

Attributes Associated with Student Persistence in Higher Education Institution

Mary Cris P. Ligan¹, Gail D. Conway²

¹ Director, Cagayan de Oro College

² Professor, Cagayan de Oro College

Abstract

A central challenge in higher education is the low rate of student persistence, which is often linked to academic, emotional, and financial difficulties. This research examines the specific impact of student demographics (age, sex, college, and family monthly income) and satisfaction with student activities on persistence. Using a mixed-methods design, quantitative data were collected from both enrolled and unenrolled students. An in-depth interview was then conducted to develop a Student Activities Improvement Plan based on the study's findings. This study included 540 respondents from a higher educational institution.

Findings revealed that among the student activities, the Acquaintance Party and Foundation Day were significant predictors of student persistence, whereas other events had a limited impact. The demographic variables of age, income, and sex were also found to be significant. Thematic analysis of the interview data supported these findings, with participants indicating that activities promoting social connection, institutional pride, and inclusivity enhanced their sense of belonging and motivation. Conversely, inaccessible or exclusive activities led to feelings of disconnection, particularly among working and financially disadvantaged students. The study concludes that a combination of personal background, institutional support, and the quality of student engagement opportunities influences student persistence. It is recommended that institutions redesign low-impact student activities, provide more inclusive and financially accessible programs, and implement systematic feedback mechanisms to continually improve the student engagement experience.

Keywords: *attributes, activities satisfaction, student persistence*

1. Introduction

Student persistence is a crucial factor in higher education success, especially in the Philippines where earning a college degree symbolizes upward social mobility and collective family aspirations. However, persistence faces serious challenges, with the national attrition rate at 39% due to financial difficulties, academic pressures, limited institutional support, and heavy personal or family responsibilities. Research highlights that socioeconomic status strongly affects persistence, with lower-income and first-generation students being more vulnerable to dropping out. Beyond finances, student engagement through extracurricular activities, leadership, and community involvement greatly boosts persistence by fostering belonging, skills, and motivation, as shown in studies, Lanuza et.al (2020) on the struggles and aspirations of first-generation female graduates. These findings emphasize the need for schools to critically assess and redesign their programs and support systems to be more inclusive and responsive to

students' diverse backgrounds. By developing targeted interventions and strengthening institutional capacity, higher education can better support at-risk populations, enhance student success, and contribute to the nation's intellectual capital and development.

Research Questions

This study aimed to determine the influence of the respondents' level of activity satisfaction on their persistence in the higher educational institution of Cagayan de Oro City, SY 24-25. Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. How are the respondents' demographic characteristics distributed in terms of age, sex, college, and family monthly income?
2. What is the respondents' level of activity satisfaction in terms of Welcome Week, Student Orientation, Organization Festival/Club Days, Palakasan, Starlighting Ceremony, Foundation Days, and Acquaintance Party?
3. How are the respondents distributed in terms of their persistence?
4. Does the level of activity satisfaction predict the persistence of respondents?
5. How do the respondents compare in terms of persistence when grouped by their demographic characteristics?
6. How do the respondents' demographic characteristics and their activity satisfaction influence persistence?
7. Based on the results of the study, what improvement plan can be designed?

Significance

The findings of this research provide clear and actionable benefits for all stakeholders in higher education institutions: administrators can use data-driven evidence to allocate resources effectively for student activities and support services, thereby improving retention rates and enhancing the school's reputation; teachers can apply the insights to better understand student motivations, refine pedagogical practices, foster community, and identify at-risk learners; while student affairs and services can design targeted, inclusive policies and activities that promote belonging and support students' academic and personal success.

Scope and Limitations

This study explored how students' demographic characteristics (age, sex, college, and family income) and their satisfaction with activities such as Welcome Week, Orientation, Organization Festival, Palakasan, Starlighting Ceremony, Foundation Days, and Acquaintance Party influence persistence in higher education. Using a mixed-methods design combining surveys and in-depth interviews, the research examined the relationships between demographics, satisfaction, and persistence while also capturing students' personal experiences. Although limited to a single institution and primarily first-year students' factors that may restrict generalizability, the study offered valuable insights that can guide future retention strategies by highlighting the role of student characteristics and activity satisfaction in fostering persistence.

