

## Challenges of Transition Faced by Freshman Students: An Academic Study

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### Abstract

The transition from senior high school to university often requires significant academic adaptation, particularly for students entering English Literature programs where learning approaches differ substantially from secondary education. This study examines the varied challenges faced by first-year English Literature students at Bangka Belitung University as they adapt to the shift from structured high school language learning to university-level study that emphasizes critical interpretation, literary theory, etc. Using a mixed-methods design involving 72 survey respondents and 5 interview participants, the study examines six domains of academic adaptation: teaching methods, course content, evaluative methods, psychological and educational support, academic environment, and learning conditions. Quantitative findings indicate that teaching methods constitute the most dominant challenge ( $M = 3.79$ ), followed by course content and learning conditions ( $M = 3.55$ ). Qualitative findings reveal that adaptation is not linear but interconnected, involving identity reconstruction, emotional regulation, and self-regulated learning development. The study addresses a research gap by bringing university system and individual experiences in learning English in an Indonesian university context. The results suggest the pedagogical reforms, structured orientation programs, and supportive assessment practices to help English Literature Students navigate their transition into university students.

**Keywords:** Academic Adaptation; English Literature Students; First Year Challenges; Higher Education Transition; Language Studies Learning

### INTRODUCTION

The global phenomenon indicates that difficulties experienced during college are a major factor leading to students' failure to complete their education (Hesti Purnamasari, et al, 2022). University learning environments are fundamentally different from high school learning contexts (Tuan, 2020). Research has consistently shown that the transition from high school to university presents significant challenges for students, particularly those in their first year. Studies by Pittman and Richmond (2008), Sotardi and Brogt (2016), and Chalapatia et al. (2018) emphasize that this transitional phase often creates academic, social, and psychological difficulties for new undergraduates. Supporting this view, a prospective cohort study by Clinciu (2013) identifies the first year of college as a critical developmental period in students' academic path.

In the context of English Literature programs, unlike the structured learning systems in high school, learning English languages in university emphasizes critical thinking, time management and self-regulated learning which often create significant adaptation pressures for first-year students (Credé & Niehorster, 2012). The transition to university learning involves not only general academic adaptation but also to new forms of language and literary study.

Major of English Literature is an academic program that focuses on the analysis of literary texts written, including novels, poem, drama, and other forms of English literary expression (Culler,

2011). This program also introduces students to a range of literary theories and critical approaches, which provide frameworks for interpreting and evaluating texts from different perspectives, therefore, students are expected to possess strong English proficiency (Barry, 2017).

Chemenya (2025) explains that first year students of English Literature often struggle from school reading practices to university academic reading because it is more complex and also demand the time management and independent learning. In Zhang (2024) also shows that students of English Literature face the transition to university must move from surface level reading to deeper interpretation of texts and meaning making processes in academic discourse. First year EFL students also faced the challenges transition in writing practices to university-level academic writing, many students struggle with grammar accuracy, organizing ideas coherently, and developing academic arguments, and also needing to adopt new strategies to meet the expectations of university writing (El Sulukiyyah, et al. 2026). Another challenge encountered by EFL students occurs when they need to write an analytical essays, or transforming their understanding into structured academic arguments, first year students often struggle with developing critical interpretations, organizing analytical ideas coherently, and expressing their interpretations using appropriate academic language (Setyowati et al. 2024). Awwalia and Rais (2024) examine the challenges faced by first-year students when dealing with structure section, which assesses grammatical knowledge and sentence patterns in academic English. These challenges indicate that students often enter university with limited mastery of advanced grammar which is essential for academic reading, writing, and comprehension in English-medium learning environments.

In light of these conditions, identifying the factors that influence first-year students' academic adaptation is crucial for enhancing learning outcomes and improving student retention in higher education (Tuan:2020). The demanding academic environment of higher education places students at risk of emotional challenges, including anxiety, fear, and uncertainty in decision-making and seeking support. Students often struggle to navigate academic expectations, develop social connections, and maintain academic performance, which can lead to decreased motivation and academic withdrawal (Agestia, et al.2024).

