

Adaptive Help Seeking Related to Academic Resilience of Final Year College Student with Special Needs

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Abstract

This paper aims to describe and understand the essence of the lived experiences of final-year college students with special needs regarding their adaptive help-seeking and academic resilience. The research approach used is a qualitative study involving students with various types of disabilities. Purposive sampling of 9 student were selected for the semi-structured interviews. Cassidy's Academic Resilience Scale (ARS) was used as the interview guided. Data triangulation was used throughout the research to ensure integrated analysis. The result shows that participants described their parents as sources of emotional reassurance and moral encouragement. Besides, the theme of Peer Support reveals that the respondent has a mature strategy for maintaining their mental well-being. This study demonstrates that both parental and peer support are essential resources in sustaining the academic resilience of final year students with disabilities. While parental support was identified as the primary motivator, providing a strong foundation of care, encouragement, and responsibility, peer support emerged as equally vital in maintaining on going motivation and well-being.

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1. Introduction

In the final stage of an undergraduate program, students encounter specific challenges, particularly in completing their final project or thesis. Such challenges may include sustaining motivation to complete the thesis in order to graduate on time, demonstrating adequate academic writing competence, adapting to their surrounding environment, navigating the faculty's thesis management system, and overcoming communication barriers with academic supervisors (Asmawan, 2016). These pressures can be even more demanding for students with special needs, who often face additional physical, cognitive, or social barriers that further complicate their academic journey (Odame et al., 2021). Such conditions necessitate the use of effective coping strategies to manage stress and sustain satisfactory academic performance.

Resilience can be understood as a positive response or the successful adaptation of an individual when confronted with pressure. It represents an ongoing process in which a person maintains positive adaptation despite experiencing difficulties or challenges (Brewer et al., 2019). Academic resilience, more specifically, refers to the capacity to adapt effectively when faced with obstacles or barriers to achieving academic success. This concept suggests that academic resilience serves not only as a motivational force for attaining personal academic goals but also as a range of strategies for managing stress and anxiety within the university context (Yang & Wang, 2022). As noted by Takwin in IPB News (2021), students with special needs encounter daily physical and mental challenges. In this context, academic resilience plays a vital role in enabling them to navigate various situations, engage with others, and embrace new experiences with confidence and a positive mindset, ultimately fostering academic success. For final-year students with special needs working on their thesis, maintaining positive beliefs and high expectations for achieving favorable outcomes increases their likelihood of overcoming the challenges and difficulties encountered throughout the thesis writing process (Roellyana & Listiyandini, 2016).

Academic resilience encompasses three dimensions: perseverance, reflective ability and adaptive help-seeking, and negative affect and emotional response (Cassidy, 2016). The dimension of reflective ability and adaptive help-seeking reflects an individual's capacity to evaluate personal strengths and weaknesses, demonstrate flexibility, and proactively seek resources that can provide support. Adaptive help-seeking in academic context is the practice of obtaining assistance from people or resources to enhance academic performance. Viewed through the lens of self-regulated learning, it functions as a social strategy involving peers,

teachers, and parents. Such strategies can quickly influence achievement, with common sources including peers, supervisors, and parents (Martin-Arbos, et al., 2021). For students with special needs, employing this strategy can grant access to essential academic resources, enhance the understanding of complex concepts, and promote skill development, thereby strengthening their resilience.

Although previous studies have examined adaptive help-seeking behaviors and resilience among the general student population, few have specifically focused on final-year college students with special needs. Given the unique challenges encountered by this group, it is important to explore the relationship between adaptive help-seeking and academic resilience. Such research could inform the development of inclusive educational policies and targeted support systems aimed at enhancing academic outcomes for students with special needs. Accordingly, the present study investigates this relationship, seeking to address the existing gap in the literature and to provide practical insights for promoting student success within inclusive higher education settings.

2. Method

The research approach used is a qualitative phenomenological study. This method was chosen because it aims to describe and understand the essence of the lived experiences of final-year college students with special needs regarding their adaptive help-seeking and academic resilience. The study was conducted for the duration of three months (June 2024 to August 2024). To ensure diversity within the sample, the study involves students with various types of disabilities, such as visual impairment, hearing impairment, and physical impairment. Purposive sampling of 9 student were selected for the semi-structured interviews. We used Cassidy's Academic Resilience Scale (ARS) for the interview guided. Data was collected through in-person interviews with each participant at location of the participant choosing. The initial face-to-face interviews were recorded using macOS dictaphone. Researchers engaged with students both formally and informally, collecting insights from their conversations and recording key comments in personal memos. Data triangulation was used throughout the research to ensure integrated analysis. This approach was applied not only during the development of the interview guide and transcription but also by incorporating additional data from mentoring session notes and social media to provide a well-rounded understanding.

