

---

5-24-2021

## Rural Students Transition into Higher Education in Meghalaya: Challenges and Coping Strategies

Ferrando Lyngdoh Nonglait

North-Eastern Hill University, Meghalaya, India, ferrandolyngdoh@gmail.com

Dr. Euodia Bahun Myrthong

North-Eastern Hill University, Meghalaya, India, eubahun@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: <https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr>



Part of the [Educational Psychology Commons](#), and the [Social and Behavioral Sciences Commons](#)

---

### Recommended APA Citation

Lyngdoh Nonglait, F., & Myrthong, D. B. (2021). Rural Students Transition into Higher Education in Meghalaya: Challenges and Coping Strategies. *The Qualitative Report*, 26(5), 1663-1677. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2021.4759>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the The Qualitative Report at NSUWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Qualitative Report by an authorized administrator of NSUWorks. For more information, please contact [nsuworks@nova.edu](mailto:nsuworks@nova.edu).

---



**Qualitative Research Graduate Certificate**  
*Indulge in Culture*  
Exclusively Online • 18 Credits  
**LEARN MORE**

NSU  
NOVA SOUTHEASTERN  
UNIVERSITY

NOVA SOUTHEA

## Rural Students Transition into Higher Education in Meghalaya: Challenges and Coping Strategies

### Abstract

The transition from school to college is a change every student has to make in their pursuit of higher education. The transition phase is a difficult time for many students, especially to the rural students, many of whom are from a disadvantaged background. However, little literature exists in our state and the country on the transition of rural students into higher education, especially on the challenges they face and the coping strategies they have adopted. This qualitative exploratory study, therefore, aims to explore the challenges rural students in Meghalaya faced when making the transition into higher education, along with the strategies they adopted to cope with the challenges. The participants of this study consist of 68 rural students selected by the use of purposive sampling technique and the data was collected by the use of a semi-structured interview schedule. The thematic analysis method was used to analyse the interview transcripts. The study revealed rural students faced two main challenges, which are academic challenges and socio-emotional challenges, and they had adopted task-oriented coping and emotion-oriented coping strategies in coping with these challenges. The study concludes by suggesting that rural students need additional support when making the transition into higher education.

### Keywords

rural students, transition, higher education, challenges, coping strategies

### Creative Commons License



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-Share Alike 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).

# Rural Students Transition into Higher Education in Meghalaya: Challenges and Coping Strategies

Ferrando Lyngdoh Nonglait and Euodia Bahun Myrthong  
North-Eastern Hill University, India

---

The transition from school to college is a change every student has to make in their pursuit of higher education. The transition phase is a difficult time for many students, especially to the rural students, many of whom are from a disadvantaged background. However, little literature exists in our state and the country on the transition of rural students into higher education, especially on the challenges they face and the coping strategies they have adopted. This qualitative exploratory study, therefore, aims to explore the challenges rural students in Meghalaya faced when making the transition into higher education, along with the strategies they adopted to cope with the challenges. The participants of this study consist of 68 rural students selected by the use of purposive sampling technique and the data was collected by the use of a semi-structured interview schedule. The thematic analysis method was used to analyse the interview transcripts. The study revealed rural students faced two main challenges, which are academic challenges and socio-emotional challenges, and they had adopted task-oriented coping and emotion-oriented coping strategies in coping with these challenges. The study concludes by suggesting that rural students need additional support when making the transition into higher education.

*Keywords:* rural students, transition, higher education, challenges, coping strategies

---

## Introduction

Every student has to make the transition from higher secondary school to college in their pursuit of higher education. The transition from school to higher education is a period of rapid and extensive change. Hence, challenges for students through the transition stage are inevitable (Wilson et al., 2016, p. 21) and every student encounters these challenges in a different ways (Jeyagowri & Ilankumaran, 2018, p. 1). While the transition from school to higher education can be difficult for any students irrespective of their background, studies conducted had found, because of their disadvantaged background, it can be severely acute for rural students (Ast, 2014; Bramston & Patrick, 2007; Hlinka, 2017; Jeyagowri & Ilankumaran, 2018; Xie; 2015; Yan & Wu, 2020). Rural students received less guidance from their parents regarding participation in higher education (Yoder, 2007) as they are less likely to have college educated parents (Taylor, 2013), hence they are less prepared than their urban counterparts in overcoming the challenges faced when making the transition into higher education. Moreover, studies had also found rural students may face difficulty in interacting with teachers and other students because of fear of negative stereotypes of rural background (Denhere, 2013) and the feeling of being different from other students (Schultz, 2004) when transitioning to a large urban college.