Previous studies have examined first-year student adaptation, however, they have largely focused on single dimensions such as psychological well-being, academic achievement, or social integration in isolation, thereby overlooking the inherently multidimensional nature of the adaptation process. In addition, limited attention has been given to academic-related factors, including teaching methods, course content, assessment systems, learning conditions, and institutional environments, particularly within specific disciplinary contexts such as English Literature. This limitation is further compounded by the dominance of studies conducted in Western settings, resulting in a lack of context-specific evidence from Indonesian higher education. Addressing these gaps, the present study adopts an integrative approach by combining quantitative and qualitative methods to examine the adaptation of first-year English Literature students at Bangka Belitung University. This study not only explores the challenges encountered during the transition to academic life but also identifies the strategies and key factors shaping students' learning adaptation. This study lies in its multidimensional conceptualization of adaptation, its use of a mixed-methods design to provide more nuanced insights, and its focus on an under researched local context, thereby offering a more comprehensive and contextually grounded understanding of students' transition and contributing to the improvement of learning support systems in higher education.

Pigozne et al. (2025) highlighted that students' adaptation to learning processes is shaped by the interaction of institutional, personal, and academic factors. Research shows that students' adaptation and integration into learning activities are affected by many factors. Other factors that affect the first year student's adaptation to learning activities include: the content or the course, teaching methods, evaluative methods, the psychological and educational support, the academic environment, and learning conditions (Tuan, 2020).

#### **a. The content or the course**

Fresh year students may find the contents or the courses harder to understand, leading to frustrations and decreased motivation when the course does not consider students' prior knowledge (Ambler, T, 2021). The contents or the courses are the academic materials, subject matter, and curriculum structure that college students are required to engage with in university learning. The curriculum in English Literature program generally integrates courses in language proficiency, linguistics, and literary studies in purpose to develop students' analytical, communicative, and interpretive abilities (Ronald Carter & John McRae, 2017).

English Literature students gain an understanding of how language functions in different social and cultural contexts through the study of grammar, discourse, and sociolinguistics (Victoria Fromkin et al., 2018). In other hand, there are also many first-year students enter higher education without strong fundamental skills or strategies to cope with academic work that could be contributing to lower confidence, reduced engagement, and potential academic failure (Rooij, 2018).

#### **b. Teaching methods**

Different style of teaching in university practices lead to a challenge that students may struggle to follow lessons, interpret expectations, and manage their own learning processes (Prince, 2004). Teaching methods can be defined as the strategies, approaches, and instructional practices used by lecturers to deliver courses or contents and guidance that meets students at their current level (Vygotsky, 1978). The adoption of innovative teaching practices, such as flipped classrooms, cooperative learning, and technology-enhanced instruction can particularly affect first-year students who are unfamiliar with self-directed learning. (Baig, 2023).

#### **c. Evaluative methods**

Evaluative methods have a crucial role in understanding how first year of English Literature students adapt to the academic demands as a college student. Freshman students entering higher education often struggle not because of academic skill but because university systems, such as assessment and evaluation practices that are new to students and culturally distinct from those in their previous learning environments (Tinto, 2012). Another critical issue concerns on how evaluation practices sometimes focused on performance comparison, and standardized achievement that make the transition process more challenging (Credé, 2012). Kift (2015) argues that first-year assessment practices must be structured to facilitate student transition, otherwise, it could be seen as a barrier rather than as developmental supports.

#### **d. The psychological and educational support**

Psychological anxiety among college students frequently ignored, not because support systems are absent, but because students struggle to seek help during transitional periods (Kitzrow, 2003). This highlights the importance of peer support networks, mentorship programs, and emotionally supportive learning communities to enhance freshmen adjustment (Permatasari, 2025). Focusing on enhancing self-motivation and self-regulated learning can help freshmen overcome transitional academic barriers (Ahmad, 2024). Indeed, good support and academic motivation both influence academic adaptation (Homklin, 2024).

