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The Morning Rush: Exploring the Correlation Between Early Commutes and Student Learning Satisfaction Among College Students

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Abstract
Early morning commuting is a common yet understudied aspect of college student life in highly urbanized Philippine settings where transportation challenges are frequent and unpredictable. While previous studies highlight the negative effects of commuting on stress and academic performance, limited attention has been given to how early commutes influence learning satisfaction (a variable encompassing academic engagement, performance, and physical and mental well-being). This study examined the correlation between early commuting experiences (before 7:30 AM) and learning satisfaction among college students in Cebu City using an embedded mixed-methods design. Quantitative data were collected from fifty (n = 50) students through a structured questionnaire, while qualitative insights from fifteen (n = 15) interviews provided deeper perspectives on their lived experiences. Descriptive statistics summarized commute profiles, and Spearman's rho tested associations between commute variables and four dimensions of learning satisfaction. Results showed no significant relationship between residence location or commute duration and learning satisfaction, suggesting strong student adaptability despite long or complex commutes. However, usual wake-up time demonstrated a weak but statistically significant negative correlation with physical and mental well-being, indicating that earlier wake-up times were modestly associated with better reported well-being. Thematic analysis revealed that early commutes contribute to fatigue, disrupted routines, and reduced focus, yet students cope through time management, self-discipline, and adaptive strategies. Overall, while students maintain engagement and performance despite early commutes, their well-being remains sensitive to commuting demands. Institutional adjustments in scheduling, wellness support, and interactive instruction are recommended to enhance learning satisfaction.

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1. Introduction

Early commuting has become an integral part of many college students' daily routines, influencing how they begin their academic day and manage their responsibilities. Research shows that while longer commutes often correlate with strain or reduced academic participation, a growing number of studies highlight potential benefits such as improved productivity, reflective preparation, and stronger time management (Burzacchi *et al*., 2024; Murphy *et al*., 2023; Coutts *et al*., 2021; Ahmed *et al*., 2021) . Despite these findings, most studies focus on commute-related stress, institutional performance, or subjective well-being, while little is known about how early commuting might enhance students' learning satisfaction by providing structured routines or study-ready mindsets.

The literature is particularly silent on whether early commuting might foster positive psychological or academic outcomes that go beyond typical deficit-focused narratives. This proposed study aims to explore the correlation between early commuting (before 7:30 AM) and learning satisfaction among college students, using an embedded mixed-methods approach that integrates quantitative patterns with rich qualitative narratives.

Early commutes have become an increasingly relevant concern in the context of higher education, particularly for students residing in urban and peri-urban areas where transportation systems are often inefficient and congested. In cities such as Cebu, many college students are required to wake up early and endure lengthy travel times to attend their classes, often navigating heavy traffic and limited public transport options. These conditions may lead to physical fatigue, psychological stress, and time constraints, all of which can interfere with students' readiness to learn and overall academic experience (Van den Berg & Nelson, 2019; Sumicad *et al*., 2024). Within this context, student learning satisfaction—defined as students' overall contentment with their academic environment, instruction quality, and classroom engagement—becomes an essential metric for evaluating the impact of daily logistical challenges. Learning satisfaction is not only a reflection of educational outcomes but also a predictor of motivation, retention, and long-term academic success (Richardson *et al*., 2007). While institutional efforts often focus on improving teaching practices and curriculum design, less attention has been paid to how non-academic factors, such as commute duration and timing, may shape the academic experiences of students. Investigating the connection between early commutes and student learning satisfaction is, therefore, vital for developing strategies that support student well-being and enhance the overall quality of higher education.

From a global perspective, learner satisfaction is greatly influenced by commuting. Students' campus participation, academic success, stress levels, and physical well-being are deemed to be the factors that are negatively impacted in countries such as Canada (Taylor & Mitra, 2021) and Bahrain (Jamil *et al*., 2022) [22]. Moreover, a private university in India expressed that commute has a weak association with academic performance. Instead, students in the said private university associate commute with punctuality and regularity (Kaushik *et al*., 2023). China, on the other hand, has highlighted that students with lengthy commutes negatively affect their mental health, which is heavily grounded in factors such as sex, migrant parents, and students whose parents have lower education levels (Guan *et al*., 2025).

Educational realities in the Philippines suggest that commuting negatively impacts the students. Morales *et al*. (2024) have suggested that students from National University face challenges such as traffic congestion which affects their stress levels and academic performance. Meanwhile, Misamis University highlighted time-related struggles, public transportation, and weather conditions as the main factors that are affected as far as commuting is concerned (Belano 2024). Furthermore, Cerafica & Florenda (2019) from the University of the Philippines expressed the same results which were gathered from students in selected state universities. On the contrary, a study by Alcaraz and Napiza (2023) from Laguna State Polytechnic University showed that public transportation is a hassle to the students which exacerbates being drained out during classes. Their study then followed a suggestion which is to plot priorities correctly to somehow reduce academic stress and other related factors. This study will hold substantial significance as it will address a largely overlooked dimension of student life in higher education: the impact of early commutes on learning satisfaction, within the local context of a public higher educational institution. While international research has examined the relationship between commuting time and academic outcomes (Tigre *et al*., 2017; Ben Atta & Agwu, 2025), a substantial gap continues to exist in localized studies within highly urbanized Philippine settings such as Cebu. Most existing literature on student satisfaction in the country tends to focus on instructional quality, curriculum design, and teacher performance, yet fails to consider the lived experiences of students before they even arrive on campus. Although there are studies that explore the effects of general transportation issues (such as commute duration, access to transit, and traffic congestion) on student performance and well-being, this research narrows the focus specifically to early-morning commutes, a particularly taxing and often underexamined aspect of daily student life. In most state universities, where a significant number of students commute from outlying provinces, early morning travel likely results in fatigue, stress, and reduced classroom engagement—factors that may directly influence how students perceive their learning experience. Despite this, the relationship between early commutes and learning satisfaction remains minimally explored through empirical research. Research at the University of Cebu, for instance, has shown that student commuters report "very high" levels of stress associated with traffic and waiting time, regardless of demographic profile. Similarly, a cross-sectional study at Gulf Medical University found that longer commutes were associated with greater physical difficulties, elevated stress, disrupted sleep, and poorer academic outcomes. By generating empirical data from a Cebu-based university, this study will contribute a pioneering perspective to the discourse on learner-centered education, offering evidence-based insights that can guide institutional planning, support services, and broader academic reforms.

2. Theoretical-Conceptual Framework

This study anchors on Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Astin's Theory of Student Involvement. These foundational theories support the exploration of how early commute experiences may affect the physical, emotional, and cognitive conditions of students, which in turn may influence their overall learning satisfaction. By understanding these interconnected factors, the study aims to assess the potential correlation between early commuting patterns and the learning satisfaction of college students. The figure below illustrates the theoretical–conceptual framework for this study.