2. Literature Review

Demographic Profile

Research highlights several key factors influencing student persistence in higher education. Age plays a critical role, with younger students generally more engaged in campus activities that foster belonging and persistence, while older students often face competing responsibilities that reduce participation (Walve, 2021). Sex also matters, as studies show female students often display higher persistence, engagement, and resilience compared to males, underscoring the need for gender-responsive strategies (Demalata et. Al., 2024). The choice of college or program further affects persistence, with academic fit, satisfaction, and program relevance strongly linked to retention; demanding courses like engineering and nursing require tailored support to enhance belonging (Palaoag & Ocampo, 2020). Monthly family income remains a major determinant, as higher-income students benefit from stability and resources, while lower-income students face economic pressures that increase dropout risks (Gopalan & Brady, 202). Finally, satisfaction with student activities significantly promotes persistence by enhancing engagement, motivation, and social integration, aligning with Tinto's model that stresses the importance of extracurricular involvement for retention (García & Villar., 2022).

Activities Satisfaction

Campus events and traditions play a strategic role in fostering student persistence by enhancing belonging, engagement, and institutional pride. Programs like Welcome Week and student orientation provide critical early connections to peers, faculty, and resources, significantly improving retention, especially for first-generation and at-risk students (Lang, 2022). Large-scale events such as Organization Festivals, Palakasan sports activities, and cultural traditions like Starlighting and Foundation Days build community, encourage participation, and strengthen institutional attachment, which research links to higher persistence and reduced dropout rates (Sá, 2023). Similarly, social events like acquaintance parties foster early peer relationships and belonging, easing transitions and motivating continued enrollment (Tinto, 2021). Collectively, these activities are more than ceremonial they are intentional interventions that integrate students academically and socially, creating supportive environments that sustain long-term academic success.

Student's Persistence

Student persistence, defined as continued enrollment from one term to the next, is shaped by academic, social, and institutional factors. Tinto (2025) emphasized that persistence depends on motivation, belonging, and integration within academic and social environments, while studies show that early interventions such as orientation programs significantly improve retention (Manicone et al., 2023). Personality traits like conscientiousness and self-efficacy also support persistence, whereas time constraints and competing responsibilities pose barriers (Pedler et al., 2022). Engagement in extracurricular activities fosters belonging and institutional commitment (Sá, 2023), and institutional support such as emergency grants addresses basic needs that directly influence retention. Furthermore, innovative instructional methods, like real-world problem-solving approaches, have been found to enhance persistence rates (Davis & Burkholder, 2024). Overall, persistence is a multifaceted construct requiring holistic strategies that integrate academic, social, and institutional supports to ensure student success.

Methodology

Research Design

This study used a mixed-methods design, combining quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews to examine factors influencing student persistence. The survey collected demographic data (age, gender, course, year level, and family income) and satisfaction with activities like Welcome Week, Orientation, Organization Festival, Palakasan, Starlighting, Foundation Days, and Acquaintance Party, with results analyzed statistically to identify correlations with persistence. Complementing this, in-depth interviews provided deeper insights into students' perceptions, motivations, and challenges. Integrating both methods allowed for a nuanced understanding of how demographics and activity satisfaction affect students' decisions to persist in higher education.

Participants

The respondents in this study were the 540 first-year college students. These students were at a pivotal stage in their academic careers, transitioning from senior high school to college, which often brings challenges in both academic and social adjustment. The study involved students from various educational programs. Participants were randomly selected to represent a diverse group based on demographic factors, including age, sex, course, and family income. This enables a comprehensive examination of how these elements influence student involvement in extracurricular activities and their persistence in college. Surveys and interviews were used to gather relevant data, ensuring a broad and representative sample of first-year students that reflects the overall student body.

