

Parental and Teacher Involvement in the University Transition: Psychological Adjustment as a Mediating Pathway to Academic Success Among First-Year Students at Dongthap University, Vietnam

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ABSTRACT

The transition from secondary education to university constitutes a pivotal developmental stage for adolescents, marked by heightened psychological vulnerability and academic demands. This study investigates how college freshmen adolescents' perceptions of parental and teacher involvement are associated with their psychological and academic adjustment within the Vietnamese higher education context. Employing a cross-sectional correlational design, data were collected from 682 first-year students at Dong Thap university using standardized and culturally adapted instruments measuring perceived parental involvement, teacher involvement, psychological adjustment (stress regulation, self-esteem, and sense of belonging), and academic adjustment (academic self-efficacy, engagement, and grade point average). Structural equation modeling revealed that both parental and teacher involvement significantly predicted psychological adjustment, which in turn exerted a strong positive effect on academic adjustment. Psychological adjustment partially mediated the relationship between social involvement and academic outcomes. The findings

underscore the central role of perceived relational support in facilitating adaptive adjustment during the first year of university and provide culturally grounded implications for student support policies and instructional practices in Vietnamese higher education.

Keywords: Parental involvement, teacher involvement, psychological adjustment, academic adjustment; college freshmen, adolescents, Vietnam, higher education.

1. INTRODUCTION

The transition to university represents a profound developmental and contextual shift for adolescents, involving increased autonomy, academic responsibility, and social reorganization. For many first-year students, this transition coincides with late adolescence—a developmental period characterized by identity exploration, emotional instability, and heightened sensitivity to social evaluation. Empirical research consistently demonstrates that college freshmen are particularly vulnerable to psychological distress, academic disengagement, and maladaptive coping strategies during this period (Hill, N. E., & Tyson, D. F., 2009).

Within this transitional context, social support from significant adults—particularly parents and teachers—plays a critical role in shaping students' adjustment trajectories. Parental involvement provides emotional security and continuity, while teacher involvement offers academic guidance, motivational support, and institutional belonging (LeBlanc, J. E., & Lyons, S. T., 2022; Yufen, J., Yao, Q., & Liang, Y., 2026). However, the majority of empirical evidence on these relationships has been derived from Western educational systems, where cultural norms regarding autonomy, family roles, and teacher–student relationships differ substantially from those in collectivist societies (Yeager, D. S., & Dweck, C. S., 2020)

In Vietnam, family expectations, intergenerational interdependence, and respect for teachers remain deeply embedded cultural values. University students, even as emerging adults, often maintain strong emotional and instrumental ties with their families and continue to perceive teachers as authoritative yet supportive figures (Nguyen, D. H. N., Nguyen, P. V., & Pham, T. H., 2025). Despite this cultural specificity, systematic research examining how parental and teacher involvement jointly influence Vietnamese college freshmen's psychological and academic adjustment remains scarce.

Dong Thap university, a major public institution located in the Mekong Delta region, enrolls a large proportion of students from rural and socioeconomically diverse backgrounds. These contextual characteristics make it an ideal setting to examine the interplay between social involvement and student adjustment during the critical first year of university.

Accordingly, this study aims to (1) examine the relationships between perceived parental involvement, teacher involvement, psychological adjustment, and academic adjustment among college freshmen adolescents, and (2) test the mediating role

of psychological adjustment in linking social involvement to academic outcomes.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Parental Involvement and Adolescent Adjustment

Recent research has increasingly emphasized that parental involvement remains a salient developmental resource beyond secondary education, particularly during the transition to university. Contemporary models conceptualize parental involvement not as direct control over academic tasks but as a form of developmentally attuned support, encompassing emotional availability, value socialization, motivational encouragement, and autonomy-supportive guidance (Epstein, 2001).