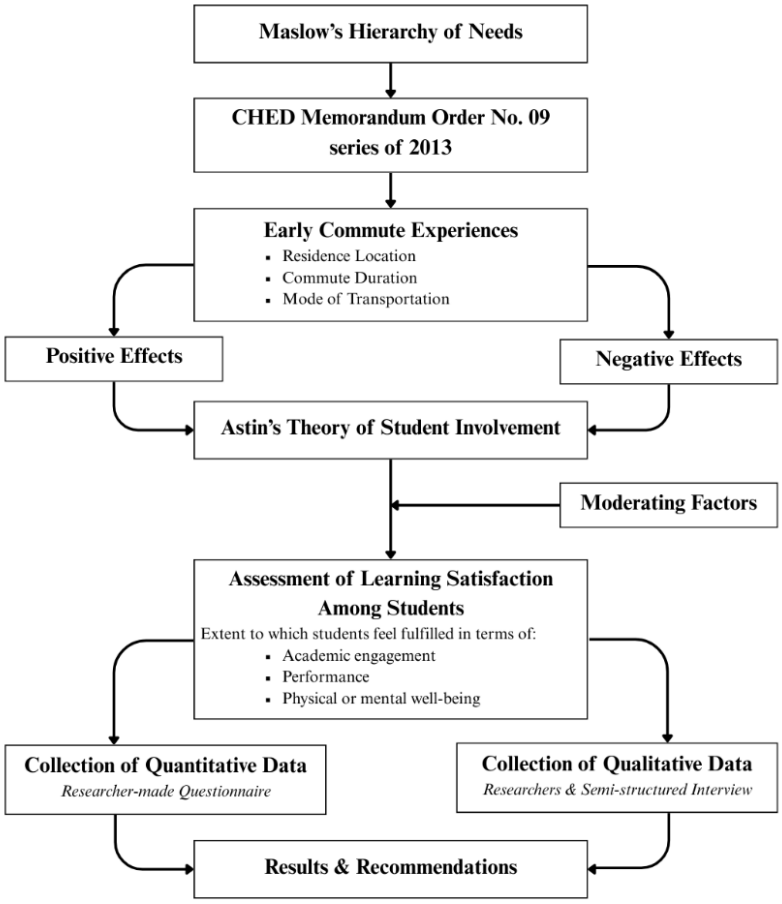

Fig 1: Theoretical-Conceptual Framework

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

This study draws upon Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, a motivational theory that emphasizes the necessity of fulfilling basic physiological and safety needs, such as adequate sleep, rest, nourishment, and comfort, before individuals can attain higher-order goals like academic engagement and self-actualization (Maslow, 1943; Kenrick *et al*., 2010). In the context of education, these foundational needs will be critical for effective learning and classroom participation (McLeod, 2025). Consequently, students who will endure early and prolonged commutes may arrive at school physically fatigued, mentally unfocused, and emotionally stressed, thereby compromising their readiness to learn (Brooks & Kirk, 2025). This theory supports the present study's exploration of whether the disruption of basic needs caused by early commuting significantly influences students' overall learning satisfaction.

Astin's Theory of Student Involvement

This study is also grounded in Astin's Theory of Student Involvement, which defines involvement as the amount of physical and psychological energy that a student will devote to the academic experience (Astin, 1984). Moreover, Astin argues that higher levels of student engagement, both quantitative and qualitative, will be directly associated with higher learning outcomes, academic persistence, and satisfaction (Astin, 1984; Duncan & Oakley, 2016). Therefore, when students face early and exhausting commutes, their energy may be significantly reduced, leading to lower classroom participation, diminished cognitive focus, and reduced motivation, which can ultimately lower their perceived learning satisfaction (Smith, 2018). In the context of this study, Astin's theory supports the examination of whether commute-induced fatigue and emotional distraction undermine students' active involvement in their academic experience, thereby affecting their overall satisfaction with learning.

CHED Memorandum Order No. 09, series of 2013

CHED Memorandum Order No. 09, series of 2013 sets the standards and guidelines for Student Affairs and Services in higher education institutions in the Philippines, requiring these institutions to promote student welfare, well-being, and overall development (CHED, 2013). In relation to our study, this CMO serves as a legal basis for examining how early commuting experiences, which students face before arriving on campus, may affect their physical comfort, emotional preparedness, and learning satisfaction. Furthermore, this is significant since it highlights the responsibility of institutions to provide supportive learning environments, allowing us to present our findings as evidence-based recommendations for improving student services. Therefore, CHED CMO No. 09 (2013) does not only offer a policy framework but also provides practical means for transforming our research results into concrete actions that strengthen student welfare and institutional practices.

Early Commute Experiences

This study examines the early commute experiences of college students, focusing on factors such as wake-up time, commute duration, travel distance, and mode of transportation. Prior studies suggest that extended or strenuous commutes may contribute to physical fatigue, emotional stress, reduced sleep, and lower academic

engagement, potentially diminishing students' readiness and satisfaction with learning (Sreejith *et al*., 2022; Thakur, 2023). However, another theoretical perspective highlights that early commute experiences can be used for quiet reflection, reading, or relaxation, which can restore mental resources and improve well-being, potentially translating into better academic readiness and satisfaction (Pindek *et al*., 2023). By considering both positive and negative outcomes, this study aims to evaluate whether the burdens and benefits of early commuting significantly correlate with students' overall learning satisfaction.

Student Learning Satisfaction

In this study, student learning satisfaction refers to the extent to which students feel fulfilled and engaged with their academic experience, encompassing factors such as participation, motivation, attentiveness, and perceived learning quality. Furthermore, it is regarded as a short-term attitudinal response based on students' evaluation of teaching quality, academic support, and learning environments, and is considered essential due to its strong influence on academic performance, retention, and institutional credibility (Weerasinghe *et al*., 2017; Li *et al*., 2022). This study investigates how early commuting experiences may influence these dimensions by affecting students' physical and mental readiness, which impact their overall satisfaction with learning.

Moderating Factors

This study also considers moderating variables that may influence the relationship between early commute experiences and learning satisfaction, including sex, year level, college department, academic load, and coping strategies. Students from different socioeconomic backgrounds may experience varying levels of academic adjustment and satisfaction, with those from higher socioeconomic groups often having greater access to resources and support (Daud *et al*., 2023; Dorado Barbé *et al*., 2025). Additionally, the use of effective coping strategies has been found to support academic satisfaction and resilience among university students (Pindek *et al*., 2020; Dorado Barbé *et al*., 2025). Hence, considering these factors allow the study to explore how individual differences may affect the way students experience the impact of early commuting on their learning satisfaction.

3. Statement of the Problem

The main purpose of this study is to explore the correlation between early commutes and student learning satisfaction among college students. This study intends to examine both the challenges and advantages that students associate with early commuting and how these factors influence their learning satisfaction. Specifically, it seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What is the demographic profile of the respondents in terms of:
   - Sex, Year level, and College Department,
   - Mode of transportation,
   - Residence location (within/outside the Cebu city),
   - Usual wake-up time, and
   - Average commute duration?
2. How do students describe their learning satisfaction in terms of:
   - Academic engagement,
   - Performance,
   - Physical or mental well-being during early morning classes?
3. What challenges or benefits do students associate with early commuting?
4. Is there a significant relationship between early commuting and students' learning satisfaction?

4. Methodology

Research Design

This study employed an embedded mixed-methods design, wherein the qualitative data was embedded within a primarily quantitative approach. This design allowed for the collection of numerical data on students' early commuting patterns and learning satisfaction, while also integrating qualitative insights to better understand their lived experiences. The design provided a complementary perspective, enriching the interpretation of results by offering deeper context to quantitative findings (Phonman & Akakul, 2023).

Sampling Design, Research Respondents & Environments

A total of fifty (50) college students from a state university was selected to answer a structured questionnaire regarding their early commuting patterns and learning satisfaction. In addition, fifteen (15) students from the same population were invited to participate in individual interviews to provide deeper qualitative insights into their commuting experiences. A purposive sampling technique was employed to ensure that all respondents regularly experience early commutes, defined in this study as traveling to school before 7:30 AM. The study was conducted within Cebu City, Philippines. The research environment was purposively chosen, where implementation of early morning classes and commuting routines of students from both urban and rural areas are evident and consistent.

Research Instrument

A researcher-made questionnaire served as the primary instrument for data collection in this study. The purpose of this questionnaire was to gather information from the respondents related to their commuting experiences and learning satisfaction. It served as the main tool in collecting relevant data needed to answer the research questions. The questionnaire was divided into two parts. The first part asked about the profile of the respondents, including their college department, year level, residence location, average commute duration, and mode of transportation. The second part focused on the investigation of factors related to student learning satisfaction, such as academic engagement, performance, and physical or mental well-being during early morning classes. The use of a structured questionnaire is appropriate for identifying patterns and trends across a larger population, which aligns with the strengths of quantitative data collection (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

In addition to the questionnaire, a separate set of interview questions was used to gather qualitative data from selected respondents. This supports the use of an embedded mixed-methods design, which allows for qualitative insights to be integrated within a primarily quantitative approach (Phonman & Akakul, 2023). This approach also helped the researchers explore the lived experiences, challenges, and perspectives of students. The collected data served as the basis for analyzing the relationship between early commuting patterns and levels of learning satisfaction among

respondents.