Data Collection

This study used a researcher-made questionnaire and a semi-structured interview guide to gather data on student persistence. The questionnaire collected demographic details, participation in activities like Welcome Week, Orientation, Organization Festival, Palakasan, Starlighting, Foundation Day, and Acquaintance Party, and assessed their impact using Likert-scale items. The interviews provided deeper insights into how demographics and activity engagement shaped students' sense of belonging and academic dedication. Both tools, pilot-tested for clarity and reliability, offered complementary quantitative and qualitative data to better understand factors influencing persistence.

Data Analysis

This study employed both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations) were used to summarize student demographics and activity participation. For inferential analysis, a logistic regression model was used to assess the association between a combination of interval and categorical independent variables and a categorical dependent variable. All analyses were conducted using SPSS at a 0.05 level of significance.

3. Results and Discussions

Problem 1. How are the respondents' demographic characteristics distributed in terms of age, sex, college, and family monthly income?

Table 1
Distribution of Respondents' Demographic Characteristics

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Age	21 years old and above	80	14.81
	19-20 years old	345	63.89
	17-18 years old	115	21.30
	15-16 years old		
Total		540	100.00
Sex	Male	237	43.90
	Female	303	56.10
Total		540	100.00
College	Allied Health and Sciences	103	19.10
	Criminology	83	15.40
	Education	92	17.00
	Engineering and Architecture	81	15.00
	Information Technology	80	14.80
	Management and Accountancy	101	18.70
Total		540	100.00
Family Monthly Income	PHP 20,001 - PHP 25,000	26	4.80
	PHP 15,001 - PHP 20,000	34	6.30
	PHP 10,001 - PHP 15,000	66	12.20
	PHP 5,001 - PHP 10,000	96	17.80
	PHP 5,000 or lower	295	54.60
Total		540	100.00

Table 1 shows that the majority of respondents were aged 19–20 years, followed by those aged 17–18, indicating that most participants were typical undergraduate students. The distribution also revealed a higher proportion of females compared to males, reflecting national and global trends of higher female participation in higher education. Respondents came from various colleges with relatively even representation, though Allied Health, Management and Accountancy, and Education had slightly higher percentages, likely due to program demand and larger student populations in these fields. In terms of socioeconomic status, more than half of the respondents reported a monthly family income of PHP 5,000 or less, suggesting that many of them came from low-income households. This economic background points to potential challenges in affording educational resources, accessing technology, and managing daily living expenses, which may affect their persistence in higher education. Alongside these demographic factors, findings on student activity satisfaction indicated that campus events such as Welcome Week, Orientation, Foundation Days, and other activities play a vital role in promoting

engagement, belonging, and integration. High levels of satisfaction suggest that these programs effectively support student success, while lower ratings identify areas that institutions can strengthen to enhance overall student experience and retention.

Problem 2. What is the respondents' level of activity satisfaction in terms of Welcome Week, Student Orientation, Organization Festival/Club Days, Palakasan, Starlighting Ceremony, Foundation Days, and Acquaintance Party?

Table 2
Summary Distribution of Respondents' Level of Activity Satisfaction

Variables	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Welcome Week	3.09	0.62	High
Student Orientation	3.11	0.58	High
Organizational Festival/Club Days	3.00	0.64	High
Palakasan	3.10	0.68	High
Starlighting Ceremony	3.03	0.71	High
Foundation Days	3.06	0.70	High
Acquaintance Party	2.79	0.85	High
Overall	3.03	0.09	High

Table 2 presents the respondents' levels of satisfaction with student activities, showing an overall mean of 3.03 (SD = 0.09), interpreted as High. This indicates that students generally view the institution's programs as valuable, supportive, and enriching to campus life, with activities fostering engagement, belonging, and community connections. Among the seven events evaluated, Student Orientation received the highest satisfaction rating (M = 3.11, SD = 0.58), reflecting its effectiveness in easing new students' transition by providing clear information, reducing anxiety, and connecting them with institutional resources. Conversely, the Acquaintance Party had the lowest mean score (M = 2.79, SD = 0.85), though still rated High, suggesting that while it successfully created positive experiences for some, others may not have felt equally included or engaged. These results highlight the importance of designing activities that balance information, social interaction, and inclusivity to ensure all students benefit. Overall, the findings emphasize that well-planned programs like orientation strongly support student persistence, while events such as acquaintance gatherings require refinement to maximize their role in fostering holistic development, belonging, and retention.