The current paper focuses on the transition of rural students into higher education in Meghalaya, a small state in India. Meghalaya is one of the important centres of higher education in North-East India, and its state capital, Shillong, is a preferred destination for higher education for many students, especially for students of the different states of North-East India. However, higher education in Meghalaya is characterised by the unequal educational opportunity provided between the state urban and rural areas. Higher educational institutions in Meghalaya are mostly located in urban centres and cities. Therefore, rural students who want to continue their education after schooling often had to be separate from their family and to move to the nearest urban centres or the state capitals. This transition from small rural higher secondary schools to large urban colleges may subject rural students to a variety of challenges. The new environment rural students experience in college is different from their higher secondary school; hence, they may struggle to adapt and adjust to the increasing academic rigour and larger classroom in college. They may also face the challenges of losing touch with friends and to experience fewer encouraging factors such as lack of parental encouragement as many of them are first-generation learners. Further, they may also struggle to socialise with others and adjust to the new city life as a whole.

### **Literature Reviews**

The literature reviewed focuses on the challenges faced by rural students when transitioning into higher education and how they cope with the challenges. They are highlighted in systematic order.

#### **Challenges Rural Students Face**

Shifting from higher secondary to higher education is a period of rapid and intensive change (Kutty, 2014). Chea (2015) had found rural students encounter academic challenges when making the transition into higher education. They tend to be less academically prepared for college (Poole & More, 2001) and found the academic demands of college to be more difficult and challenging than high school (Goldman, 2019; Heinisch, 2018). It was also found that learning to study was one of the most challenging parts of transition for rural students (Heinisch, 2016) as they are required to devote much more time on their education than relying on their teachers like they used to do in their high school (Chea, 2015). They would also struggle in making a transition from a high school mind-set of memorization to college-level analysis and integration of thoughts (Hlinka, 2017) and would spend their first semester or two learning how to study as well as catching up academically (Sikes, 2018). Further, rural students would struggle with time management after leaving the structure of high school (Heinisch, 2016) as there are many distractions at university (Dietrich, 1999).

Rural students also face additional socio-cultural challenges when transitioning to college (Guiffrida, 2008). They would struggle to adjust to large classrooms and colleges (Maltzan, 2006) as they were used to small classes and schools where they had a personal connection to their teachers (Heinisch, 2018) in contrast to the large class sizes which made for far less personal experience (Dietrich, 1999). Moreover, rural students were also found to have feelings of loneliness (Williams & Luo, 2010) and would lack social connections (Ast, 2014) when they joined college as for most of them it will be the first time that they will be without their life-long peer group (Webb, 2019). In fact, they were experiencing difficulties transitioning to college as they were unable to relate to their classmates (Ast, 2014) as for the majority of them they had little to no experience making an entirely new set of new friends from a sea of individuals unknown to them (Cerrone, 2017).

## **Coping Strategies**

When rural students make the transition into college, they have to devise a strategy to cope with the different challenges by looking at the kinds of challenges, both inside and outside of college (Clark, 2005, p. 296). Clark (2005) and Bramston and Patrick (2007) had found talking to their family, friends, and peers about the different challenges is a universally adopted coping strategy by rural students when making the transition into college. To cope with the academic challenges rural students face when making the transition, Kutty (2014) and Chea (2015) had found they would work consistently hard in their education, change their study habits to suit the academic demands of college, and seek the support of their teachers and others. Bauer and Rokach (2004) had also found rural students would cope with the feeling of loneliness when making the transition to college by staying connected with their friends from school or village. Further, Wilson et al. (2016) and Sikes (2018) had found students from the rural areas would usually seek friends who are also from the rural areas when they are unable to make friends with those from the urban areas.

After reviewing the related literature, it is clear that rural students faced different challenges when making the transition into higher education. However, no studies were found to have been specifically focused on the challenges rural students face when transitioning into higher education in India or Meghalaya in particular. Therefore, more educational research on rural students' transition to college is essential (Manly et al., 2019, p. 1) as understanding the challenges they faced in transitioning to higher education will be essential in providing them with resources for their success in higher education. Further, it also felt necessary to find how rural students cope with the different challenges as rural communities could influence young people's learning of coping strategies and their ability to cope with a challenge (Bourke, 2002).

Hence, the current study aimed to find out the challenges faced by rural students when making the transition into higher education in Meghalaya and how they cope with the challenges.

## **Research Questions**

The following research questions guide this study:

1. What challenges do rural students face when making the transition into higher education?
2. How do rural students cope with the challenges when making the transition into higher education?