**e. The academic environment**

Students’ background educational experiences shape their expectations of university learning, however these expectations frequently diverge from the realities of the academic environment (Timmis, 2024). The academic environment is the educational setting and culture that shape how students learn, interact, and grow academically *in a learning institution* (Fraser, 1998). The transition becomes more difficult because of academic demands such as extensive reading requirements and diverse instructional methods (Renata at al. 2026). Students experience challenges in adapting to academic culture, managing institutional expectations, and forming effective routines, which indicates the need for structured orientation and mentoring programs (Alya, 2025).

**f. Learning conditions**

Learning conditions include the teaching approaches implemented in classroom settings (Yi, H., 2023). Entwistle (2009) defines learning condition as the environmental and instructional factors that influence how effectively students learn. Learning conditions also depend on the classroom environment, the learning atmosphere, and everyday teaching practices (Fraser, 1998). Other influencing factors include limited professional development opportunities for educators and the complex integration of LMS platforms, digital tools, and educational technologies that have direct implications for students to adapt to university level learning expectations (Li, H., 2025). On the other hand, students who adapted well to learning conditions developed stronger knowledge and skills, even though their grades were not strongly affected (Nguyen et al. 2024). From the perspective of previous research, this study focuses on six major challenges commonly faced by first-year students during their transition into higher education (Tuan, 2020) and critically analyzes the strategies that can be implemented to reduce these obstacles that support sustainable academic success and long-term student retention in higher education.

**METHOD**

This study used a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data to better understand how first-year students adapt academically. By using both numerical data and students’ personal experiences, the study gains a more complete and meaningful picture of the adaptation process, making the findings more valid and insightful (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). For quantitative, the participants selected using quasi-sampling method (Stopher, 2012). There were 72 freshman students in Bangka Belitung University, majoring English Literature. The details of participants’ background information are summarized in Table 1

**Table 1.** Participants’ description (n = 72).

No	Background Information	Items	n	%
1	Gender	Male	15	20.8%
		Female	57	79.2%
2	Age	17	1	1.4%
		18	40	55.6%
		19	25	34.7%
		20	5	6.9%
		21	1	1.4%
3	Length of stay in Bangka	More than 1	3	4.2%
		year	13	18.1%
		More than 2	56	77.8%
		years		

		More than 5 years		
4	English Level (CEFR)	A1	8	11.1%
		A2	47	65.3%
		B1	15	20.8%
		B2	2	2.8%
5	Frequency of communicate in English	Everyday	10	13.9%
		Sometimes	50	69.4%
		Rarely	12	16.7%

Quantitative part used questionnaires with 2 (two) open-ended questions that self-administered by the interviewer (Bhattacharyya, 2017). This study used open-ended questions to ensure participants' response is not influenced unduly by the interviewer and the verbatim replied from the participants can offer a rich source and data. The data of quantitative part were analyzed using SPSS 19 version as the software tool. There were 5 participants for qualitative part, all names used in this study were pseudonyms to protect their identities. The details of participants' background information are summarized in Table 2

**Table 2.** Participants' description (n = 5).

No	Name	Gender	Age	Length of stay in Bangka	English Level (CEFR)	Frequency of communicate in English
1	Cara as S1	F	18	More than 5 years	A2	Sometimes
2	Zule as S2	F	19	More than 5 years	A2	Everyday
3	Vero as S3	M	19	More than 5 years	A2	Sometimes
4	Rocky as S4	M	20	More than 5 years	A2	Sometimes
5	Rassa as S5	F	18	More than 2 years	A2	Sometimes

Semi-structured interviews were conducted for qualitative part, and the data were examined through in-depth content analysis. The questions addressed both the challenges faced by students and the strategies they used to evaluate how necessary and effective different approaches to support first-year students' adaptation to learning activities (Tuan, 2020). The transcript translated from Indonesian version to English version without prejudice with any meaning. All students that participating in this study were protected with the consent, anonymity and confidentially (Eisner, 1991; Howe & Moses, 1999).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Results