Problem 3. How are the respondents distributed as to their persistence?

Table 3
Distribution of Respondents as to their Persistence

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Not Enrolled	261	48.30
Enrolled	279	51.70
Overall	540	100.00

Table 3 shows the respondents' distribution in terms of persistence, with 261 (48.3%) classified as "Not Enrolled" and 279 (51.7%) as "Enrolled," reflecting a near-even split and a slightly larger proportion of continuing students. The presence of a significant "Not Enrolled" group highlights the importance of examining barriers to persistence, such as financial constraints, adjustment difficulties, or limited social integration, which may have influenced their decision to pause or discontinue studies. Meanwhile, the "Enrolled" group represents those actively engaged in academic life, whose participation in campus activities often fosters belonging, satisfaction, and success. This balance between the two groups offers valuable insight, allowing for a comparative understanding of how enrollment status shapes student experiences, levels of satisfaction, and the effectiveness of institutional support in promoting persistence.

Problem 4. Does the level of activity satisfaction predict the persistence of the respondents?

Table 4

Binomial Logistic Regression Coefficient Predicting Persistence from Student Activity Satisfaction

Activity Satisfaction	Z	P	Odds Ratio	Result
Welcome Week	0.706	0.480	1.218	Not Significant
Student Orientation	0.579	0.563	1.190	Not Significant
Organizational Festival/Club Days	-1.929	0.054	0.576	Not Significant
Palakasan	-0.245	0.807	0.944	Not Significant
Starlighting Ceremony	-0.355	0.723	0.927	Not Significant
Foundation Days	2.342	0.019	1.743	Significant
Acquaintance Party	3.216	0.001	1.596	Significant

Table 4 presents the results of a binomial logistic regression analysis examining whether student satisfaction with campus activities predicts persistence, defined as continuous enrollment toward degree completion. Among the activities assessed, only Foundation Day and the Acquaintance Party were significant predictors. Foundation Day, with a Z-score of 2.342, p-value of 0.019, and odds ratio of 1.743 indicated that students satisfied with this event were about 74.3% more likely to remain enrolled, highlighting the role of institutional traditions in fostering identity and belonging. Similarly, the Acquaintance Party, with a Z-score of 3.216, p-value of 0.001, and odds ratio of 1.596, showed that students who valued this early-semester event were nearly 59.6% more likely to persist, emphasizing the importance of early social integration and peer connections in supporting academic success. Together, these findings underscore that early, high-quality institutional and social experiences significantly contribute to student retention by shaping belonging, motivation, and commitment to their studies.

Problem 5. How do respondents compare in their persistence when grouped according to their demographic characteristics?

Table 5
Binomial Logistic Regression Predicting Persistence from Demographic Characteristics

Demographic Characteristics	Z	p	Odds Ratio	Result
Age	-38686	<.001	0.784	Significant
Income				
PHP 25,001 or higher	-0.6328	0.527	0.749	Not Significant
PHP 20,001 - PHP 25,000	1.0603	0.289	1.596	Not Significant
PHP 15,001 - PHP 20,000	-1.0181	0.309	0.681	Not Significant
PHP 10,001 - PHP 15,000	2.9251	0.003	2.512	Significant
PHP 5,001 - PHP 10,000	-0.8509	0.395	0.813	Not Significant
PHP 5,000 or lower	<i>ref</i>			
Sex:				
Male	<i>ref</i>			
Female	2.2404	0.025	1.556	Significant
College:				
Allied Health and Sciences	<i>ref</i>			
Engineering and Architecture	0.2184	0.827	1.073	Not Significant
Information Technology	-1.0136	0.311	0.717	Not Significant
Management and Accountancy	0.6397	0.522	1.212	Not Significant
Education	0.0770	0.939	1.024	Not Significant
Criminology	0.8984	0.369	1.346	Not Significant