Data Gathering Procedure

As part of the research process, data gathering began with securing approval from the research college instructor of the researchers digitally. Upon approval, the researchers ensured that the study strictly adhered to ethical standards based on confidentiality, voluntary participation, and informed consent. Participation was open only to college students. Before any data is collected, all respondents were clearly informed about the purpose of the study, their rights as respondents, and the steps taken to ensure the confidentiality of their responses. Informed consent was obtained through a digital agreement presented at the beginning of the online form. All data gathered were used solely for academic purposes and were kept anonymous and confidential.

Quantitative data was gathered through an online survey distributed via Google Forms, which included closed-ended items such as Likert scale and demographic questions. This form included the demographic information, commute details, and self-reported learning satisfaction in areas such as academic engagement, performance, and physical or mental well-being of the respondents. Meanwhile, qualitative data was obtained through short, scheduled online interviews with fifteen (15) selected participants who volunteered to provide deeper insight into their commuting experiences. Each interview lasted for only a couple of minutes and was conducted through a Google Meet. With the participants' consent, the interviews were recorded for transcription and thematic analysis. Probing questions were used to encourage students to elaborate on their challenges, coping strategies, and perceived benefits related to early commuting. Although participation was voluntary, tokens of appreciation such as e-certificates were provided to express gratitude to the interviewees for their time and input.

Data Analysis

In this study, both the qualitative and quantitative data were analyzed to explore the correlation between early commuting and student learning satisfaction among college students. According to Rawat (2021), descriptive analysis is the type of analysis of data that helps describe, show or summarize data points in a constructive way such that patterns might emerge that fulfill every condition of the data. Thus, descriptive analysis including frequency and percentage distributions, was utilized to summarize the demographic profile of the respondents based on their sex, college department, year level, residence location, commute duration, and mode of transportation. In order to determine the general trends and variability of student learning satisfaction in terms of academic engagement, performance, and physical or mental well-being, the mean was computed. Furthermore, correlational analysis was applied to determine the relationship between commuting factors (such as duration and mode of transportation) and student learning satisfaction. Correlational analysis, particularly the Spearman's Rank-Order Correlation Coefficient (Spearman's rho, ρ) was used to assess the relationship between commuting factors and learning satisfaction. According to Frost (n.d.), spearman's rho is a nonparametric measure of rank correlation that evaluates the strength and direction of a monotonic relationship between two variables when the data are ordinal or based on Likert-type scales, which was applied to both our commute duration categories and learning satisfaction scores. To address the qualitative aspect, responses from open-ended questions underwent thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's six-phase approach: familiarization with data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report (Byrne, 2025). This allowed the researchers to identify common challenges and benefits associated with early commuting. Overall, this analysis provided a comprehensive understanding of students' experiences and served as the basis for further examination of the relationship between early commuting and learning satisfaction of college students.

Ethical Considerations

Prior to the administration of the survey, ethical protocols were carefully followed to ensure the protection of respondents' rights and privacy. Participation in the study was entirely voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all respondents. They were assured that all information collected through the survey remained confidential and was used solely for academic purposes. No identifying information was required, and all responses were anonymized to protect the identity of the respondents. The objectives and procedures of the study were clearly explained to the respondents within the Google Form, ensuring full transparency before they proceed with the survey.

5. Results and Discussions

Table 1: Demographic Profile of the Respondents (n=50)

Description	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Sex	Male	22	44.0%
	Female	28	56.0%
Year Level	First	5	10.0%
	Second	14	28.0%
	Third	30	60.0%
	Fourth	1	2.0%
College Department	CNAHS	1	2.0%
	CTE	40	80.0%
	CCAIS	0	0.0%
	CCAS	4	8.0%
	CPGSS	1	2.0%
	CTHHM	3	6.0%
	CSNECEILL	1	2.0%
Mode of Transportation	Jeepney	38	76.0%

	Bus	7	14.0%
	Motorcycle	5	10.0%
	Private Vehicle	0	0.0%
	Others	0	0.0%
Residence Location	Within Cebu City	26	52.0%
	Outside Cebu City	24	48.0%
Usual Wake-up Time	Earlier than 3AM	1	2.0%
	3AM-5AM	26	52.0%
	5AM-7AM	18	36.0%
	Past 7AM	5	10.0%
Average Commute Duration	Less than 30 minutes	11	22.0%
	30 minutes to 1 hour	15	30.0%
	More than 1 hour	24	48.0%

Table 1 presents the demographic profile of the fifty (50) respondents who participated in the study. The data show that most respondents are female (56%), while male respondents account for 44%. In terms of year level, the largest group consists of third-year students (60%), followed by second-year students (28%), with smaller groups from the first-year (10%) and fourth-year (2%) levels. When classified by college department, the majority belong to the College of Teacher Education (CTE) with 40 respondents or 80%, while others are distributed across the College of Culture, Arts and Sports (CCAS) with 8%, the College of Tourism, Hospitality, and Hotel Management (CTHHM) with 6%, and the College of Nursing and Allied Health Sciences (CNAHS), College of Public Governance, Safety, and Sustainability (CPGSS), and College of Special Needs, Early Childhood Education, Internationalization, and Lifelong Learning (CSNECEILL), each with 2%. Most respondents use jeepneys (76%) as their main mode of transportation, followed by buses (14%) and motorcycles (10%).

In terms of residence location, a nearly equal distribution was observed, with 26 respondents (52%) residing within Cebu City and 24 respondents (48%) living outside the city. This balance suggests diverse commuting experiences, as those residing outside Cebu City may have longer travel times and greater transportation challenges. Regarding usual wake-up time, the majority reported waking between 3:00–5:00 AM (52%), followed by 5:00–7:00 AM (36%), while a few wake earlier than 3:00 AM (2%) or past 7:00 AM (10%). These findings indicate that most students begin their day early to prepare for classes, reflecting the prevalence of early commuting among the respondents. For average commute duration, nearly half (48%) travel more than one hour, while 30% commute between 30 minutes and one hour, and 22% travel for less than 30 minutes. This pattern highlights that long commutes remain common among students in Cebu City, which may influence their punctuality, fatigue levels, and overall learning satisfaction.

Table 2: Correlation Between Early Commutes and Student Learning Satisfaction (n=50)

		Academic Engagement	**Academic Performance**	**Physical/ Mental Well-being**	**Commuting Experience**	**MEAN (Student Learning Satisfaction)**
Residence Location	Spearman's rho	0.070	0.161	0.057	-0.045	0.099
	p-value	0.627	0.263	0.692	0.757	0.496
Usual Wake-up Time	Spearman's rho	-0.157	-0.176	-0.295	-0.297	-0.307
	p-value	0.276	0.221	0.038	0.037	0.030
Average Commute Duration	Spearman's rho	0.120	0.064	0.076	0.181	0.152
	p-value	0.405	0.659	0.602	0.208	0.293

A. Residence Location

The table outlines a negligible relationship without statistical significance between residence and academic engagement, academic performance, mental and physical well-being, and commuting experiences (r_s = –0.099, p = 0.496). With the four dimensions mentioned receiving low average, this is an indication that the respondents are still able to perform well in classes where they can participate, receive high marks, and maintain a balance between their mental and physical well-being inside the classroom despite the commuting experiences they face during their travel toward the school. In contrast to these findings, Chappell et. al (2020) & Masin (2024) suggested that, compared to relocated peers, commuters were likely to attend classes and are also almost twice as likely to ask questions in class. Findings of Thomas (2020) also support the impression that commuters are highly commuted to study. These findings imply that although residence location does not correlate with the four aspects, it still underscores their resilience and the importance of continued institutional support.