## **Context of the Researchers**

Both Nonglait and Myrthong are interested in the higher education of rural students. Nonglait is a senior research fellow in the Department of Education, North-Eastern Hill University, Meghalaya, India. He is from the rural parts of Meghalaya and has personally experienced transitioning from a small rural high school to a big urban college. He is interested in understanding the challenges rural students experience as they transition into college and how to assist them in this transitional phase. Myrthong is a doctorate and an assistant professor in the Department of Education, North-Eastern Hill University, Meghalaya, India. She has vast experience in research. She is also the programme officer of the national service scheme in North-Eastern Hill University and has been responsible for arranging awareness programmes and health camps in the rural areas of Meghalaya. Her

experience working with youth in the rural areas had driven her interest to conduct research on rural students in higher education. She also supervised this study.

## **Methodology**

The current study aims to explore the challenges rural students faced when making the transition into higher education, along with the strategies they adopted to cope with the challenges. The data for the current study were drawn from a broader exploratory study that focused on the problems and challenges rural students faced in higher education. In order to accomplish the purpose of this study, a qualitative research method through the use of a semi-structured interview schedule was adopted.

### **Site and Participants**

The current study was conducted in 12 general colleges which are affiliated with North-Eastern Hill University and are in East Khasi Hill District of Meghalaya. East Khasi Hill District was purposefully chosen as the site to conduct the study given the concentration of higher education institutions in Shillong, which is the headquarters of East Khasi Hills Districts and the state capital of Meghalaya. Moreover, a majority of the students moved to this district from the rural areas of Meghalaya had to move to continue their higher education after their schooling.

To identify the rural students for the current study, the first investigator had sought the help of the college administration where they were requested to provide a list of rural students from Meghalaya in their college. Once the lists of rural students were provided, 68 rural students were purposefully selected as participants for the current study based on the consideration of the participants' representative (gender, districts, streams). To ensure the participants being interviewed are really from the rural areas of Meghalaya, every participant was asked to fill in a demographic information form where they were asked to declare whether they were from the urban or rural areas before every interview.

### **Data Collection**

A semi-structured interview schedule developed by the first investigator was used to collect data for the current study. Data collection was done individually for each of the 68 participants by the first investigator, and the data collection was done from July 2018 to October 2018. The interview conducted was also audio-recorded for later transcription and analysis. In the start of the interviews, the participants were asked questions that build a rapport between the first investigator and the participants such as, "What makes you come to this college?" After the investigator felt a cordial rapport had been established with the participant, questions that were relevant to the research questions such as, "What are the challenges you face as you make the transition from school to college?" were asked.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis is the process of making sense of the data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The thematic analysis method was used to analyse the data involving the six step-by-step guides recommend by Braun and Clarke (2006), namely: (1) familiarising with the data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining themes, and (6) producing the report.

## Data Validation

In this study for data validation, the member checking strategy suggested by Creswell (2014) was used where the recorded interviews were transcribed and a copy of the transcript was provided to every participant to review the interview transcripts so that to ensure their view is well presented. Furthermore, they were provided with the opportunity to remove something or to add some more to the interview transcripts.

## Ethical Consideration

In the state of Meghalaya and in North-Eastern Hill University, no third-party approval is required to conduct this study; however, the following procedures were adopted to protect against any potential harm to the participants.

1. **Informed Consent:** The first investigator had conducted and recorded the interview with full knowledge and consent of the participants.
2. **Confidentiality:** The name of the participants, their college's name and the name of their village were never mentioned throughout this study. Further, the audio recorded from the interviews were kept in a password-protected laptop and the interviews recorded were transcribed and analysed by the first investigator himself.
3. **Right to Withdraw:** The participants in this study were informed of their right to withdraw from this study at any time if they wanted to do so.
4. **Right to give Feedbacks:** The participants in this study were informed of their right to give feedback or to ask any questions from the investigator

## Findings and Discussion

To analyse the data gathered from the interviews conducted, the inductive thematic analysis was used to generate themes and sub-themes to answer the research questions of the study. Students' quotes were incorporated to support the different themes and sub-themes generated.

**Table 1**

*Summary of Major Themes*

Research Questions	Theme	Sub-Theme
1. What challenges do rural students face when making the transition into higher education?	Academic Challenges	Increasing Academic Demands
		Adjusting with New Teachers
		Large Classroom Size
		Time Management
	Socio-Emotional	Missing their Friends

	Challenges	Inability to form New Friendship
		Lack of Involvement in Extra-Curricular activities
2. How do rural students cope with the challenges when making the transition into higher education?	Task-Oriented Coping	Working Harder
		Maintaining Contacts with Old Friends
		Trying to Make New Friends:
	Emotion-Oriented Coping	Praying
		Positive Attitude
		Talking to Others

### Research Question One

What challenges do rural students face when making the transition into higher education?