Table 5 presents the results of a binomial logistic regression analysis examining whether students' demographic characteristics predict persistence in higher education, focusing on age, sex, course, and income brackets. Three variables emerged as statistically significant predictors: age, sex, and the PHP 10,001–15,000 income bracket. Age negatively predicted persistence ($p < 0.001$; OR = 0.784), suggesting that older students were less likely to remain enrolled, possibly due to competing responsibilities. Sex showed a positive effect ($p = 0.025$; OR = 1.556), with female students more likely to persist than males, reflecting stronger engagement in academic and support networks. Income also played a role, as students from the PHP 10,001–15,000 bracket were over 2.5 times more likely to stay enrolled than those from the lowest-income group ($p = 0.003$; OR = 2.512), underscoring the barriers posed by financial hardship. Other income levels and course disciplines did not show significant effects, indicating that persistence is shaped more by age, gender, and financial stability than by program of study. Overall, the findings highlight the complex interplay of demographic factors influencing retention and point to the need for targeted interventions such as financial aid, gender-sensitive support, and resources for older students.

Problem 6. How do demographic characteristics and the level of activity satisfaction influence persistence?

Table 6

Summary of Results with Integrated Qualitative Insights

Student Activities	Statistical Outcome	Qualitative Insight	Thematic Theme
Acquaintance Party	Positive predictor ($p < 0.001$) from the quantitative result	Built confidence and friendships; felt memorable and inclusive; positively influenced connection and emotional well-being (R1, R5).	Social Bonding and Belongingness, Role Models
Foundation Day	Positive predictor ($p = 0.019$) from the quantitative result	Fostered pride and identity with the institution; meaningful volunteering experiences promoted connection and belonging (R2, R6).	Institutional Identity and Legacy, Sense of Pride
Welcome Week & Orientation	Not significant ($p > 0.05$) from the quantitative result	Seen as helpful but lacked personal resonance; felt irrelevant for working students or failed to build a lasting connection (R7).	Mismatch in Relevance and Timing
Palakasan & Starlighting	Not significant ($p > 0.70$) from the quantitative result	Perceived as traditional, exclusive, or niche; failed to engage students broadly; limited impact on persistence (R3, R4).	Perceived Exclusivity and Disconnect
Organizational Festival	Marginally negative ($p = 0.054$) from the quantitative result	Felt disorganized or excluded; lacked opportunities for meaningful participation; some felt confused or uncertain about purpose (R8).	Exclusion and Lack of Engagement
Demographics (Age, Sex, Income)	Significant in various categories (Age, Income, Sex) from the quantitative result	Financial hardship often outweighed positive experiences; older or working students struggled with participation; gender influenced the sense of belonging and safety (R2, R5).	Contextual Barriers to Participant

Table 6 summarizes the integration of quantitative results with qualitative insights, showing that not all student activities equally influence persistence; those fostering emotional connection, inclusivity, and active participation have stronger impacts on retention. The Acquaintance Party ($p < 0.001$) and Foundation Day ($p = 0.019$) emerged as significant predictors, with respondents highlighting how these events broke social barriers, built friendships, and deepened institutional pride, reinforcing their sense of belonging and purpose. In contrast, Welcome Week and Orientation were perceived as impersonal, Palakasan and Starlighting lacked participatory elements, and the Organizational Festival even showed a marginally negative effect ($p = 0.054$) due to feelings of exclusion. Demographic factors such as age, sex, and income also significantly shaped persistence, with financial hardship and work responsibilities

limiting participation for some students. Overall, the findings stress that persistence depends less on the mere availability of activities and more on how students experience them, activities that are inclusive, engaging, and identity-building promote retention, while those that are generic, exclusive, or inaccessible may hinder it.

Problem 7. Based on the results of the study, what Improvement Plan can be designed?

The findings showed that although students were generally satisfied with institutional activities, only Foundation Day and the Acquaintance Party significantly predicted persistence. This underscores the need to improve the design, delivery, and inclusivity of engagement programs by addressing gaps such as limited inter-year interaction, passive participation, and uneven impact across demographics. To respond, a structured improvement plan is proposed to ensure all activities meaningfully support student integration, development, and success over the next three academic years.