3. Results and Discussion

An initial round of open coding resulted in the development of a thematic framework that identified sources of social support derived from both peers and parents. Among the several themes ultimately generated, four emerged organically during the discussion process rather than from the predetermined interview questions. For the purposes of this section, the analysis will focus on the two themes most relevant to the research questions.

3.1. Result

3.1.1. Parental Support

Parental support emerged as the most salient and consistent source of motivation for participants. This form of support extended beyond simple encouragement, functioning as a multidimensional driver that reinforced resilience, sustained persistence, and instilled a strong sense of purpose. Respondent 1 explicitly identified this as the central motivational factor, stating, "It is truly the support from my parents". For this participant, parental affirmation served to validate both effort and achievement, as reflected in the statement: "Don't give up... just reaching this stage is already impressive... it will be over soon". Such expressions provided emotional reassurance and reinforced the belief in their ability to persevere.

Some participants emphasized the exclusivity of familial support. Respondent 4 explained, "I only ask for prayers and support from my family", underscoring a deliberate reliance on the trust, safety, and unconditional acceptance provided by close family ties. This reliance was often preferred over external networks, which were perceived as potential sources of judgment or misunderstanding. In certain cases, motivation arose from a more confrontational form of encouragement. Respondent 6 recalled a nurse's blunt challenge: "You've come this far, are you going to give up? Where is the ambition you once had?". While not gentle, such "tough love" compelled participants to critically reflect on their determination and sense of accountability.

For others, the drive to succeed was almost entirely externally motivated. Respondent 9 acknowledged, "I have no hopes for the future", yet was still motivated by a desire to honor parental sacrifices: "Because my parents are struggling so much, I want to prove myself in any way possible". Collectively, these narratives position parental support as a central pillar of student motivation. Whether expressed through encouragement, emotional security, confrontational challenges, or a sense of filial duty, parental involvement played a pivotal role in shaping participants' capacity to endure academic pressures and personal challenges.

3.1.2. Peers Support

While parental support was identified as the primary motivator, participants also acknowledged the significance of peer support in sustaining motivation and well-being. This theme highlights how a positive social network contributes not only to emotional reassurance but also to practical assistance in academic and personal contexts. Peers were often described as instrumental in providing constructive feedback. As Respondent 1 explained, "They give feedback so I can improve on my weaknesses". This reflects the role of peers as active contributors to personal growth, offering targeted suggestions rather than passive encouragement. Engagement in peer-related activities was described as purposeful rather than purely recreational. Respondent 2 noted participation in community or foundation activities "...as an effort to encourage myself, yes, and to find entertainment, yes". These activities served a dual purpose: providing leisure to refresh the mind while also offering renewed motivation through social interaction. Peers were also considered a recovery resource when motivation declined. As Respondent 2 reflected, "So when I lose motivation, I think about how to find it again", highlighting that social activities function as a deliberate strategy to regain drive.

In several accounts, peer support carried emotional and spiritual depth. Respondent 8 recalled friends saying, "You can do it" and "We will pray for you", demonstrating a form of encouragement that combined affirmation with spiritual solidarity. Such gestures fostered a sense of belonging and reinforced the perception that peers were emotionally invested in the participant's success. In summary, the theme of Peer Support reveals that the respondent has a mature strategy for maintaining their mental well-being. They not only rely on support from others but also actively build and leverage it through various social activities to find renewed energy and motivation.

3.2. Discussion

This study makes a conceptual contribution by advancing existing understandings of adaptive help seeking and academic resilience through a contextualized, experience-based perspective of final-year college students with special needs. While prior research has predominantly examined help seeking in terms of individual learning strategies or institutional support, the present findings reconceptualize adaptive help seeking as a relational and socially embedded process. The emergence of parental and peer support as central themes highlights how academic resilience in the final year is sustained not only through personal self-regulation but also through dynamic social resources that foster motivation, confidence, and persistence during the thesis-writing process. By foregrounding these relational dimensions, this study extends resilience theory by emphasizing the interactive role of social support in shaping adaptive help-seeking behaviors among students with special needs.