Empirical evidence published over the past decade consistently demonstrates that adolescents and emerging adults who perceive high-quality parental involvement report better emotional regulation, stronger self-esteem, and greater academic persistence (Hill & Tyson, 2009). More recent studies extend these findings to college populations, showing that parental involvement continues to exert both direct and indirect effects on students' academic functioning through psychological mechanisms such as academic self-efficacy, goal internalization, and professional identity development (Li, X., Ang, R. P., Ng, T. K., & He, J., 2026).

Importantly, recent meta-analytic evidence underscores the mental health dimension of parental involvement. A large-scale meta-analysis synthesizing data from nearly 400,000 adolescents found a moderate but robust negative association between parental involvement and depressive symptoms, suggesting that parental support plays a protective role against emotional maladjustment. Although much of this literature focuses on adolescents in secondary education, emerging evidence indicates that similar mechanisms operate during the first year of university, when

students encounter elevated stress and uncertainty.

In collectivist cultural contexts such as Vietnam, parental involvement assumes particular psychological significance. Family expectations regarding educational attainment are often deeply internalized, and emotional ties between parents and children remain strong well into emerging adulthood. For first-year students at Dong Thap university—many of whom transition from rural or semi-rural backgrounds to a more autonomous academic environment—supportive parental involvement may function as a psychological anchor, providing emotional security and reinforcing adaptive coping strategies. However, recent studies also caution that overly controlling or performance-oriented parental involvement can intensify stress and undermine autonomy, highlighting the need to distinguish between supportive and intrusive forms of involvement.

2.2 Teacher Involvement and Student Outcomes

Teacher involvement represents a second critical source of social support during the transition to university. Defined as students' perceptions of instructors' accessibility, responsiveness, and genuine concern for their academic and emotional well-being, teacher involvement has been shown to exert a powerful influence on students' engagement and adjustment. Rooted in expectancy theory and relational perspectives on teaching and learning (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968), this line of research emphasizes that students' beliefs about teachers' attitudes and behaviors shape motivation and performance.

Recent longitudinal and cross-lagged panel studies have advanced this field by demonstrating that teacher–student relationships are not merely correlates of academic success but dynamic predictors of change in academic adjustment over time. Variations in perceived teacher support across semesters have been shown to predict subsequent changes in academic

engagement, persistence, and self-regulated learning, even after controlling for prior achievement and stable individual differences.

Within higher education, teacher involvement takes on heightened importance for first-year students, who often experience a sharp reduction in individualized attention compared to secondary schooling. Studies published in the past five years consistently show that students who perceive instructors as approachable and supportive report stronger institutional belonging, greater intrinsic motivation, and lower academic burnout (Chen, Q., Gao, Y., Zhang, Y., & Wang, J., 2025).

In the Vietnamese university context, teacher involvement must be understood against a backdrop of cultural norms emphasizing respect for authority and hierarchical relationships. While such norms may enhance motivation, they can also inhibit help-seeking behaviors if students perceive teachers as distant or unapproachable. Consequently, perceived teacher involvement, rather than formal instructional competence alone, becomes a decisive factor in students' psychological comfort and academic adjustment. Recent research suggests that teacher involvement may also serve a compensatory function, buffer the negative effects of academic stress and partially offset limited parental support, particularly for students from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds.

2.3 Psychological and Academic Adjustment in College

Psychological and academic adjustment constitute two interrelated dimensions of successful adaptation to university life. Psychological adjustment encompasses emotional well-being, stress management, self-worth, and social integration within the institutional environment, whereas academic adjustment refers to students' capacity to meet academic demands through effective study behaviors, sustained engagement, and

academic self-efficacy (Baker & Siryk, 1989).

Contemporary research increasingly conceptualizes these dimensions as mutually reinforcing rather than independent. Students experiencing psychological distress—manifested as chronic stress, anxiety, or low self-esteem—are more likely to disengage academically, exhibit poor concentration, and demonstrate lower persistence. Conversely, persistent academic difficulties can exacerbate emotional problems, creating a maladaptive feedback loop that undermines overall adjustment.