THREE-YEAR STUDENT ACTIVITIES IMPROVEMENT PLAN

Areas of Concern	Specific Objectives	Strategies/ Activities	Time Frame	Persons Involved	Source of Fund	Estimated Budget (PHP)	Expected Outcome
Administrative & Logistical Resistance to Change: Student organizations may resist changes to event formats. Coordination and Communication: The plan requires close coordination between multiple departments as student activities are redesigned. Data Collection and Analysis: The	Address resistance to change from student organizations	Conduct orientations; form Student Advisory Council	Year 1, Semester 1–2	CSDL, CSG, AC	Institutional Budget	50,000	Initial buy-in and participation from student groups
	Strengthen coordination across departments.	Establish an interdepartmental working group and pilot a communication platform.	Year 1, Quarter 1–4	CSDL, AC	Institutional Budget	75,000	Improved planning and information-sharing system
	Build a system for data collection and analysis	Design standardized feedback tools; pilot survey collection	Year 1, Semester 1–2	CSDL, SSG	Institutional Budget	60,000	Baseline data collected for program improvement
	Sustain student organization engagement.	Continue advisory council activities; introduce recognition awards	Year 2, Semester 1–2	CSDL, CSG, Student Leaders	CSDL, CSG, SBO Budget,	50,000	Stronger collaboration and reduced resistance
	Enhance departmental coordination	Hold quarterly meetings; expand working group membership	Year 2, Quarter 1–4	CSDL, AC	Institutional Budget	75,000	Departments actively coordinating events
	Expand the feedback and evaluation system.	Train faculty/staff on survey analysis; integrate re-	Year 2, Semester 1–2	CSDL, SSG	Institutional Budget	60,000	Wider use of feedback to improve activities

success of the plan relies on continuous feedback, which may not be consistently used or analyzed		sults into planning					
	Institution-alize the student advisory system.	Formalize the Student Advisory Council as a permanent body	Year 3, Semester 1–2	CSDL, AC, SSG	CSDL Budget	50,000	Institution-alized mechanism for student representation
	Institution-alize the coordination system.	Fully adopt the communication platform; evaluate outcomes	Year 3, Quarter 1–4	CSDL, AC, SSG	Institutional Budget	75,000	Sustainable inter-departmental collaboration
	Institution-alize the feedback loop	Fully integrate data collection into the annual cycle; publish reports	Year 3, Semester 1–2	CSDL, AC, SSG	Institutional Budget, CSDL	60,000	Reliable evidence-based improvements in activities

This three-year improvement plan was created in response to a study on student activity satisfaction and persistence in higher education. While students generally expressed high satisfaction with activities, only Foundation Day and the Acquaintance Party significantly influenced continued enrollment. This shows that not all events equally support belonging, connection, and commitment. Recognizing the role of co-curricular experiences in promoting well-being, relationships, and institutional pride, the plan aims to make student programming more inclusive, meaningful, and strategically designed to ensure all students feel represented and supported.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion

The study revealed that student persistence in higher education is shaped by both demographic factors and satisfaction with student activities. Beyond academics, co-curricular and extracurricular programs foster belonging, confidence, and social connection, which strongly motivate students to remain enrolled. While income influences persistence, financial stability alone does not guarantee retention; rather, meaningful and emotionally resonant experiences drive commitment. These findings highlight the need for well-designed, inclusive activities that support leadership, wellness, and student engagement across diverse backgrounds. Ultimately, persistence reflects the holistic student experience when learners feel valued, supported, and connected, they are more likely to stay, succeed, and carry institutional pride beyond graduation.

Recommendations

Based on the study's results, the following recommendations are proposed to strengthen student persistence through improved activities. School administrators should review and redesign student

programs to align with academic goals while promoting inclusivity and belonging. Teachers and advisers are encouraged to actively promote participation by linking events to skill development in communication, teamwork, and leadership. The Student Affairs and Services Office should oversee the 3-year improvement plan, ensuring activities foster inclusion and assigning trained student leaders to engage new students and build early connections. Lastly, future research should explore long-term impacts of engagement and broaden the scope to include variables like mental health, advising, and peer support for a more comprehensive understanding of persistence.

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