The findings focus on two main areas, describing participants' experiences of the challenges and difficulties faced as first-year students, and examining the strategies they used to cope with and address these challenges. Based on the SPSS frequency statistics, the mean scores for each challenge are:

**Table 3.** SPSS Result

Item	Challenge Area	Mean Score
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2	Teaching Methods	3.79
1	Content / course (English Literature UBB)	3.55
6	Learnign conditions	3.55
3	Evaluative methods	3.27
5	Academic environment	3.13

**a. Describing participants’ experiences of the challenges faced as first-year students**

The results show that challenges related to teaching methods have the highest mean score (m = 3.79), indicating that this is the most dominant difficulty experienced by English Literature first-year students in Bangka Belitung. Many participants expressed that they were accustomed to structured explanations in school, where teachers monitored understanding closely that really contrast in university lectures (Timmis at all.2024).

-One student (form open ended question) explained:

*"In high school, teachers explained everything clearly and step by step. Here, the lecturer explains briefly, and we are expected to understand by ourselves. Sometimes I don't even know what I should study first. Every lecturers' English accent are also different, I need to adjust myself."*

-One student (form open ended question) also added:

*"University teaching method is different from high school, and what students learned in high school doesn't help much with understanding new material. So, when we face new teaching methods in university, we have some trouble adjusting because our high school knowledge is limited"*

-Similar statement from another student (form open ended question) stated:

*"As new students, there are quite a few challenges in university life. These include learning methods that depend on each course's credits and the way lessons are delivered by the lecturers, sometimes the lecturers explain it full in English, like really different in senior high school or the teaching methods used in class"*

-S5 also stated:

*"The teaching style feels too fast. If you don't understand at the first explanation, you are already left behind."*

-S1 also described as:

*"Sometimes the lecturer doesn't explain in detail, and we are directly given assignments. I feel confused because I don't know what standard is expected."*

This suggests that many freshmen struggle to adapt to university teaching styles, such as lecture-based instruction, independent learning demands, limited interaction, and unfamiliar classroom expectations (Tuan, 2020, Arifin et al.2024).

The second highest challenges were found in contents or courses difficulty in English Literature (M = 3.55) and learning conditions (M = 3.55). This indicates that students face significant difficulty in understanding course materials and adjusting to learning conditions such as workload, time management, learning facilities, and study environments. These challenges reflect academic pressure and cognitive overload commonly experienced during the transition to higher education (Diniz et al, 2016). Participants described encountering unfamiliar vocabulary, abstract concepts, and long academic texts that felt overwhelming.

-One participant (from open ended question) mentioned:

*"The materials are very different from school, it is really detail about English. The texts are longer, the language is harder, and sometimes I don't understand the terms."*

-Other participant (from open ended question) stated:

*“The biggest challenge I face in university is keeping up with courses that I am not yet familiar with”*

-S4 also reflected:

*“I feel like I am learning a new academic language, not just English. It’s really detail, like speaking only, listening only, and writing. While in high school we studied all at the same time.”*

-S3 stated:

*“This is very different from high school, a complete 180-degree difference. For example, in speaking, I didn’t practice much in high school, but in college I often have to do individual presentations”.*

Learning conditions were also described as one of the top three the most challenging factor, that referred to campus facilities, digital platforms, and learning systems that were unfamiliar.

-One student (from open ended question) stated:

*“Online platforms are confusing at the beginning. We are expected to understand systems we’ve never used before, like Siakad, Edlink etc.”*

-Other student (from open ended question) mentioned:

*“There are several aspects that I find quite challenging as a new student, first: a new learning condition where I have to understand the situation and personalities of many people, and the attitudes of lecturers, which are sometimes difficult to understand and often lead to miscommunication.”*

-Other student also (from open ended question) added:

*“The hardest part of being a university student for me is adjusting to assignments or the learning condition. In vocational high school (SMK), classes ran from morning to afternoon, and some teachers did not focus much on students’ understanding, which is different from university”*

-S1 also added:

*“It is difficult when I have to complete the KRS, because we didn’t have this system in high school, we mostly just followed a fixed curriculum”*

Next, evaluative methods ( $M = 3.27$ ) also present a significant challenge. This suggests that assessment systems such as grading standards, formats, assignment types, and academic performance expectations are still difficult for first-year students to understand and adapt to.