B. Usual Wake-Up Time

There is a moderate and statistically significant negative correlation between usual wake-up time and physical/mental well-being (r_s = –0.307, p = 0.030). This indicates that students who wake up earlier tend to report moderately better in terms of their academic engagement, academic performance, especially, mental and physical well-being and commuting experiences, whereas students who wake up later tend to report somewhat lower in the said aspects. Conversely, studies conducted by Oliveira (2015) [35] and Ma and Ye (2019) highlighted that long & early commutes negatively impact the mental health of the learners adding that health issues are also surfacing. Taylor and Mitra's study in 2021 also suggested that early and long commutes negatively affect commuting satisfaction. Although statistically significant, the correlation is weak and does not imply causation; other factors such as commute duration, sleep quality, and daily routines likely also influence students' engagement and performance in academics, as well as their mental and physical well-being and commuting

experiences.

C. Average Commute Duration

Parallel to the findings of residence location, a negligible relationship without statistical significance was drawn out between average commute duration, and the respondents' academic engagement, academic performance, mental and physical well-being as well as commuting experiences ($r_s = -0.152$, $p = 0.293$). This suggests that regardless of the time respondents put in traveling from their houses toward the university, they are still able to engage in class, receive decent marks, and maintain balance between their mental and physical health and feel satisfaction with their learning during early morning classes. This is supported by Ding and Feng's study conducted in 2022 depicting how commute times or duration is negatively associated with the learners' academic performance and well-being which contradicts a cross-sectional study conducted among students in the U.S in 2021 revealed that exhaustion, as well as reduced study time caused a decline on learners' academic performance due to commuting for more than an hour daily. The said findings implies that learners possess effective coping strategies and resilience to sustain academic and personal development despite varying travel times.

Thematic Analysis

A. Academic Engagement

Theme 1: Focus and Engagement Depend on Daily Circumstantial Factors

Focus and engagement refer to the learner's active participation, sustained attention, and cognitive involvement in the learning process, which are influenced by internal and external factors (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004). These aspects of learning are not static; rather, they fluctuate depending on situational circumstances such as mood, environment, and daily experiences (Salanova *et al*., 2010). The statements below illustrate how college students' ability to focus and stay engaged depends heavily on how their day begins or unfolds.

> *"For me, my ability to focus and stay engaged really depends on whether my morning is going great or not." – R1*

> *"It really affects the way I engage in class, especially since I have to wake up early. For example, the class is at 7, so I have to wake up as early as 4 to prepare and travel by 5 to catch up on the class and not be late." – R8*

> *As a student, I really hate early classes because I live far away from the university and I have to allot 2 hours, perhaps, to get ready and then travel, commute, and then there's traffic. – R11*

> *"It's a case-by-case basis. Sometimes I am engaged, sometimes not." – R13*

R1, R8, R11, and R13 described how their focus and engagement vary daily depending on external conditions and internal mood. Their responses suggest that learning satisfaction and attention are conditional, often determined by how their day starts or by certain situational factors that affect their mindset and readiness to learn. Sonnentag (2018) emphasized that daily experiences such as sleep quality, morning mood, and initial energy significantly influence an individual's engagement and cognitive performance throughout the day. These responses confirm the theme that focus and engagement fluctuate according to circumstantial factors, particularly those experienced before attending classes. The findings highlight that the quality of a student's morning, whether positive or stressful, plays a crucial role in determining their readiness and attentional control during learning activities. Such variability reflects the dynamic nature of engagement, where environmental and emotional conditions shape how effectively students participate and find satisfaction in their learning experiences. This implies that educators and institutions should consider implementing supportive morning practices, flexible schedules, or well-being interventions that help students transition into a focused and engaged state despite varying daily circumstances.

Theme 2. Difficulty Sustaining Attention Due to Fatigue and Sleep Deprivation

Fatigue is defined as a state of physical and mental weariness resulting from prolonged exertion or inadequate rest, which significantly affects cognitive functioning and attention (Åkerstedt *et al*., 2014). Sleep deprivation, on the other hand, refers to the condition of not having enough sleep, leading to reduced alertness, slower reaction times, and impaired concentration (Killgore, 2010). Both factors play a vital role in influencing students' engagement, as insufficient rest and accumulated tiredness hinder one's capacity to focus and process information effectively. The following statements reflect how fatigue and lack of sleep hinder college students' ability to sustain attention during early morning classes.

> *"It is kind of hard for me because I'm not a morning person and I usually sleep in classes held in the morning." – R6*

> *"I think I don't really learn well during early morning classes because my body and mind are somehow still adjusting. I usually feel a bit sluggish, and it takes me a while to be truly engaged in the discussion." – R7*

> *"On my end, I would have a hard time focusing, especially if I lack sleep, as it limits my focus." – R12*

> *"For me, when I have early morning classes, I tend to get sleepy, so I don't really like it." – R14*

R6, R7, R12, and R14 shared experiences that demonstrate how fatigue and sleep deprivation negatively impact their ability to stay alert and engaged in class. They described morning sluggishness, sleepiness, and difficulty maintaining focus, particularly during early schedules that do not align with their natural energy patterns or sleeping habits. Curcio, Ferrara, and De Gennaro (2006) confirmed that sleep deprivation significantly impairs attention, working memory, and learning capacity. These responses align with that finding, emphasizing how insufficient rest reduces students' cognitive readiness and learning engagement, especially in early morning classes following long commutes or short sleeping hours. Such fatigue-driven disengagement illustrates the biological and psychological limits of students' concentration, showing that consistent lack of rest directly undermines learning satisfaction and participation. This

implies that academic institutions should recognize the crucial role of adequate rest and manageable scheduling in sustaining students' attention and performance. Promoting healthy sleep habits and adjusting class timetables may help alleviate fatigue, allowing students to perform optimally and remain engaged throughout the learning process.

Theme 3. Enhanced Cognitive Alertness During Early Hours

Cognitive alertness refers to a state of mental readiness and attentional sharpness that allows individuals to process information efficiently and respond effectively to learning tasks (Oken, Salinsky, & Elsas, 2006). Morning alertness, in particular, has been associated with improved working memory, faster reaction time, and heightened motivation for cognitive activities (Schmidt *et al*., 2007). This theme reflects how some students experience increased focus and preparedness during early hours, perceiving morning classes as an opportunity for productive learning due to reduced distractions and a refreshed state of mind.

> *"As for me, my brain really functions best in the morning. So the early hours of the day are often quieter, with fewer people on the road or public transport. So that often offers a chance to also mentally prepare for the day ahead without the usual distractions of noise, crowded spaces, or the pressure of being late. So it allows me to welcome the academic environment with a clear mind." – R2*

> *"So, for me, morning classes help me become engaged since I don't feel sleepy during those times, and morning classes energize me." – R5*

> *"I feel motivated every morning. Despite my work that finishes by 2–3 AM, where I can still take naps and proceed to school right after due to early morning classes, I still feel motivated and I don't feel like not answering the professors' questions." – R9*

R2, R5, and R9 expressed how early morning schedules contribute positively to their cognitive functioning and emotional readiness. They described mornings as mentally refreshing and less distracting, which allows them to concentrate better and participate actively in class discussions. Goldstein and Walker (2014) highlighted that cognitive performance peaks when an individual's circadian rhythm aligns with their natural alertness period, suggesting that morning-oriented individuals perform better in tasks requiring focus and attention during early hours. These responses confirm that early classes can promote higher engagement and motivation for certain students who identify as morning types. The theme underscores that early hours provide a mental advantage through quiet environments, lower external stimuli, and an energized state that fosters focus and academic satisfaction. This implies that recognizing students' chronotypes and optimizing class schedules to suit their cognitive peaks may enhance learning outcomes and overall engagement within academic settings.

Theme 4. Interactive and Supportive Learning Environments Promote Engagement

An interactive and supportive learning environment refers to a classroom setting that encourages collaboration, active participation, and mutual support among teachers and students to enhance engagement and learning outcomes (Kurniawan, Rohmaniah, & Abdillah, 2024). Such environments promote emotional connection and cognitive stimulation, which are particularly crucial during early morning classes when students often experience low energy and reduced focus (Chen *et al*., 2025). The following responses demonstrate how interactive and supportive classroom dynamics foster attentiveness and motivation among students despite fatigue or early class schedules.