The purpose of the first research question is to find out the challenges faced by rural students as they make the transition into higher education. From analysing the data, two main themes emerge as the challenge faced by rural students, and they are:

1. Academic Challenges
2. Socio-Emotional Challenges

#### Theme 1: Academic Challenges

This theme highlighted rural students experienced numerous academic challenges as they made the transition into higher education. Rural students reported they had to work harder, take responsibility for their education, improve their study habits, and to their education more seriously in college than in their higher secondary school. This finding was also revealed by Sikes (2018) and Yan and Wu (2020), who found that academic transition was a significant challenge for rural students, whether those challenges presented themselves during their first semester or later.

#### Increasing Academic Demands

Participants highlighted they were required to put in more efforts academically in college as the academic demand in college was greater and exceeded the work required in higher secondary school. They mentioned their teachers had spoon-fed them in school, and for most of them, it was only when they reached the college level that they started to make

notes rather than depending on the teachers, which for most of them was a challenging task. However, the challenge of increasing academic demand usually occurred when rural students were in the first semester, and they had to adjust over time:

In college, I have to make more effort to study every day, not like the times when I was in school where I would study only when the exam is near. In the first semester, it was very difficult for me as I am a very lazy person to study every single day. But slowly, you will be able to adjust.

This finding is supported by other research showing rural students would face challenges because of the increasing academic demand in college (Chea, 2015; Heinisch, 2018; Poole & More, 2001; Sikes, 2018). Previous research had shown rural students would be surprised at the academic rigour of college (Heinisch, 2018) and the increasing level of studying they were required to perform (Sikes, 2018) as they tended to be less academically prepared for college (Poole & More, 2001). In tune with the finding of the current study, previous studies had also revealed that academic difficulty occurred very early in college (Ast, 2014) and rural students would spend their first semester or two learning how to study as well as catching up academically (Sikes, 2018).

### **Adjusting with New Teachers**

When rural students make the transition into college, they also have to adjust with the new teachers. Rural students pointed out they were unable to adjust with the teachers as their way of teaching is not suitable for them as they could not cope with the speed the professors were teaching. This challenge is mainly when rural students first join college, and with time they can adjust with the teachers:

When I first came into this college, I found it very difficult to adjust with the teachers. The teacher's way of teaching is not suitable for me as they are going very fast in their explanation and would teach a different topic every day...

This same finding was reported by Dkhar (2018) who, in her study of women rural students, found they were not able to adjust with the speed their teachers were teaching in the classroom. The reason for their inability to adjust with the speed their teachers taught may have been the transition from their higher secondary school schedule to the contrasting semester system in college. In the semester system of education, the course duration per semester is short, and the teachers do not have much time to complete the syllabus on time.

### **Large Classroom Size**

Almost all participants in the study had described they had completed their higher secondary education from a school where the class size was small. The small classroom size in school allowed the teachers to know them by name and give them individual attention. However, the large classroom size in college makes it impossible for their teachers to give them individual attention and to know them personally. These changes make rural students feel left out by their teachers and as though they would be unable to adjust in the large classroom:

In school, the teachers will know you and they will ask whether we have understood what they are teaching or not but in college that is not the case

since there are too many students so the teachers will not know us, and they will not ask everything like in school.

In higher secondary school rural, where teachers are more invested in the students, students had a personal connection with their teachers, which gave their education a more personal touch (Heinisch, 2018). However, in college, students had described their teachers could not give them individual attention, make eye contact, know their name like teachers in the higher secondary level. Hence, rural students felt insignificant in the large college classes (Heinisch, 2016) and would experience more difficulty than their urban peers in adjusting to larger, lecture style classrooms (Maltzan, 2006).

### **Time Management**

When rural students make the transition into college, they must adapt themselves to the semester system of education, which is quite different from the annual system of education followed in higher secondary schools in Meghalaya. Rural students had maintained that they were unable to manage their time as they were not able to adapt to the new semester system as they were accustomed to the annual system of education:

The only thing difficult for me is that I cannot manage my time when I first join college as for the first time, we are following the semester system where everything is going very fast. (1st Semester Student)

We have so many assignments to finish. Therefore, I found it very difficult at first to manage my time, but now that I am in the 3rd semester, I have adjusted with the semester system. (3rd Semester Student)

This finding is similar to the finding of Heinisch (2016), who found that rural students struggled with time management after leaving the structure of high school. This challenge is, however, more for the first semester rural students, as they will usually be able to adjust to the semester system when they reach the second or third semester, and as such, they will be able to manage their time effectively.