3.2.1. Parental Support Parental

Support emerged as another significant dimension of resilience for these students. Participants described their parents as sources of emotional reassurance and moral encouragement. Parents function as a secure base and safe haven, offering emotional warmth, affection, and interest that strengthen a child's sense of belonging, well-being, and resilience. Such support not only facilitates developmental progress but also protects against stressors detrimental to physical and mental health, while fostering social competence and effective learning (Cheraghian, et al., 2023). Within the collectivist cultural framework of Indonesia, parental support is intertwined with values of filial duty and the pursuit of family honor (Kwon, et al., 2016). This cultural context was evident in respondent's narratives, as several described their parents as either the ultimate motivation or one of the main reasons for completing their thesis. For these students, earning a university degree was not solely a personal achievement, but also a way to honor and bring pride to their parents. This sentiment was particularly profound among participants who were the only members of their family to have accessed higher education, making the accomplishment even more meaningful within their family context. This sense of duty reflects Landsford's (2021) depiction of collectivist cultures, in which personal accomplishments are frequently directed toward advancing the honor of the family unit rather than serving purely individual aspirations.

3.2.2. Peer Support Peer

Support is a crucial factor in encouraging students' academic motivation and adjustment, as positive peer interactions encourage engagement and persistence. Building on this perspective, the present study demonstrates that supportive peer relationships significantly enhance college students' ability to adapt to academic demands. Wentzel (2021) also argued that peer support extends beyond providing emotional reassurance, as it shapes students' self-beliefs and influences adaptive learning behaviors. Our findings resonate with this argument, showing that perceived peer support not only reduce stress but also strengthens academic self-efficacy by offering informational resources and opportunities for collaborative learning. Peer support represents a major dimension of social support in the academic context, encompassing the emotional encouragement, informational guidance, and material assistance that students receive from their peers or classmates (An & Guo, 2023). Such support is especially important because peers often occupy a central role in students' everyday academic and social experiences. Previous studies have shown that peer support helps

reduce academic pressure and promote academic adjustment by providing comfort during stressful periods, sharing relevant information, and offering learning resources that might otherwise be unavailable (Zhu et al., 2025). These findings underscore the multidimensional benefits of peer support, which functions not only as a buffer against negative experiences but also as a catalyst for academic growth. The findings reveal the multifaceted role of peer support in sustaining the motivation and well-being of final year students with disabilities. Respondents emphasized that their peers not only provided emotional comfort but also constructive feedback and practical assistance, it's recognize peer relationships as key drivers of academic persistence and adjustment (Worley et al., 2023). Engagement in peer related activities was described as purposeful and strategic, functioning as both leisure and a means of regaining energy and motivation. This indicates that peer support serves not only as a coping mechanism but also as a resilience building resource for students facing the dual demands of academic completion and disability related challenges. Furthermore, the accounts of spiritual encouragement highlight the cultural depth of peer support, demonstrating how affirmation and solidarity extend into emotional and spiritual domains. This holistic support system contributes to a stronger sense of belonging and reinforces self-belief in the participants' ability to succeed. From a practical perspective, these findings suggest that higher education institutions should actively foster peer support structures tailored to students with disabilities for example, through mentorship schemes, peer learning groups, or inclusive community activities. By facilitating such interactions, institutions can strengthen students' psychological resources, enhance their academic adjustment, and promote successful transitions into post-graduation pathways.

4. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that both parental and peer support are essential resources in sustaining the academic resilience of final year students with disabilities. While parental support was identified as the primary motivator, providing a strong foundation of care, encouragement, and responsibility, peer support emerged as equally vital in maintaining on going motivation and well-being. Peers contributed not only through emotional reassurance but also by offering constructive feedback, purposeful social engagement, and even spiritual encouragement. Taken together, these two forms of support highlight the importance of both family and peer networks in enabling students with disabilities to navigate academic challenges, manage psychological stress, and persist toward graduation. Such findings suggest that a comprehensive approach to supporting students should address the complementary roles of parents and peers in fostering resilience and academic success.

Author Contributions

All authors have equal contributions to the paper. All the authors have read and approved the final manuscript.

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Declaration on AI Use

The authors declare that no artificial intelligence (AI) or AI-assisted tools were used in the preparation of this manuscript.

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