Recent studies highlight that psychological adjustment is particularly fragile during the first year of university, when students face multiple simultaneous transitions: separation from familiar social networks, increased academic autonomy, and heightened performance expectations. In the context of Dong Thap university, these challenges are often compounded by additional stressors such as financial constraints, digital learning demands, and adaptation to urban or semi-urban environments. These contextual factors underscore the importance of examining psychological adjustment not merely as an outcome but as a central mechanism through which social support influences academic functioning.

2.4 Theoretical Framework

The present study is theoretically grounded in Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1979) and the stress-buffering model of social support (Cohen & Wills, 1985). Ecological systems theory posits that individual development is shaped by ongoing interactions within nested environmental systems, with the microsystem—comprising family and educational contexts—playing a particularly influential role during periods of transition. From this perspective, parental and teacher involvement represent proximal social processes that directly shape students' psychological experiences. The stress-buffering model further suggests that social

support mitigates the negative impact of stress by enhancing coping resources, emotional regulation, and perceived control (Liu, Y., Song, Y., et al., 2024). Applied to the university transition, supportive parental and teacher involvement can reduce perceived stress, strengthen self-esteem, and foster a sense of belonging, thereby facilitating adaptive academic behaviors.

Integrating these perspectives, recent empirical models increasingly position psychological adjustment as a mediating mechanism linking social support to academic outcomes. This integrative framework is especially relevant in the contemporary Vietnamese higher education context, where rapid social change, digital transformation, and increasing academic competition intensify the psychological demands placed on first-year students.

In fact, despite a growing international body of research on parental involvement, teacher involvement, and student adjustment, several gaps remain. First, many studies examine parental or teacher involvement in isolation, neglecting their combined and potentially interactive effects. Second, psychological adjustment is often treated as an outcome rather than a mediating process linking social support to academic functioning. Third, empirical evidence from Southeast Asian and Vietnamese higher education contexts remains limited, despite clear cultural and contextual differences from Western settings.

By examining the joint effects of perceived parental and teacher involvement on psychological and academic adjustment—and by explicitly modeling psychological adjustment as a mediator—this study addresses these gaps. Situated within Dong Thap university, the research contributes contextually grounded evidence to the global literature and advances understanding of how social support systems operate during the critical first year of university in non-Western contexts

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional correlational research design to examine the structural relationships among perceived parental involvement, teacher involvement, psychological adjustment, and academic adjustment among first-year university students. This design was selected to capture students' perceptions and adjustment outcomes at a critical transitional stage—namely, the initial period of entry into higher education—when psychological vulnerability and academic demands tend to peak. A correlational framework was deemed appropriate for testing theoretically grounded associations and mediating mechanisms among multiple latent constructs within a single time point, consistent with prior research in educational and developmental psychology.

3.2 Participants

Participants were 682 first-year undergraduate students enrolled at Dong Thap university during the 2025–2026 academic year. The sample was drawn from a range of academic disciplines, reflecting the university's multidisciplinary structure. The mean age of participants was 19.2 years ($SD = 0.59$), corresponding to late adolescence and early emerging adulthood. Female students accounted for 56% of the sample, while male students represented 44%.

Dong Thap University serves a diverse student population, including a substantial proportion of students from rural and semi-rural areas of the Mekong Delta. This demographic composition provides a relevant context for examining the role of parental and teacher involvement in students' adjustment, as many participants experienced simultaneous transitions in academic environment, social networks, and levels of personal autonomy.

3.3 Measures

All constructs were assessed using standardized self-report instruments with

established psychometric properties. To ensure linguistic and cultural appropriateness, all measures were translated into Vietnamese following a rigorous back-translation procedure and subsequently pilot-tested with a separate sample of first-year students prior to the main data collection.

Parental Involvement

Parental involvement was measured using the 18-item Perceived Parental Involvement Scale adapted from Fan and Williams (2010). The scale assesses students' perceptions of parental emotional support, academic encouragement, and involvement in educational decision-making. Responses were recorded on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). In the present study, the scale demonstrated satisfactory internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .87$).