-One participant (form open ended question) stated:

*“I don’t always understand how my work is graded. Sometimes I try my best, but I don’t know why my score is low.”*

-Other participant (form open ended question) expressed:

*“The assessment system feels stricter than school, and it makes me more stressed.”*

-S3 also added:

*“In high school, technology is rarely used for exams, they are only manual. In college, exam answers must be detailed, and sometimes exams use apps.*

-S1 also expressed :

*“something very new, that sometimes the final exam can be replaced with a final project and work in group”*

-S5 mentioned:

*“The most challenging part is group assignments because our grades depend on the work of all group members, some contributed, and some did not. However, for some courses, group assignment grades are based on each person’s individual contribution.*

Challenges related to the academic environment ( $M = 3.13$ ) appear at a moderate level.

-One participant (form open ended question) stated:

*"I feel like I'm in a completely new world. Everything feels formal, and sometimes I feel small in this environment as an introvert that must work a lot with group."*

-Other student (from open ended question) also added:

*"In my opinion, what is very challenging when becoming a new student at university is to adapt to a new environment, such as a friendship environment, well starting a new friendship when you are in this college environment, is very different from building a friendship environment when you are still in high school. And I still haven't found a way to deal with this."*

-S5 also said:

*"It takes time to feel like I belong here, confused about where to learn first"*.

-S1 added:

*"During my time at university, I felt challenged by the campus world which was starting to become more serious, starting from the learning which required more independent learning rather than being explained by lecturers"*

These narratives show that adaptation is not only academic but identity-based. Students reconstruct their self-image, confidence, and sense of belonging as they transition into university culture (Yang and Gao: 2025)

Finally, the lowest mean score is found in psychological and educational support (M = 2.99).

-S1 expressed:

*"I do not really have any problem here, my family and my friend really support me, every time I feel confused, I ask my friend"*

-S4 also added:

*"So far so good, I do not face any problem talking about psychological and education support, may be because I have been living here since I was young and actually, I asked my senior about campus habit, so it is fine"*.

-S3 stated:

*"I have a little information about campus life when I was a senior high student, I get it from social media and also from college student who visited our school for university promotion, I think it helps me a lot"*

Further analysis shows that freshman students in Bangka Belitung University majoring English Literature reported difficulty adapting to independent learning expectations and feel confusion during their first semester. Interestingly, many students admitted that they initially relied more on peers than lecturers when face academic challenges. These findings suggest that academic adaptation is strongly peer-mediated in early transition proses. Students' English proficiency levels also reported that students at A1 and A2 levels have significantly higher difficulty in content or courses comprehension compared to B1 and B2 students. Nevertheless, higher-level students still reported difficulties in critical analysis and academic writing. This confirms that language proficiency alone does not fully determine adaptation success.

## **b. The strategies used to cope with and overcome the challenges.**

Based on the open-ended responses and interview data, several common strategies used by new students were identified. Five of these were mentioned repeatedly by student.

### **a) Academic Self-Regulation Strategies**

Many students developed independent learning strategies for limited instructional guidance. These strategies included self-study routines, pre-reading materials before class, reviewing lessons after lectures, and creating personal notes in simplified language.

-One participant (from open ended question) explained: *"I try to read the material before class,*

*so I already have a basic understanding. During the lecture, I take notes of the important points to help me remember the lesson."*

-S4 stated: *"I make my own notes in a way that is easy for me to understand and remember."*

-S1 added: *"First, I started by learning how to study in the university, then I continue by studying alone using the lessons explained by the lecturer after I get home or a day before the class begin"*

These strategies show the development of self-regulated learning, where students shift from dependency on lecturers to personal responsibility for learning.