> *"During our English class, the discussion was interactive, and the teacher encouraged us to share our ideas. So even if I was a bit sleepy from commuting, I felt engaged because the activity made me think and participate. Like, I realized that when the class is lively, it really helped me overcome the tiredness." – R3*

> *"When we have collaborative activities, that's when I am really engaged in class." – R4*

R3 and R4 emphasized that active participation and teacher encouragement significantly influence their engagement levels. Even when physically tired or mentally drained, they found that interactive activities and peer collaboration reinvigorated their focus and motivation. These findings suggest that the social and interactive nature of learning can counteract fatigue brought by early commutes or morning drowsiness. Recent studies affirm this connection between interactive learning environments and student engagement. Kurniawan *et al*. (2024) found that collaborative and participatory classroom strategies significantly increase student motivation and attentiveness. Similarly, Peng, Deng, and Jin (2022) discovered that active learning classrooms, through spatial and social interactivity, enhance learners' focus and cognitive performance. Narla *et al*. (2025) further highlighted that classroom interactions cultivate a stronger sense of belonging, leading to improved engagement and satisfaction even in remote or challenging learning conditions. This implies that educators should actively cultivate interactive and supportive classroom environments through collaborative discussions, group tasks, and teacher encouragement to sustain engagement, especially during early hours when students are vulnerable to fatigue. By promoting social interaction and active participation, teachers can help students overcome morning sluggishness, fostering a more energized and attentive learning atmosphere.

Theme 5. Monotonous and Ineffective Instruction Reduces Engagement

Monotonous and ineffective instruction refers to teaching methods that lack variety, interactivity, and stimulation, which often result in reduced learner attention, motivation, and participation (Barkley, 2010) [4]. When lessons are overly teacher-centered, predictable, or delivered without enthusiasm, students are more likely to experience disengagement, particularly during early morning classes when energy levels are already low (Rahman, Ismail, & Jusoh, 2023). The statements below illustrate how unengaging or repetitive instructional approaches diminish student involvement and satisfaction in learning.

> *"I get disengaged if the class is like the traditional ones." – R10*

> *"I feel disengaged if the early morning class is quite*

boring for me. For example, if the teacher is too lenient in forming a class, then maybe that is one of the factors I could say that makes me disengaged in class." – R15

R10 and R15 highlighted that traditional and lecture-heavy teaching styles lead to decreased engagement and motivation. They expressed that when instruction lacks interaction, energy, or meaningful structure, their attention declines, especially in morning sessions. Their experiences align with the concept that teaching strategies play a crucial role in maintaining learners' focus, as ineffective pedagogy can directly hinder the learning process. Rahman *et al*. (2023) found that monotonous or passive teaching methods lead to student disengagement and lower academic satisfaction, particularly in early classes where maintaining alertness is already a challenge. Similarly, Prince (2024) emphasized that interactive and active-learning strategies are essential to sustaining attention and deep learning, as traditional methods fail to meet students' cognitive and motivational needs. These findings confirm that monotonous teaching methods limit opportunities for meaningful interaction and emotional connection, both of which are vital to student engagement. This implies that educators must design and deliver lessons that integrate variety, interactivity, and meaningful activities to prevent disengagement. By replacing traditional and passive approaches with more student-centered and dynamic strategies, teachers can better capture students' attention and promote sustained motivation, even during early morning classes when learners are most susceptible to fatigue and boredom.

B. Academic Performance

Theme 1. Physical and Mental Fatigue Impede Academic Productivity

Physical and mental fatigue refer to the exhaustion of the body and mind resulting from prolonged exertion, insufficient rest, or demanding circumstances, which negatively affect cognitive performance and learning outcomes (Lim & Dinges, 2010) [26]. In academic contexts, fatigue often leads to decreased concentration, slower cognitive processing, and reduced productivity, particularly among students with long commutes or early morning schedules (Lo *et al*., 2016) [29]. The following statements illustrate how exhaustion from daily travel and early routines hinders students' ability to stay productive and perform effectively in their studies.

"Honestly, commuting really eats up a lot of my time and energy. It really drains me because of the heavy traffic. So I sometimes struggle to finish assignments or review properly the night before, since I have to wake up early. By the time I get home from school, I'm too exhausted to study productively, as I am already tired from class and then dealing with heavy traffic on the way back." – R1

"My usual travel time takes me about 30 to 50 minutes going home or going to school, depending on the traffic. If it's rush hour, I can't help but feel tired going home or going to school. Also, I missed some important classes and presentations due to arriving late in class." – R7

"There are times when, after the long ride, I still have to walk to get into the classroom, and that makes me tired and lose my sense of focus. I find it difficult when there is reporting that needs to be done in early classes, especially when we need to bring materials, since jeepneys in our area are very packed." – R9

"I would say early morning classes have made me unproductive. I noticed that some discussions in the morning are not that great, so I tend not to listen and I would rather study on my own to avoid being confused with the topic." – R11

"I think it affects my academic performance when I am disengaged or I am still zoning out, since I am too focused on trying to stay awake." – R14

R1, R7, R9, R11, and R14 all described how early commutes, long travel hours, and sleep deprivation directly contribute to exhaustion, which consequently impairs their focus, attendance, and overall academic productivity. Their experiences reveal how physical fatigue and mental strain lead to disengagement, missed learning opportunities, and reduced quality of academic output. Consistent with these experiences, Lo *et al*. (2016) [29] found that even moderate sleep restriction and fatigue impair attention and cognitive control, while Lim and Dinges (2010) [26] highlighted that chronic sleep deprivation diminishes learning efficiency and academic productivity. Similarly, Reddy *et al*. (2022) noted that physical exhaustion among commuting students correlates with lower performance levels and reduced task persistence. These findings confirm that physical and mental fatigue serve as major barriers to sustained academic engagement and effective learning performance. This implies that educational institutions should consider student fatigue as a critical factor influencing academic performance. Implementing later class schedules, promoting adequate rest, and ensuring supportive academic pacing can help mitigate the effects of exhaustion on productivity. Furthermore, universities may adopt wellness programs or flexible study arrangements that acknowledge the physical and psychological toll of early commutes, enabling students to perform at their optimal cognitive capacity.

Theme 2. Time Constraints Disrupt Task Completion and Academic Consistency

Time constraints refer to the limited availability of time to complete required academic tasks due to external factors such as travel duration, traffic congestion, and scheduling conflicts (Adebayo & Oyinloye, 2021) [1]. These restrictions often challenge students' ability to manage coursework, meet deadlines, and maintain academic consistency. Commuting students experience difficulties balancing school responsibilities with the time consumed by transportation, resulting in compromised task quality and delayed submissions (Pehlivan, 2013) [38]. The following statements demonstrate how travel-related time constraints hinder students' academic productivity and reliability.

"Usually, I cram my activities since I have to travel a long distance from my house to school. I make the activities an hour before the deadline, or I sometimes do the activities while travelling. It is kind of hard, honestly." – R4

"It really affects my time. For example, if there is an activity with a deadline on the same day, it would really be hard for me because my commute takes time, since I still have to wait in line at the South Bus Terminal, and

my arrival depends on the heaviness of the traffic." – R8

"There was a time when I was late to school, and we had a group activity. Luckily, I arrived at 8:15, so I was still able to catch up. But arriving at that time, it's frustrating. For the academic part, it is tiring for task completion. I failed to submit certain tasks on time, as well as studying." – R12

R4, R8, and R12 expressed how long travel times and unpredictable commuting conditions limit their available study hours and disrupt academic consistency. Their accounts highlight the challenges of managing coursework while balancing travel demands, often leading to rushed submissions, incomplete work, and lower-quality outputs. The time spent commuting not only reduces productivity but also contributes to increased academic stress and inefficiency. Supporting these experiences, Adebayo and Oyinloye (2021) [1] noted that students facing time scarcity due to non-academic commitments exhibit poorer time management and reduced academic performance. Similarly, Pehlivan (2013) [38] emphasized that ineffective time management among university students often results in procrastination and irregular study habits, further undermining learning outcomes. These findings reinforce that time constraints caused by commuting and scheduling conflicts are significant barriers to academic consistency and success. This implies that universities should recognize the impact of commuting-related time loss on students' task completion and performance quality. Institutions may consider adopting flexible learning arrangements, such as extended submission deadlines, hybrid schedules, or asynchronous activities, to accommodate students with long travel times. Furthermore, incorporating time management training and productivity support programs can help students effectively organize their academic tasks despite external constraints, thereby improving academic consistency and overall performance.

