new environment is never easy and may take time getting used to. Coming into college, students may seem to have a grasp on the "needed" tools and necessities to get by in the college setting. They bring habits they had developed in high-school, thinking it is "good enough" but when they are thrust into the college setting, everything is chaotic and they are not able to cope with the requirements of their college lives (Hirsch, 2010).

Relationship Between Emotional Intelligence and Stress Among the Respondents

As shown in Table 7, the *p*-value ($p = 0.000$) indicates that the relationship between emotional intelligence and stress is *significant*. Result also showed that there is a moderate negative relationship between emotional intelligence and stress ($R = -0.476$). This means that the higher the Emotional Intelligence, the lower the stress that the respondents experience. Also, it is interpreted that about 23% of the variance in stress can be explained by Emotional Intelligence ($r^2 = 22.66$). Thus, based on the statistical result, the null hypothesis stating that *there is no significant relationship between emotional intelligence and stress* is rejected.

Table 7. **Relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Stress among the Respondents**

| Indicator | Computed *r* | Emotional Intelligence | *p*-Value | Remark |
		Qualitative Description		
Perceived Stress	-.476	Moderate Negative Relationship	0.000	Significant

Legend: +1 Perfect Relationship, +0.91-+0.99 Very High Relationship, +0.71-+0.90 High Relationship, +0.41-+0.70 Moderate Relationship, +0.21-+0.40 Low Relationship, +0.01-+0.20 Negligible Relationship, 0 No Relationship Significant at P < 0.05

The findings of the study are congruent with the studies done by Bowen et al. (2016). The study investigated the relationship between emotional demands, emotional intelligence, and perceived stress among the academic employees. The result revealed the inverted relationship between them, which means as emotional intelligence increases, the perceived stress scale reduces.

In addition, the findings of the study are also in agreement with another study conducted by Kauts (2016). This study on the relationship between emotional intelligence and academic stress among 300 college students have shown that the students with high EI experienced lower academic stress, while the students with low EI reported high academic stress.

However, the findings of Kermani, Khoshbakht, Miri, and Moodi (2013) disagree with the results of the study. They conducted a cross-sectional study on students from four different faculties of medical sciences. The results of their study revealed that there was no significant correlation between EI scores and educational stress in students.

Relationship Between Emotional Intelligence and Transition Shock Among the Respondents

According to Table 8, the relationship between emotional intelligence and transition shock is significant, having a *p*-value of 0.000. It also reveals the moderate negative relationship between emotional intelligence and transition shock with the *r*-value of -.417. Hence, based on the statistical result, the null hypothesis stating *that there is no significant relationship between emotional intelligence and transition shock* is denied.

Table 8. **Relationship Between Emotional Intelligence and Transition Shock Among the Respondents**

Indicator	Computed *r*	Emotional Intelligence	*p*-Value	Remark
		Qualitative Description		
Transition Shock	-.417	Moderate Negative Relationship	0.000	Significant

Legend: +1 Perfect Relationship, +0.91-+0.99 Very High Relationship, +0.71-+0.90 High Relationship, +0.41-+0.70 Moderate Relationship, +0.21-+0.40 Low Relationship, +0.01-+0.20 Negligible Relationship, 0 No Relationship Significant at P < 0.05

It is an agreement to Parker, Summerfeldt, Hogan and Majeski (2004), who have conducted a study on the relationship between transition from high school to university and emotional intelligence among college freshman. The participants were all graduated high school within past 2 years. In order to measure the successful transition, they compared the high school grade-point-average (GPA) with the University GPA. The result showed that overall emotional intelligence scores was found to be poor predictors of academic success.

On the other hand, Parker et al.(2004) found that interpersonal, adaptability, and stress management abilities, which are included in emotional intelligence, seem to be important factors in successful transition from high school to university.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results, the first-year students have an agreeable perception of well-being, self-control, emotionality, and sociability. Moreover, their EI level appeared to be high. The first-year students perceive high stress in their daily life. Also, they agree that they have a hard time transitioning from high school to college, as their level of transition shock is also high. The following are the recommendations based on the findings of the study:

1. An emotional intelligence test can be conducted prior to the start of the semester to gauge the student. A test to measure stress level and transition shock level should be conducted to see how well the student acclimates to the new academic environment.

2. It is recommended that first-year nursing students become aware of their emotional intelligence. And one should emphasize on developing emotional intelligence to manage stress and transition shock at college to get success in their academic endeavors.

3. Therefore, it is suggested that an intervention program be provided to increase the students' overall emotional intelligence.

4. Nursing educators should become aware of the emotional intelligence of incoming first-year nursing students. By knowing how high or how low the students' emotional intelligence is, the nursing educators can factor this with the students' overall performance, and perhaps the nursing educators may be more flexible with their requirements.

5. It is recommended to emphasize stress management among the first-year students. A psychological intervention should be given to the students to lessen their stress level.

6. Also, the nursing educators should provide activities that can promote first-year students' transition into the new academic environment, if their transition shock level is found to be high.

7. Future research on the long-term effect of emotional intelligence may also be conducted to assess the extent of stress and transition shock in all levels, not just first-year students. Thus, one might expect the extent of stress and the extent of transition shock to change over the course of the student's college life. Students who have stayed in the university are likely to have a different extent of stress and transition shock at the end of their program when compared to levels at the start of their program, knowing that they have already adjusted to college life. Additional research

may also be investigated with the indicators for emotional intelligence namely: well-being, self-control, emotionality, and sociability. Lastly, the researchers recommend future studies on the topic of emotional intelligence, stress, or transition shock to be conducted using a larger sample size.

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