### **b) Peer-Based Support and Collaborative Learning**

Social strategies played a crucial role in adaptation. Students frequently relied on friends, classmates, and peer groups to understand materials, manage assignments, and reduce emotional stress (Salsabilah et al. 2025)

-S5 said: *"When I don't understand about the material, I ask my friends first before asking the lecturer."*

-S3 also added: *"Group discussions help me understand difficult topics better."*

-One participant (from open ended question) also expressed: *"I always ask my classmates about everything, if it is possible I also ask my senior"*

Peer learning functioned not only as academic support but also as emotional security, reducing feelings of isolation (Crosnoe & Benner A. D., 2018).

### **c) Digital and Informal Learning Strategies**

Students actively used digital platforms such as YouTube, social media, and online resources to support learning.

-One student (from open ended question) stated: *"I learn from social media how to be university student, I also use Google to know about campus or about the course"*

-S4 also expressed

*"I learn from YouTube and social media when I don't understand the lesson."*

-S2 added:

*"I watch podcasts and English conversations to improve my understanding."*

### **d) Emotional Regulation and Psychological Coping**

Freshman students also developed emotional strategies to manage anxiety, fear, and stress. Those included positive self-talk, mindset change and confidence-building practices. These strategies show that students actively work on emotional adaptation.

-One student (from open ended question) explained: *"I try to build confidence by practicing speaking in front of a mirror."*

-S5 also added: *"I try to think positively and adapt slowly."*

-S4 expressed: *"I silently observe everything first, see how the campus life works and try to adapt step by step"*

### **e) Time Management and Life-Management Strategies**

Time management reflects as a coping strategy. Students created schedules, prioritized tasks, and tried to balance academic, social, and organizational responsibilities. These strategies show the development of life-management skills, not only academic skills.

-S1 stated: *"I make a daily schedule and set priorities for my tasks."*

-Another student (from open ended question) explained: *"I try to manage my time better and not delay assignments."*

-S5 stated: *"I learn everything before the class, so I set my schedule and sometimes has a group discussion"*

The findings of this study strongly support and deepen existing theoretical perspectives and has a certain impact on freshman students (Tuan, 2020). The teaching-method confirms that pedagogical transition is the most challenging factor during the first year that also impacts the students of English Literature. Different level of English exposure also affects the ability of understand the lectures, read academic texts, and also participate in discussion, adjusting to English-medium instruction at the university level can be challenging for first year student of English Literature (Rod Ellis & Natsuko Shintani, 2021).

## **Discussion**

This shift needs awareness and self-regulation skills that many freshmen students have not yet developed well. Academic adaptation occurs when students are able to adjust effectively because their previous preparation meets the academic standards and expectations set by the universities (Tinto, 2012). English Literature student may struggle to identify themes and interpret meaning effectively without sufficient background knowledge in language and literary analysis (Peter Barry, 2020). Lessons moved too fast or not clearly explained, it drives the transitional stress, where academic challenges influence self-confidence, and engagement with the learning environment (Liu & Zhang, 2023). It also mentioned in Purnamasari, et al. (2022) that freshman students struggle with pedagogical shifts and academic demands during the transition from high school to higher education.