Theme 3. Morning Productivity Enhances Cognitive Performance and Learning Outcomes

Morning productivity refers to the optimal level of focus, alertness, and efficiency exhibited during early hours of the day, often linked to increased cognitive performance and academic success (Preckel, Lipnevich, Schneider, & Roberts, 2011) [39]. Students who utilize morning hours effectively tend to demonstrate higher concentration, better memory retention, and stronger learning outcomes (Carrell, Maghakian, & West, 2011) [8]. The following statements illustrate how arriving early to school enables students to maximize their time for studying, preparing for tasks, and enhancing academic readiness.

"Coming early or early arrivals often gave me quick and free access to resources on campus, like quiet study spaces or library access. Also, with fewer students and preventing crowding in these places, I can focus entirely on academic work without interruptions. With this, I can do more overview or course readings before classes start. So arriving at school earlier than the scheduled time really allowed me to also review what I needed to prepare for the day." – R2

"Allows me to focus and prepare for classes." – R5

"It improved my academic performance since I got more time to study." – R6

"I think going to classes early benefits me in a way that I have more time to prepare for the next class, and I have more time to do missing tasks." – R10

R2, R5, R6, and R10 described how early arrivals fostered better focus, preparedness, and productivity. Their responses reveal that morning routines provide a quieter and more conducive environment for concentration and self-paced learning, which consequently enhances academic readiness and performance. The ability to maximize time before classes allows students to complete pending tasks, engage in pre-study activities, and mentally organize their academic priorities for the day. Preckel *et al.* (2011) [39] found that students with morning-oriented habits demonstrate superior academic performance compared to those with later daily schedules. Similarly, Carrell *et al.* (2011) [8] revealed that early-day engagement correlates with higher cognitive efficiency, attention control, and learning outcomes. More recent studies, such as that of Silva *et al.* (2020) [47], further affirm that students who utilize morning hours effectively exhibit enhanced productivity, particularly in tasks requiring critical thinking and sustained attention. This implies that encouraging early productivity and structured morning routines can improve students' academic preparation and cognitive engagement. Universities may foster this by opening study facilities earlier, promoting morning review sessions, and supporting academic habits that align with students' natural periods of optimal alertness. By leveraging morning productivity, learners can strengthen their focus, maximize available time, and achieve improved learning outcomes.

Theme 4. Self-Discipline and Time Management Foster Academic Improvement

Self-discipline and time management refer to an individual's ability to regulate behaviors, maintain focus, and allocate time effectively to achieve academic goals (Zimmerman, 2002). These skills are essential for balancing academic demands with external responsibilities, particularly for students who face time-consuming commutes and early class schedules (Britton & Tesser, 1991). Effective self-regulation allows learners to adapt proactively to challenges, prioritize important tasks, and sustain academic performance despite external constraints. The following statements demonstrate how self-discipline and proper time management contribute to improved productivity and academic consistency among students.

"It taught me to plan and maximize any free time I get, so I can still finish my requirements despite the long travel." – R3

"In my academic performance, I can keep track of things I have to do. I manage my time very well. At the same time, I am good at doing tasks without any problem with time because, based on my experience, there was no moment in my college journey that I found hard to finish one subject activity unless it was too heavy." – R15

R3 and R15 illustrated how self-discipline and time

management helped them navigate academic responsibilities despite travel-related fatigue and schedule constraints. Their responses indicate that organized study routines and proactive planning serve as compensatory strategies to maintain academic quality and prevent delays in task completion. These behaviors reflect the importance of internal motivation and self-regulated learning as key determinants of sustained academic performance. Supporting these findings, Zimmerman (2002) emphasized that self-regulated learners display higher achievement due to their ability to set goals, monitor progress, and adjust strategies as needed. Similarly, Kitsantas, Winsler, and Huie (2008) found that effective time management positively predicts students' academic success and persistence, even under challenging conditions. Recent research by Adesina *et al*. (2023) further confirmed that self-discipline acts as a buffer against academic stress, enhancing focus and promoting resilience among college students. This implies that fostering students' time management and self-discipline skills can significantly enhance their academic performance. Educational institutions may integrate training programs or workshops on goal setting, task prioritization, and self-regulation to help learners manage academic demands more effectively. Encouraging these habits cultivates independence, efficiency, and sustained motivation, ultimately supporting long-term academic growth and success.

C. Physical and Mental Well-being

Theme 1. Physical Fatigue and Mental Due to Early Commutes

Physical fatigue is the bodily exhaustion that arises from prolonged exertion, insufficient rest, or extended travel, while mental strain refers to psychological stress, irritability, and reduced cognitive functioning due to external pressures (Van Cutsem *et al*., 2017). Early commutes often combine both conditions which leaves students physically depleted and mentally unprepared before classes begin. The act of waking up earlier than usual, rushing through morning routines, and enduring long travel in crowded environments consumes energy that should otherwise be directed toward learning. Recent research further supports this, showing that insufficient recovery among university students increases stress load and reduces academic performance-related outcomes (Teuber, Leyhr, & Sudeck, 2024). Together, these findings highlight that commuting-induced fatigue undermines both concentration and participation that ultimately shapes students' readiness to learn and their overall satisfaction with the educational experience. The following responses demonstrate early commuting depletes energy and contributes to emotional fatigue.

> *"Waking up very early… really negatively affects both my body and my mind. Physically, I often feel tired and sometimes I get headaches… Mentally, I also feel stressed and irritable because of the rush and wasted time." – R1*

> *"Physically, I get really tired since it's morning and you're not that awake. For mental health, it's mental fatigue where you're not yet ready to learn." – R6*

> *"Just recently… we had a quiz at 7:30, but my mental capacity back then was not there yet. For my score in the quiz, I'd rather not disclose it." – R7*

R1, R6, and R7 clearly illustrate how commuting drains both physical energy and mental readiness which leaves students less capable of concentrating, retaining information, and performing effectively in class. Their experiences show that the long hours of travel, combined with the need to wake up much earlier than usual, result in a state of exhaustion that directly interferes with their ability to engage in academic tasks. Boksem and Tops (2010) confirmed that mental fatigue reduces motivation, weakens self-regulation, and impairs cognitive control, while Van Cutsem *et al*. (2017) emphasized that physical exhaustion significantly diminishes sustained attention and overall performance. These scholarly findings align with the students' testimonies, reinforcing the idea that commuting-induced fatigue is not only a personal inconvenience but also a scientifically recognized barrier to learning satisfaction. The convergence of physical tiredness and mental stress creates a compounded obstacle to academic engagement as students are forced to expend much of their energy on the commute itself rather than on classroom participation. As a result, they often arrive in class already depleted, which reduces their ability to absorb lessons, contribute to discussions, and maintain focus throughout the session. This situation implies that universities should take proactive measures such as implementing later start times, offering wellness programs, or adopting flexible scheduling to reduce fatigue and improve students' readiness to learn, thereby enhancing both academic performance and overall well-being.

Theme 2: Disruptions in Daily Habits and Health Practices

Disruptions in daily habits occur when commuting schedules interfere with essential routines such as sleep, meals, and rest, which are critical for maintaining both physical health and cognitive performance. When students are required to leave home before dawn or return late at night, they often experience irregular eating patterns, skipped meals, and insufficient recovery time, all of which compromise their overall well-being. Such disruptions negatively affect not only physical health but also academic consistency, as fatigue and poor nutrition reduce concentration and productivity (Beattie, Baumeister, & Baumeister, 2015). Recent studies further confirm this connection, showing that long commutes among students are strongly associated with disrupted sleep cycles, heightened stress, and diminished academic outcomes (Lima, Neto, Hino, & Duarte, 2024) [28]. These findings suggest that commuting is not merely a logistical challenge but a factor that directly undermines students' ability to sustain healthy routines. The cumulative effect of disrupted sleep and irregular meals is a decline in both energy levels and mental focus, which in turn weakens classroom engagement and learning satisfaction. The responses below highlight how commuting interferes with students' basic health routines.