### **Theme 2: Socio-Emotional Challenges**

This theme highlighted that rural students were also facing socio-emotional challenges when making the transition into higher education. Rural students were feeling lost, getting lost, and struggling in their transition from high school to college (Yarbrough, 2016). They were feeling lonely as they missed their friends from higher secondary school since they were unable to form a friendship with their peers during the first few months in college. Furthermore, they were facing difficulties making a connection to the new social environment in college.

#### **Missing Their Friends**

Most of the participants mentioned they had originally studied in a small school which and where every student knew everybody else in their class. However, when these students made the transition into college, they have to leave behind their group of established friends and were required to search for new friends which was a complicated process. Rural students reported they experienced the feeling of loneliness when they first joined college as

they were missing their friends from school, since they were usually the only one from their friends' circle to enter a specific college as most of them would usually continue their higher education in a different college:

I miss my friends from school when I first join college as I am the only one in this college and I would feel so lonely without them, and I would not want to come to college as I have no friends... However, after the first few months, I was able to make some friends.

This finding was also supported by Webb (2019), who found many rural students would be without their life-long peer group when they first join college. This usually led to loneliness and lack of social connection among the rural students (Ast, 2014), as they had been accustomed to having the same friends throughout their school life (Webb, 2019). However, Cerrone (2017) has found this challenge will begin to subside over time as they begin to establish new friend groups.

### **Inability to Form New Friendship**

Most of the participants in this study studied their school education in their own place. Hence, they were able to establish good friendships among their peers, and usually, this relationship was close-knit. However, in joining college rural students found themselves thrown amongst new faces and hardly had anyone in the class with whom they were familiar. This situation makes it difficult for them to form a new friendship in the college as there are many students belonging to various parts of Meghalaya as well as various communities of North-East India:

It is difficult for me to have friends as it is difficult for me to have a common topic to start a conversation with them as they would talk about the things which I do not know, and I would talk about the things they do not know so it is difficult for them and for me too to have a common ground where we can talk and share about things.

Rural students were having difficulties making friends in college as most of them had little to no experience making an entirely new set of new friends from a sea of individuals unknown to them (Cerrone, 2017; Yarbrough, 2016), as they had never left their friend group to try making new friends in a new environment (Webb, 2019). However, in college, rural students not only have to learn how to make new friends but also have to learn how to become friends with people from diverse backgrounds (Webb, 2019). Ast (2014) had maintained their inability to make friends was tied to increases in the population of students, as they have never had to make social connections before, to a large extent, intentionally.

Further, the participants in this study also reported that they were finding it difficult to make friends with those students from urban areas. They stated urban students are different from them in several aspects like their style of dressing, their habits and behaviour, their way of talking, and even their language:

I have difficulty making friends with the urban students as I am feeling shy with them. They are living a high standard life like their way of dressing, and their way of behaving is very different from us... I do not have the money to live like them.

These findings echo those of Sovanak et al. (2017) and Yan and Wu (2020) who found that rural students were having difficulties in making friends with urban students when studying in urban institutions. According to Yan and Wu (2020), rural students perceived the urban students to have high standards which made urban students feel they were different from them. Hence, they would avoid making friends with urban students.

### **Lack of Involvement in Extra-Curricular Activities**

Participants in this study described they were involved and active in various cocurricular activities in school. However, they highlighted they were not very involved in extracurricular activities in college. Rural students revealed not having friends was the reason for their lack involvement in extra-curricular activities in college:

I am not involved in any extra-curricular activities now in college, but when I was in class 11 and 12, I was very active in NCC. Before I had friends who would join NCC with me but now not even one of my friends is interested in NCC so since I do not know anyone from my class who are joining NCC I feel lonely. (1st Semester Student)

This finding is consistent with Heinisch's (2016) finding that rural students were heavily involved in high school activities but were overly uninvolved in college activities. This was also supported by Ast (2014) who found rural students lack involvement in extra-curricular activities in college, often tying this to their lack of friendships.

### **Research Question Two**

How do rural students cope with the challenges when making the transition into higher education?

This research question aimed to find the strategies adopted by rural students to cope with the challenges when making the transition into higher education. Coping strategies are the cognitive and behavioural efforts to master, tolerate, or reduce external and internal demands and conflicts (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980). From analysing the data, two main themes emerge as the coping strategies adopted by rural students, and they are:

1. Task-Oriented Coping
2. Emotion-Oriented Coping

#### **Theme 1: Task-Oriented Coping**

Task-oriented coping is the type of coping strategy aimed at problem-solving or doing something to amend the source of a problem. According to Folkman and Lazarus (1988), task-oriented coping is an attempt to alter a problematic situation actively. The finding of the current study reported rural students had adopted various types of task-oriented coping to cope with the different challenges when making the transition into college.