Teacher Involvement

Teacher involvement was assessed using a 16-item Teacher Involvement Inventory designed to capture both instructional and relational aspects of faculty support, including accessibility, responsiveness, and perceived concern for students' learning and well-being. Items were rated on a five-point Likert scale. The scale exhibited strong reliability in the current sample ($\alpha = .89$).

Psychological Adjustment

Psychological adjustment was evaluated using a composite measure encompassing three interrelated dimensions: stress regulation, self-esteem, and sense of belonging within the university environment. This composite approach reflects contemporary conceptualizations of adjustment as a multidimensional psychological construct. Participants responded to items using a five-point Likert scale, and the overall scale demonstrated excellent internal consistency ($\alpha = .91$).

Academic Adjustment

Academic adjustment was assessed through a multidimensional measure including academic self-efficacy, learning engagement, and cumulative grade point average (GPA). Self-efficacy and

engagement were measured via self-report items, while GPA was obtained from students' self-reported academic records at the end of the first semester. The combined academic adjustment measure demonstrated acceptable reliability ($\alpha = .85$).

3.4 Procedure

Data collection was conducted during freshman orientation sessions at the beginning of the academic year. Participants completed either online or paper-based questionnaires, depending on accessibility and preference. Prior to participation, students were informed of the study's purpose, assured of the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses, and notified of their right to withdraw at any time without penalty.

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the Dong Thap university Research Ethics Committee. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and data were handled in accordance with ethical guidelines for research involving human subjects.

3.5 Data Analysis

Data analysis proceeded in several stages. First, descriptive statistics were computed to examine the distributional properties of all study variables. Pearson correlation analyses were then conducted to explore bivariate relationships among parental involvement, teacher involvement, psychological adjustment, and academic adjustment.

To test the hypothesized structural relationships and mediating effects, structural equation modeling (SEM) was performed using AMOS version 24. SEM was chosen for its ability to simultaneously estimate relationships among multiple latent constructs while accounting for measurement error. Model fit was evaluated using multiple indices, including the chi-square to degrees of freedom ratio (χ^2/df), the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation

(RMSEA), and the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR).

Mediation effects were tested using a bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 resamples to generate bias-corrected confidence intervals for indirect effects. An indirect effect was considered statistically significant if the 95% confidence interval did not include zero. This analytic strategy is widely recommended for testing mediation in psychological and educational research due to its robustness and statistical power.

4. RESULTS

4.1 Descriptive Statistics

Preliminary data screening indicated no serious violations of normality, linearity, or multicollinearity. Skewness and kurtosis values for all observed variables fell within the acceptable range (± 2), supporting the use of parametric analyses and structural equation modeling.

Descriptive analyses revealed that first-year students at Dong Thap university perceived moderately high levels of both parental and teacher involvement during their initial transition to university. Specifically, perceived parental involvement yielded a mean score of $M = 4.01$ ($SD = .62$), suggesting that most respondents experienced consistent emotional support, guidance, and encouragement of autonomy from their families. Teacher involvement was also rated relatively high ($M = 3.89$, $SD = .58$), reflecting students' perceptions of instructional clarity, accessibility, and relational support from university instructors.

Regarding adjustment outcomes, students reported moderate-to-high levels of psychological adjustment, particularly in terms of emotional regulation, perceived self-worth, and sense of belonging within the university environment. Academic adjustment, operationalized through academic self-efficacy, learning engagement, and cumulative GPA, demonstrated greater variability, reflecting

differential adaptation trajectories among freshmen.

Pearson correlation analyses showed that parental involvement, teacher involvement, psychological adjustment, and academic adjustment were all positively and significantly intercorrelated ($r = .31-.58, p < .001$). Notably, psychological adjustment exhibited the strongest association with academic adjustment, providing preliminary support for its mediating role in the proposed model.