Challenges of contents or courses are not simply about linguistic but also unfamiliar terminology (Kurniawan, 2024). This confirms a gap between high school curriculum and university-level disciplinary discourse. In this case, universities may consider offering bridging programs to help the freshman student's transition (David et al.2025). For example, first-year English Literature students are often required to read a scholarly articles and texts written in advanced academic English, this could overwhelm them who are not yet familiar with academic discourse and extensive reading strategies (Ken Hyland, 2022). Learning conditions and digital adaptation are also faced as challenges in this transition. Unfamiliar academic environments triggers how they see themselves and where they feel they belong. Confusion about academic systems like course registration and learning platforms (LMS) also causes challenges at the beginning of the semester. This result is strongly supported by earlier studies that describe first-year adaptation as a complex and interconnected process, where academic, social, and psychological challenges influence and strengthen one another (Alya, 2025; Timmis, 2022). Indeed, structured digital orientation programs could minimize this issue. Evaluation method also influence emotional responses. Students' express stress appears from unclear rubrics and performance-based contrast (Boud, 2010). Transparent evaluation criteria and formative feedback may lessee's uncertainty and improve academic confidence (Nicol & Macfarlane, 2006). The lowest score of mean for psychological support does not automatically indicate that freshman students are free from emotional challenge. Instead, it highlights the role of peer and family support among students (Cohen, 1985).

Importantly, adaptation seems to occur as a developmental process (Tinto, 2012). Research shows that academic stress is deeply connected to students' emotions, identity, motivation, and sense of belonging, meaning that adaptation is not just about learning content, but about personal growth as a whole (Savitri et al.2025). Over time, students are also not passive in facing these challenges, they build adaptation processes such as self-directed learning, collaborative engagement with peers, strategic use of digital tools, emotional regulation, and organized time management (Fernanda et al.2024). These patterns show that adapting to university life is a full personal process that involves the mind, emotions, relationships, and identity, not just academic performance. These also support the modern theories that confirm

the first year as a period of growth and development, not just a risk period (Stockinger et al, 2021, Rustam et al.2023).

Overall, these findings support contemporary perspectives that the first year of university is not just a time of struggle, but also a time of growth and change (Savitri et al.2025). Freshman students of English literature in adaptation process define as the interaction between university systems and students' personal efforts (Astin, 1984). As students deal with new teaching styles, academic pressure, and university expectations, they gradually become more resilient, independent, emotionally stronger, and more confident in who they are as learners (Maunder, 2018). It means, by overcoming challenges, students move from depending on others to be more independent in their studies, especially during the transition (Tuan, 2020). Instead of simply adapting, they are actually transforming and growing into new versions of themselves through the challenges they face, both academic adaptation and personal identity development. (Rohi et al, 2023; Fernanda et al, 2024).

## CONCLUSION

This study shows that the transition from senior high into university is not a simple change for first-year students, especially students majoring English Literature, it is a complex and deeply personal transformation. Their challenges do not come one by one, but are connected. Teaching styles, course content, learning conditions, assessments, the academic environment, and support systems all interact and shape how students experience as a freshman student. Teaching methods comes out as the biggest challenge, and students' own stories show how these difficulties build on each other, creating a chain of struggles rather than separate problems. Adapting to university, therefore, is not just about learning new material, it is about entering a completely new academic culture and learning how to exist within it.

This study also shows that first-year students are not passive participants of these challenges. Instead, freshman student of English Literature actively create adaptation strategies through self-study, peer collaboration, digital and informal learning practices, emotional regulation and time management. These strategies reflect increasing learner autonomy in managing academic demands. The transition process, emerges not only as a period of risk, but also as a context for the development of independence, and personal responsibility.

Furthermore, the findings suggest that first-year of English Literature student's adaptation is not merely an academic adjustment, but an integrated developmental process. Students reconstruct their self-confidence, emotional stability, sense of belonging, and academic identity alongside their learning strategies. Academic pressure, emotional responses, social relationships, and institutional structures interact to shape how students understand themselves and their position within the university context. Successful transition, therefore, cannot be reduced to academic performance alone, but must be understood as a multidimensional process involving cognitive, emotional, social, and identity development. Overall, this study concludes that the first year of university represents not only a period of challenge, but a critical stage of growth and transformation. Through engagement with unfamiliar teaching practices, complex academic demands, and new institutional cultures, students gradually develop greater autonomy, resilience, and self-directed learning capacities. Adaptation should therefore be understood not simply as survival within a new system, but as a process of becoming, in which students actively reshape their learning practices, identities, and sense of purpose as emerging members of the academic community.

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