#### **Working Harder**

Participants in this study responded, in order to cope with the increasing demand in college, they had spent more time on their education by reading more as well as by going to the library to search for material and to make their own notes. Participants revealed they had

increased the time they spent studying as they had realised they would not be able to do well if they kept studying like they would in the higher secondary level:

I have tried reading more and to go to the library to search for material... Most times I would share my notes with my friends, and they would also share their notes with me. If on some topic, I cannot get any notes I would go and ask the teachers too.

This finding was also revealed by Chea (2015) who found, in order to cope with the academic challenges they faced in college, rural students would work harder and put all the efforts to improve their performance. They would also seek the support of their teachers and others. Similarly, Kutty (2014) found rural students would work consistently hard in their education and change their study habits to suit the academic demands of college.

### **Maintaining Contacts with Old Friends**

Participants in this study also explained when they miss their friends from higher secondary school, they would cope by calling or meeting them. They found that by maintaining contact with their old friends, they were able to cope with the loneliness experienced when they first joined college: "While I do not have friends in this college, I still are in contact with my friends from higher secondary school and we would meet almost every week as they are studying in \*\*\*\* College." This finding was also supported by Bauer and Rokach (2004), who found rural students would cope with the feeling of loneliness in college by staying connected with their friends from their school or village. Hence, old friends generally served as a source that helps rural students cope with the feeling of loneliness.

### **Trying to Make New Friends**

In order to cope with the feeling of loneliness which the participants experience in college, they revealed they would also try to make new friends. They explained they would try to talk and be friendly with other students in their class:

I tried to become friends with other students from my class. I have made some new friends, and I am not feeling very lonely like I used to be when I first came to this college.

I start talking to my classmates, and I realise that they too are just like me, so I start talking to them and now I have so many friends in the college.

The finding of the current study reported that when rural students first joined college, were missing their friends, and were lonely, they would cope by trying to make friends with other students in their class. They explained they would try to talk and be friendly with their classmates.

## **Theme 2: Emotion-Oriented Coping**

Emotion-oriented coping is the type of coping strategy that is aimed at reducing or managing the emotional despair or sorrow that is associated with a problem. According to Folkman and Lazarus (1988), emotion-oriented coping is managing emotional responses to a problematic situation. The current study found that rural students had adopted different types

of emotion-oriented coping strategies to cope with the challenges they face when making the transition into college.

### **Praying**

The current study revealed rural students would turn to God to give them the strength to continue their education to cope with the different challenges when making the transition into higher education: “What can I do? There is nothing I can do except pray that I will be able to finish my education as early as possible and go back home.” The finding of the current study described that rural students would pray to God to guide them in their pursuit of higher education. Since, according to them, praying to God and reading the Bible provide them comfort and strength to keep on continuing their education despite the challenges they face.

### **Positive Attitude**

Participants in this study mentioned they cope with the different challenges by having a positive attitude, and their parents had sent them to college to continue their education so they will be successful in life: “I would just say to myself that I came here for my own good and they send me here because they love me. To achieve the good thing in life I have to sacrifice something.” This finding was also revealed by Bramston and Patrick (2007) who found rural students would cope with the challenges they faced in making the transition into college by having a positive attitude, by believing the challenges they faced would only be temporary, and the thing will be better in the future.

### **Talking to Others**

Participants in this study also mentioned they used to share their challenges with their parents, siblings, and friends as a way to cope with them. Rural students find that talking about their situation with those they love greatly helps them. In fact, rural students expressed talking to their loved one gives them the motivation and strength that they will be able to cope with any challenges they are facing.

There are times when I would call my elder siblings and my mother, but I will not tell them that I am facing any difficulties, but by just listening to their voice it really give me that strength that I will be able to deal with anything.

I used to share with my friends from my village by calling them that I cannot make friends in college or when I cannot study well, and they would inspire me that I can do it and do well in my study.

This finding was also revealed by Clark (2005) and Bramston and Patrick (2007), who found that talking to others is a universally acclaimed coping strategy among rural students. Rural students would often talk to their family, friends, and peers about their difficulties when making the transition into higher education.