Structural Equation Modeling Results

Structural equation modeling (SEM) was employed to test the hypothesized relationships among parental involvement, teacher involvement, psychological adjustment, and academic adjustment. The overall model demonstrated a good fit to the data, meeting commonly accepted criteria for model adequacy:

First, $\chi^2/df = 2.89$, second, Comparative Fit Index (CFI) = .95, Third, Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) = .042 and, fourth, Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) = .038

These indices indicate that the proposed theoretical model adequately represents the observed data and supports the hypothesized structural relationships.

4.3 Direct Effects

The SEM results revealed that both forms of social involvement significantly predicted students' psychological adjustment. Parental involvement exerted a moderate positive effect on psychological adjustment ($\beta = .30, p < .001$), suggesting that emotional support, value transmission, and autonomy encouragement from parents continued to play a crucial role even after students entered higher education.

Similarly, teacher involvement showed a slightly stronger effect on psychological adjustment ($\beta = .36, p < .001$). This finding underscores the importance of supportive teacher-student relationships in helping first-year students cope with academic demands, institutional unfamiliarity, and

psychosocial stressors during the transition to university life.

Psychological adjustment, in turn, emerged as a strong predictor of academic adjustment ($\beta = .52, p < .001$), indicating that students who demonstrated better emotional regulation, higher self-esteem, and a stronger sense of belonging were more likely to engage effectively in learning activities, maintain academic confidence, and achieve higher academic performance.

In addition to these indirect pathways, direct effects from parental involvement ($\beta = .12, p = .048$) and teacher involvement ($\beta = .15, p = .032$) to academic adjustment remained statistically significant, although weaker in magnitude. This pattern suggests that parental and teacher involvement not only influence academic outcomes through psychological well-being but also exert independent effects, such as through academic guidance, expectations, and instructional support.

4.4 Mediation Analysis

To examine the mediating role of psychological adjustment, bootstrapping analyses with 5,000 resamples were conducted. The results confirmed that psychological adjustment partially mediated the relationships between both parental involvement and academic adjustment, and teacher involvement and academic adjustment.

The standardized indirect effect was statistically significant ($\beta = .27$), with a 95% confidence interval of [.18, .36], which did not include zero. This finding provides robust evidence that psychological adjustment functions as a key explanatory mechanism linking social involvement to academic adaptation.

The partial mediation pattern indicates that while psychological adjustment is a central pathway through which parental and teacher involvement enhance academic outcomes, these social supports also contribute to academic adjustment via additional mechanisms. Such mechanisms may include instrumental academic assistance, modeling

of achievement-oriented values, and the establishment of structured learning environments.

In short, the results highlight three major findings: First, both parental and teacher involvement remain salient sources of support for college freshmen, even within the context of higher education and emerging adulthood. Second, psychological adjustment plays a pivotal mediating role, serving as a bridge between social support and academic adaptation. Third, teacher involvement exhibits a particularly strong influence on psychological adjustment, emphasizing the critical role of university instructors in fostering a supportive learning climate during students' first year.

These findings are especially meaningful in the context of Dong Thap university, where many students transition from rural or semi-rural backgrounds and continue to rely on close family ties while simultaneously negotiating new academic and social expectations. The results empirically support the integration of family engagement and relationally oriented teaching practices into university-level student support strategies

5. DISCUSSION

The present study provides robust empirical evidence on the pivotal role of perceived parental and teacher involvement in shaping the psychological and academic adjustment of first-year university students at Dong Thap university, Vietnam. Consistent with ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) and the stress-buffering model of social support (Cohen & Wills, 1985), the findings demonstrate that proximal social relationships remain highly influential during the transition from secondary education to higher education.

First, both parental and teacher involvement significantly predicted students' psychological adjustment, with teacher involvement exerting a comparatively stronger effect. This finding reflects the developmental reality of late adolescence, wherein students increasingly rely on

institutional agents—particularly university instructors—for academic guidance, emotional validation, and social integration. In the Vietnamese context, where respect for teachers is culturally embedded, supportive teacher–student relationships may function as a powerful psychological anchor during periods of academic uncertainty.