> *"Physically, my BMI is underweight and because of the schedule, I tend to skip breakfast… In my mental health, I sometimes become irritable, I have mood swings." – R11*

> *"Basically, it sometimes makes me have my dinner so late… I'd be home by 9 or 10 and by then, I can have my dinner." – R8*

"Physically, it's really exhausting and then mentally, I'm always tired since I usually sleep late." – R4

R11, R8, and R4 testimonies demonstrate how commuting disrupts essential daily habits which is critical for sustaining energy, concentration, and overall academic focus. Their experiences reveal that long travel hours often force students to skip meals, delay rest, or shorten sleep which leads to irregular routines that compromise both physical health and learning efficiency. Beattie *et al*. (2015) found that disrupted routines undermine self-regulation and performance, while Lund *et al*. (2010) reported that irregular sleep patterns among college students are strongly associated with poorer academic outcomes. These findings confirm the students' experiences about commuting-induced interruptions in basic health practices create a cycle of fatigue, irritability, and diminished academic performance. The convergence of disrupted sleep and irregular meals not only weakens students' physical stamina but also reduces their ability to sustain attention and motivation in class. This implies that universities should adopt health-supportive measures such as flexible timetables, wellness education, and access to affordable and nutritious food options on campus to counteract the negative effects of disrupted routines.

Theme 3: Adaptation and Coping Through Routine

Adaptation involves students' ability to modify their behaviors and routines in order to manage stress, while coping refers to the strategies they employ to remain mentally stable and resilient in the face of challenges (Wong & Cheng, 2023). In the context of commuting, these two processes often work hand in hand, as students must constantly adjust their schedules, habits, and mindsets to deal with the demands of early travel. Recent research further supports this, showing that student commuters who establish consistent coping strategies report lower stress levels and greater academic persistence (Kumar & Mondal, 2024). Such findings confirm that adaptation and coping are not passive responses but active skills that enable students to sustain focus and motivation despite the strain of daily travel. The responses below illustrate how these intentional routines and habits serve as protective mechanisms which allow students to transform commuting from a purely exhausting experience into one that fosters resilience and self-discipline.

"I usually try to sleep early as much as possible… I also listen to music or my podcast, it really lessens my worries and tiredness during the commute." – R1

"I usually pack my bag and prepare the night before, so I don't have to rush when I wake up. That really helps lessen the pressure in the morning." – R3

"To manage stress… I usually don't stay up late, and I sleep early… then during the afternoon, if I have the chance, I take naps." – R5

R1, R3, and R5 emphasized the importance of actively developing routines to minimize stress and maintain focus despite the persistent challenges of commuting. Their testimonies reveal that students who intentionally structure their daily activities such as preparing materials the night before, organizing travel schedules, or setting aside time for rest are better able to cope with the demands of long commutes. Zhang *et al*. (2023) found that consistent daily planning significantly reduces anxiety among commuting students, while Hernández *et al*. (2022) reported that stress management routines such as mindfulness practices and systematic preparation enhance academic satisfaction. These findings confirm that adaptive routines are not merely practical adjustments but essential strategies that sustain engagement and protect students from the negative effects of fatigue. Students who establish and maintain such routines demonstrate resilience and self-regulation that allow them to preserve learning satisfaction even when faced with physical tiredness and mental strain. The convergence of student testimonies and scholarly evidence highlights that adaptation through structured habits is a proactive response that strengthens academic persistence. This implies that universities should support these efforts by offering workshops on time management, emotional regulation, and wellness strategies to help students adapt more effectively to the challenges of daily commuting.

Theme 4: Leisure and Self-Care as Well-Being Maintenance

Leisure and self-care involve activities that allow students to restore energy, maintain balance, and regain emotional stability amid the stress of academic and commuting demands (Silva & Navarro, 2023) [48]. For commuting students, engaging in leisure pursuits whether through creative outlets, exercise, or spending time with peers helps counteract exhaustion and sustain motivation for academic tasks. Recent research further supports this, showing that leisure satisfaction and effective free-time management significantly improve students' quality of life and psychological well-being (Yu *et al*., 2024). These findings confirm that self-care is not a luxury but a necessary coping mechanism that strengthens resilience and academic persistence. The responses below highlight how students actively turn to hobbies or social activities as strategies to manage stress and the protective role of leisure in maintaining both well-being and learning satisfaction.

"I usually cope with stress by playing games or doing my hobbies." – R4

"To cope, I spend money or go out with my friends where we usually do bowling, skating, or even thrifting." – R11

"If I feel tired, I make sure to relax, and sometimes reflect on the things I did… to avoid bad things from happening again." – R10

R4, R11, and R10 highlight that leisure and hobbies serve as important outlets for balancing the stress of commuting and the demands of academic life. Their testimonies reveal that engaging in enjoyable activities whether through creative hobbies, sports, or social interactions provides students with opportunities to release tension and restore emotional balance. Lim *et al*. (2022) [27] noted that recreational breaks enhance emotional stability and concentration, while Park and Kim (2023) [37] found that leisure participation among college students leads to improved mental well-being and academic motivation. More recently, Yu *et al*. (2024) emphasized that effective free-time management and leisure satisfaction significantly improve students' quality of life and resilience, further supporting the value of these practices. These findings confirm the students' experiences where

leisure is not merely a form of entertainment but a vital coping mechanism that sustains academic persistence. By allowing students to recharge, leisure activities prevent burnout, reduce stress, and help maintain motivation despite the fatigue of daily commuting. The strong connection between leisure and resilience implies that universities should foster student wellness programs, peer activities, and designated rest spaces that encourage a healthier balance between academic responsibilities and self-care.

D. Commuting Experience

Theme 1: Traffic Congestion and Transportation Barriers Reduce Punctuality

Commuting experience refers to the totality of encounters and emotions that students undergo during their daily travel to school both the logistical aspects of transportation and the psychological pressures associated with time management (Marin *et al*., 2023) [32]. These experiences are shaped not only by the physical act of traveling but also by the stressors that arise from unpredictable conditions such as traffic congestion and transportation barriers. For many students, heavy traffic prolongs travel time which forces them to wake up earlier and arrive at school already fatigued, while unreliable transport options increase anxiety about punctuality. Giron (2024) [17] reported that commuting challenges such as overcrowded vehicles and irregular schedules significantly hinder students' ability to arrive on time and maintain focus. The responses below illustrate how heavy traffic and inconsistent transport options create barriers to punctuality, readiness, and the broader impact of commuting on learning satisfaction.

> *"The challenges I usually face are heavy traffic, overcrowded public transportation, and unpredictable delays… sometimes I even worry about being late." – R1*

> *"There are rare jeepneys from my place to the school. Next is the heavy traffic during mornings." – R5*

> *"There's already plenty of people waiting for jeepneys… some days it takes 30 minutes, other days almost an hour to arrive at campus." – R7*

R1, R5, and R7 testimonies reveal how unreliable transport systems directly affect students' punctuality and overall preparedness for academic tasks. It highlights that delays caused by inconsistent bus or jeepney schedules often result in late arrivals and heightened stress before classes even begin. Santos *et al*. (2023) [43] emphasized that inconsistent public transport schedules significantly reduce productivity, increase lateness, and elevate anxiety among college commuters, while Chou and Hsu (2022) [11] reported that traffic congestion directly decreases punctuality and study satisfaction. These studies confirm the students' experiences, showing that commuting barriers are not isolated inconveniences but systemic issues that disrupt learning engagement. The combined effect of unreliable transport and heavy traffic leaves students physically and mentally strained which reduces their ability to concentrate and participate actively in class. This implies that improving transport systems, providing shuttle services, or offering flexible attendance policies can help mitigate the negative effects of commuting delays and better support student learning.