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

This study explores the challenges faced by rural students when making the transition into higher education and how they cope with the challenges. The study shows rural students

faced two main challenges, which are academic challenges and socio-emotional challenges. Students had adopted task-oriented coping and emotion-oriented coping strategies in coping with these challenges. Therefore, this study had signified rural students need help when making the transition into higher education. They need additional support in overcoming the academic and socio-emotional challenges. If they are unable to cope with the academic and socio-emotional challenges, they will be destined to fail in their college life.

The findings of the current study had some recommendation for all stakeholders. Higher secondary school should better prepare rural students by subjecting them to more rigorous academic work, so students can get used to the academic challenges they will experience in college. Higher educational institutions should organise an orientation programme when rural students first join college, so they will be oriented to the kind of challenges they will face when making the transition into higher education. Higher educational institutions should also organise meaningful social activities or peer-mentoring programmes for rural students in the 1<sup>st</sup> semester so that they can successfully integrate into college's life. Further, rural students should also be encouraged to talk with their family, teachers, and friends about any challenges they face when making the transition into higher education. At last, more study should be conducted on the experience of rural students when making the transition into higher education.

### References

- Ast, K. M. (2014). *Exploring the lived experiences of rural student college transitions* [Unpublished master's thesis]. Oregon State University.
- Bauer, N., & Rokach, A. (2004). The experience of loneliness in university: A cross-cultural study. *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth*, 11(4), 283-302. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02673843.2004.9747936>
- Bourke, L. (2002). "How can you deal with that?" Coping strategies among young residents of a rural community in New South Wales. *Journal of Family Studies*, 8(2), 197-212. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5172/jfs.8.2.197>
- Bramston, P., & Patrick, J. (2007). Rural adolescents experiencing an urban transition. *Australian Journal of Rural Health*, 15(4), 247-251. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.14401584.2007.00897.x>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Cerrone, E. R. (2017). *Socialization of undergraduate rural students in a large, urban university* [Doctoral dissertation, University of Pittsburgh]. D-Scholarship at Pitt. Retrieved from <http://dscholarship.pitt.edu/32934/>
- Chea, N. (2015). *Higher education in Cambodia: Poor rural female students' challenges, motivations, and coping strategies* [Doctoral dissertation, Göteborgs Universitet]. Göteborgs Universitet Publications Electronic Archive.
- Clark, M. R. (2005). Negotiating the freshman year: Challenges and strategies among first-year college students. *Journal of College Student Development*, 46(3), 296-316. [doi:10.1353/csd.2005.0022](https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.2005.0022).
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods approaches* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). Sage.
- Denhere, C. (2013). South African rural matriculants' perceptions of barriers to higher education. *International Journal of Case Studies*, 2(4), 41-47. [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=2868244](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2868244)
- Dietrich, L. B. (1999). *Rural students in transition: The first year university experience from a rural perspective* [Doctoral dissertation, University of Western Ontario]. National

- Library of Canada.
- Dkhar, A. (2018). *Problems of rural women in higher education in East Khasi Hills District of Meghalaya* (Unpublished master's dissertation). Indira Gandhi National Open University, New Delhi.
- Folkman, S., & Lazarus, R. S. (1980). An analysis of coping in a middle-aged community sample. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 21(3), 219–239. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2136617>
- Folkman, S., & Lazarus, R. S. (1988). Coping as a mediator of emotion. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 54(3), 466–475. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.54.3.466>
- Goldman, A. M. (2019). Interpreting rural students' stories of access to a flagship university. *The Rural Educator*, 40(1), 16-28. <https://doi.org/10.35608/ruraled.v40i1.530>
- Guiffrida, D. A. (2008). Preparing rural students for large colleges and universities. *Journal of School Counseling*, 6(14), 1-14. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ894785>
- Heinisch, B. P. (2016). Small fish out of water: Rural-first generation students experience at a large university. *The Journal of College Orientation and Transition*, 24(1), 21-33. <https://doi.org/10.24926/jcotr.v24i1.2904>
- Heinisch, B. P. (2018). *Rural students' sense of belonging at a large public university* [Master's thesis, University of Nebraska]. DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska – Lincoln.
- Hlinka, K. R. (2017). Tailoring retention theories to meet the needs of rural Appalachian community college students. *Community College Review*, 45(2), 144-164. DOI:10.1177/0091552116686403
- Jeyagowri, K., & Ilankumaran, M. (2018). The role of students in transition from school to college: Different challenges in Elt. *International Journal of Engineering & Technology*, 7(4.36), 630-635. <http://dx.doi.org/10.14419/ijet.v7i4.36.24213>
- Kutty, F. M. (2014). *First-generation student transition to university: An exploratory study into the first-year experience of students attending University Kebangsaan Malaysia*. [Doctoral dissertation, University of Southampton]. ePrints Soton.
- Maltzan, T. (2006). *Rurality and higher education: Implications for identity and persistence* [Doctoral dissertation, Ohio State University]. OhioLINK.
- Manly, C. A., Wells, R. S., & Kommers, S. (2019). Who are rural students? How definitions of rurality affect research on college completion. *Research in Higher Education*, 61, 764-779. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11162-019-09556-w>
- Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2015). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Poole, D. L., & More, S. (2001). *Participation of rural youth in higher education: Factors, strategies, and innovations*. Texas Rural Communities, Inc.
- Schultz, P. (2004). Upon entering college: First semester experiences of first-generation, rural students from agricultural families. *The Rural Educator*, 26(1), 48-51.
- Sikes, A. (2018). *Rural students' experiences at selective four-year colleges: Pathways to persistence and success* [Doctoral dissertation, College of William and Mary]. W&M Scholar Works. <http://dx.doi.org/10.25774/w4-rjc7-rx48>
- Sovanak, L., Vouchsieng, L., & Navy, M. (2017). The challenges of higher education for rural students in urban universities in Cambodia. *The University of Cambodia, UC working paper series*, 1(1), 94-106. [https://uc.edu.kh/userfiles/image/2018/The\\_Challenges\\_of\\_Higher\\_Education.pdf](https://uc.edu.kh/userfiles/image/2018/The_Challenges_of_Higher_Education.pdf)
- Taylor, B. R. (2013). *Barriers to higher education for rural high school students: A qualitative study* (Unpublished master's dissertation). Texas Tech University Libraries. <http://hdl.handle.net/2346/ETD-TTU-2013-05-1146>