Second, psychological adjustment emerged as the strongest predictor of academic adjustment, confirming that emotional regulation, self-worth, and a sense of belonging are foundational prerequisites for effective learning engagement and academic self-efficacy. This result reinforces contemporary models of student success that conceptualize academic performance as inseparable from psychological well-being, particularly during high-risk transitional phases.

Third, the partial mediating role of psychological adjustment indicates that parental and teacher involvement influence academic outcomes through both affective-regulatory pathways and direct academic mechanisms (e.g., instructional support, expectations, guidance). Importantly, parental involvement retained a meaningful role despite students' entry into higher education, highlighting the enduring influence of family support in collectivist cultural contexts such as Vietnam, where interdependence and familial responsibility remain salient well into emerging adulthood.

6. Implications

6.1 Theoretical Implications

This study makes a substantive theoretical contribution by empirically substantiating an integrated social–psychological model of first-year university adjustment within a Southeast Asian context, a region that remains critically underrepresented in high-impact educational psychology research. By situating parental and teacher involvement within a culturally embedded framework, the findings challenge universalist assumptions derived from Western

autonomy-centered models of emerging adulthood.

Specifically, the results offer a context-sensitive reconceptualization of autonomy, demonstrating that parental involvement in collectivist-oriented settings does not inherently undermine students' independence. Instead, it functions as a source of psychological security that supports emotional regulation, academic self-efficacy, and adaptive engagement during the university transition. These reframing advances autonomy theory by highlighting its relational and culturally contingent nature.

Furthermore, the study advances existing adjustment models by theoretically and empirically positioning psychological adjustment as a core mediating mechanism—rather than a peripheral outcome—linking social support to academic adaptation among first-year students. By foregrounding psychological adjustment as a dynamic process through which external support is internalized into academic functioning, the findings refine current conceptualizations of university transition and extend the explanatory power of social support and student engagement frameworks.

Practical Implications

From a practical perspective, the findings yield several actionable implications for enhancing first-year student support in higher education. First, universities should institutionalize relational pedagogy by encouraging faculty—particularly those teaching introductory and foundation courses—to adopt teaching practices characterized by responsiveness, emotional attunement, and autonomy-supportive interaction. Such practices not only facilitate academic engagement but also serve as critical sources of psychological stability during transitional periods.

Second, psychological support services should be systematically embedded within freshman orientation and early-semester programs, with targeted interventions

focusing on stress management, emotional regulation, self-efficacy, and students' sense of belonging. Early identification and proactive support may mitigate adjustment difficulties before they translate into academic disengagement or psychological distress.

Third, universities should strategically leverage family–institution partnerships by establishing structured communication mechanisms that inform and guide parents toward developmentally appropriate, autonomy-supportive involvement. Rather than diminishing parental roles, such initiatives can recalibrate parental engagement in ways that reinforce students' psychological adjustment and independent learning capacities.

In the specific context of Dong Thap university—where a substantial proportion of freshmen come from rural, low-income, or first-generation university backgrounds—these integrated support systems are particularly critical. Coordinated efforts among faculty, counseling services, and families may play a decisive role in buffering transition-related stress, preventing early academic disengagement, and promoting sustainable psychological and academic adjustment

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that perceived parental and teacher involvement are significant predictors of both psychological and academic adjustment among first-year undergraduate students at Dong Thap university, Vietnam. Psychological adjustment plays a central mediating role, indicating that emotional well-being, self-worth, and a sense of belonging are key mechanisms through which social support translates into academic engagement and success.

In the context of Dong Thap university, where many freshmen face academic transition challenges alongside sociocultural and economic pressures, supportive and autonomy-enhancing involvement from parents and instructors serves as a critical

protective factor. The findings highlight the necessity for universities to adopt holistic, relationship-centered support strategies, integrating faculty engagement, student psychological support, and constructive family involvement to promote sustainable academic adaptation during the first year of higher education.

Declaration by Authors

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