Theme 2: Environmental and Physical Discomfort During Travel

Environmental discomfort refers to the stress caused by external commuting conditions such as overcrowding, excessive noise, heat, and pollution, while physical discomfort includes fatigue from standing for long periods, cramped seating arrangements, and extended travel times (Rivera *et al*., 2022) [41]. These conditions often overlap, creating a taxing experience that drains students' energy reserves even before they arrive at school. For many commuters, the daily exposure to traffic congestion, poor ventilation in vehicles, and unpredictable weather further intensifies both physical and emotional strain. Recent studies confirm these observations, with Jamil *et al*. (2022) [22] reporting that students with longer and more uncomfortable commutes experience significantly higher stress levels and perceive commuting as a barrier to academic success. The responses below highlight how uncomfortable travel conditions diminish students' energy and preparedness.

> *"Physically, especially when standing up… it drains your energy even with classes not starting yet." – R9*
> *"Physically, it's very tiring especially when my regular commute is 5:30 and most of the time it is congested so I have to stand up." – R14*

> *"It's always the traffic and it's hard for me to look for jeepneys where I can sit." – R4*

R9, R14, and R4 highlight how the physical strain of standing in crowded vehicles, combined with environmental stressors such as traffic congestion and noise, depletes students' energy reserves. A recent study by Barros *et al*. (2023) [5] showed that commuting discomfort leads to fatigue and lower morning productivity among students. Likewise, Naidoo and Patel (2024) [33] observed that environmental stressors like crowding and noise correlate with decreased emotional well-being and academic satisfaction. Similarly, Wener and Evans (2011) [56] found that long and uncomfortable commutes are associated with higher stress levels and lower satisfaction. These findings confirm the students' experiences. The discomfort of commuting is not merely a physical inconvenience but a psychological burden that reduces students' readiness to learn. Arriving at school already drained undermines their ability to concentrate and participate actively in class. This implies that universities and policymakers should consider interventions such as shuttle services, improved public transport infrastructure, or flexible attendance policies to reduce the negative impact of commuting discomfort on students' academic engagement.

Theme 3: Adaptability and Self-Discipline in Early Routines

Adaptability is the capacity to adjust one's behavior under changing conditions, while self-discipline involves sustaining productive habits that enable academic consistency (Hernandez & Li, 2023) [19]. For commuting students, these qualities are especially important because unpredictable factors such as traffic congestion, transport delays, or sudden schedule changes often disrupt their routines. Demonstrating adaptability means that students learn to modify their behaviors to ensure they can still arrive on time and ready for class. At the same time, self-discipline allows them to maintain productive habits. Recent research supports this, with Santos and Cruz (2024) [44] noting that

adaptability and self-discipline among college commuters are strongly linked to reduced stress and improved academic persistence. The responses below illustrate how students demonstrate managing their morning routines showing that personal regulation plays a crucial role in balancing the demands of travel and learning.

> *"Morning classes help me stay motivated to stick with my routine… sleeping early and taking naps in the afternoon shapes my self-discipline." – R5*

> *"I try to leave earlier… I also listen to R&B music during the ride so my mind is calm and I don't feel pressure." – R7*

> *"It motivates me to wake up early, do all tasks before I sleep so I won't feel uneasy by the time I need to go to class." – R8*

R5, R7, and R8 show how students develop strategies to cope with commuting challenges, such as adjusting sleep schedules, preparing belongings in advance, and using commute time for relaxation. Their testimonies highlight that these intentional adjustments are not only practical but also reflect a deeper capacity for self-regulation and resilience in the face of daily stressors. Recent research by Reyes *et al.* (2023) [40] confirmed that adaptability enhances persistence and emotional regulation among college students, while Cho and Tan (2022) [10] found that time-structured routines improve learning efficiency among commuters. More recent findings also reinforce this perspective, with Santos and Cruz (2024) [44] reporting that adaptability and disciplined routines significantly reduce stress and promote academic consistency among student commuters. The alignment between research and lived experience demonstrates that discipline and adaptability are essential tools for reducing commuting stress and sustaining engagement in learning. While commuting presents significant barriers, students' ability to adapt and maintain discipline illustrates resilience though it requires considerable effort and constant adjustment. This implies that universities should provide structured resources such as time management workshops, stress management programs, and strengthened academic counseling to support students in sustaining adaptability and discipline over the long term.

Theme 4. Motivational Shifts Influenced by Commuting Conditions

Motivation determines the drive to learn and persist despite challenges which make it a central factor in students' ability to succeed academically. For commuting students, this drive is constantly tested as long travel hours and early departures often lead to fatigue which can diminish enthusiasm and reduce focus during class sessions. At the same time, commuting can also serve as a space for self-reflection, where students use the travel period to strengthen perseverance, set goals, or mentally prepare for the day ahead (Tan & Ong, 2023) [50]. This dual effect demonstrates that commuting does not influence all students in the same way, while some experience a decline in motivation due to exhaustion, others transform the challenge into an opportunity for growth. The responses below highlight how commuting influences motivation differently among students.

> *"Honestly, these experiences make me less motivated to attend early classes… it really drains my energy before the class starts." – R1*

> *"At first it felt tiring and discouraging, but over time, I realized the effort I put into traveling shows how much I value my education… it motivates me to make the most out of every class." – R3*

> *"Sometimes life happens… it would really matter what mindset you'd set onto. Not being at your best in the morning doesn't make you less as a student." – R7*

R1, R3, and R7 testimonies show the dual nature of motivation; it reveals that commuting can either erode motivation by exhausting them or strengthen it by reinforcing their commitment to education. According to Gao *et al.* (2023) [16], students' motivation depends on how they cognitively frame stressors, while Park and Han (2022) [36] observed that positive reappraisal of difficulties fosters academic persistence. This also connects to Ryan and Deci (2017) [42] argument that challenges can either undermine or enhance intrinsic motivation depending on how individuals interpret them. These studies confirm that resilience-based motivation transforms negative experiences into personal growth. The dual nature of commuting's impact on motivation highlights the importance of mindset and coping strategies. While some students feel discouraged, others use the challenge as a source of determination. This implies that educators should recognize the motivational challenges posed by commuting and provide encouragement, flexible learning opportunities, and recognition of students' efforts to sustain engagement.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

Grounded in the study's combined quantitative and qualitative findings, the results suggest that early commuting among college students in Cebu City has a generally manageable, though uneven, effect on their learning satisfaction. The respondents reported slightly favorable levels of academic engagement, academic performance, and commuting experience, while physical and mental well-being obtained the lowest scores. A moderate, statistically significant negative correlation was found between usual wake-up time and physical and mental well-being, indicating that students who wake up earlier tend to report relatively better well-being, whereas residence location and commute duration showed negligible, non-significant relationships with the four dimensions of learning satisfaction. These patterns are further clarified by the themes, in which students described fatigue, lack of sleep, time pressure, traffic congestion, and uncomfortable commuting conditions as key challenges that affect their focus, productivity, and mood. Integrating engaging instructional strategies—such as gamified participation or interactive progress tracking—may help mitigate the negative impact of early commutes on student satisfaction (Tasleem *et al.*, 2020) [51]. At the same time, many of them reported adapting through better time management, self-discipline, personal coping strategies, and experiencing higher engagement when classes are interactive and teachers are supportive. Taken together, these integrated findings suggest that while a number of students are able to adjust to early commuting and, in some cases, benefit from

structured morning routines, their overall learning satisfaction (particularly in terms of physical and mental well-being) remains sensitive to commuting conditions, classroom practices, and the level of institutional support. In light of these results, it is recommended that higher education institutions and other stakeholders consider, where feasible, reviewing early class schedules or offering flexible arrangements; strengthening wellness-oriented programs such as mental health services, stress- and time-management support, and guidance on healthy sleep and nutrition; and encouraging more interactive, student-centered teaching approaches to help sustain attention and motivation during early morning sessions. Exploring collaborations with local transport providers or institutional transport support (such as shuttle options or route information) may also help ease commuting burdens. Future studies involving larger and more diverse samples, as well as additional variables such as sleep quality, socioeconomic background, and course-related demands, are likewise recommended to deepen understanding of how early commutes shape students' academic engagement, performance, well-being, and overall commuting satisfaction, and to inform more targeted policies and interventions.

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