- Webb, M. E. (2019). *Off the rural back road: Describing the experiences of rural students who enrolled at an urban 4-year university* [Doctoral dissertation, Syracuse University]. Syracuse University Library Surface.
- Williams, J. E., & Luo, M. (2010). Understanding first-year persistence at a micropolitan university: Do geographic characteristics of students' home city matter? *College Student Journal*, 44(2), 362-377.
- Wilson, A. L., Greenacre, L., Pignata, S., & Winefield, A. (2016). Challenging the notion of the transition year: The experiences of rural and urban tertiary students. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 79, 21-30. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2016.06.002>
- Xie, A. (2015). Inside the college gate: Rural students and their academic and social success. *Chinese Education & Society*, 48(2), 77-80. DOI: [10.1080/10611932.2015.1040672](https://doi.org/10.1080/10611932.2015.1040672)
- Yan, K., & Wu, L. (2020). The adjustment concerns of rural students enrolled through special admission policy in elite universities in China. *Higher Education*, 80, 215–235. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-019-00475-4>
- Yarbrough, A. M. (2016). *Engaging rural students at the University of Montana through digital stories: Supports and barriers to higher education*. [Doctoral dissertation, The University of Alabama]. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.
- Yoder, M. J. (2007). *Rural students' access to and success in higher education: A case study* [Doctoral dissertation, North Carolina State University]. NC State University Libraries. <https://repository.lib.ncsu.edu/handle/1840.16/4849>

### Author Note

Dr. Euodia B. Myrthong is presently an Assistant Professor in the Department of Education, NEHU, Shillong. Her specializations are Research Methodology, Mental Health Education, Educational Psychology, and Guidance and Counselling. She has presented and written papers related to these subjects and has conducted workshops on innovative teaching practices. She has also provided lectures in UGC-HRDC NEHU, Shillong as well as in various schools and colleges concerning the innovative teaching practices and Research Methodology. Please direct correspondence to [eubahun@gmail.com](mailto:eubahun@gmail.com).

Ferrando Lyngdoh Nonglait is a Senior Research Fellow (SRF) in the Department of Education, NEHU, Shillong. His area of interest is the Education of Rural Students. He is the recipient of S. C. Dutta Memorial Award for academic excellence from Shillong College in 2014 and is also the recipient of U Kiang Nongbah Memorial Award for excellence in academics and for rendering service to people from North-Eastern Hill University in 2016. Please direct correspondence to [ferrandolyngdoh@gmail.com](mailto:ferrandolyngdoh@gmail.com).

Copyright 2021: Ferrando Lyngdoh Nonglait, Euodia Bahun Myrthong, and Nova Southeastern University.

### Article Citation

Nonglait, F. L., & Myrthong, E. B. (2021). Rural students transition into higher education in Meghalaya: Challenges and coping strategies. *The Qualitative Report*, 26(5), 1663-1677. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2021.4759>

---