

Exploring the Lived Academic Experiences of ABM Students in a Science High School in Baguio City

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the lived academic experiences of ABM strand students in a private science high school in Baguio City, focusing on how they handle the demands of a rigorous curriculum while balancing personal and social responsibilities. Using a phenomenological approach, six senior high school students participated in semi-structured interviews that explored their reflections and coping strategies. Thematic analysis revealed that choosing a strand aligned with personal interests and career goals motivates students and strengthens perseverance despite heavy workloads. They manage academic pressure through time management, group study, reflection, and peer support. Participation in school events, such as E-Startup Day and outreach activities, also enhances learning by allowing students to apply lessons, develop leadership, and build problem-solving skills. Teacher guidance and accessible resources further support their academic journey. Overall, ABM students view challenges as opportunities for growth, highlighting the importance of motivation, collaboration, and structured support in fostering resilience and holistic development.

INTRODUCTION

The Accountancy, Business, and Management (ABM) strand in senior high school is intended to provide students with the foundational knowledge and practical skills they need to pursue future careers in fields such as accounting, finance, marketing, and entrepreneurship. In the Philippine education system, this strand plays a crucial role in shaping learners who plan to enter the business sector, whether through college programs or direct participation in industry (Department of Education [DepEd], 2016a). When this strand is offered in science high schools, the learning environment becomes even more demanding. These schools are known for their structured, competitive, and academically intensive culture, where students are expected to think critically, work independently, and maintain high levels of academic performance (DepEd, 2016b). For ABM students, this setting presents both opportunities for growth and challenges that may affect how they approach their studies.

The academic experiences of ABM students extend far beyond completing specialized subjects such as Business Finance, Fundamentals of Accountancy, and Business Ethics. Their learning journey is intertwined with emotional, social, and personal factors that influence how they respond to the pressures of a high-achieving environment (DepEd, 2016c;

Marimat et al., 2019). Many students manage heavy course loads, frequent deadlines, and projects that require advanced planning and discipline. At the same time, they must juggle responsibilities at home, maintain friendships, and keep up with extracurricular activities. These realities shape their motivation, resilience, and engagement in school. They also reveal the importance of looking closely at students' day-to-day experiences to fully understand what they go through and how these experiences influence their academic development.

While existing studies have examined ABM students' performance, motivation, and stress (Marimat et al., 2019; Valenzuela et al., 2025), very few have looked deeply into what students themselves say about their academic lives – how they interpret their struggles, how they cope with pressure, and how they find meaning in their experiences. Much of the current literature relies on quantitative indicators such as grades or standardized assessments. Although useful, these measures cannot capture the complexities of students' thoughts and feelings, especially within the highly specialized and competitive atmosphere of a science high school. Because their schooling environment differs from that of regular senior high schools, ABM students in science-focused institutions may face unique challenges that remain underexplored.

Understanding their lived experiences can offer valuable insights for teachers, school administrators, and guidance counselors. By listening to students' own accounts, educators can better identify the types of support that students need – whether in academic assistance, emotional guidance, workload management, or school policies. Exploring these experiences also helps illuminate how students grow, adapt, and make sense of their academic journey, providing a deeper and more holistic perspective on learning in the ABM strand.

Objectives of the study

The primary objective of this study is to explore and describe the lived academic experiences of ABM students in a private science high school in Baguio City, focusing on how they perceive, navigate, and make meaning of their learning journey. Specifically, it aims to:

- 1) To explore how ABM students experience and interpret their daily academic life, including the challenges, motivations, and strategies they employ to cope with the demands of a rigorous science high school curriculum.
- 2) To examine the significant events and experiences, both positive and challenging, that have shaped ABM students' personal and academic development throughout their senior high school journey.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

Understanding students' academic experiences requires looking beyond grades or classroom performance. Learning is shaped not only by cognitive abilities but also by the personal and emotional qualities that students bring with them. International studies show that non-cognitive traits—such as intrinsic motivation, grit, and a growth mindset—play an essential role in how students deal with academic demands. Wu, Qi, and Zhong (2022), for example, found that high school learners who exhibited stronger intrinsic motivation and persistence performed better academically and showed greater determination when faced with challenges. Their study highlights that students who are emotionally invested in their learning are more likely to push through difficulties. In the same way, Misirlis, Zwaan, and Weber (2020) demonstrated how academic stress, social support, and psychological well-being are closely connected. They emphasized that when students receive emotional and social support, they are better equipped to manage stress and engage meaningfully in their studies. Taken together, these studies show that academic performance is influenced by a blend of cognitive skills and non-cognitive traits, underscoring the importance of understanding students' internal experiences and support systems.

In the Philippine setting, research focusing on ABM students provides deeper insight into the challenges and factors that shape their academic journey. Abella's (2019) qualitative study in Cebu revealed that ABM learners often struggle with limited learning resources, the need for more practical immersion opportunities, and the importance of guidance from knowledgeable and accessible teachers. These challenges highlight the reality that ABM students require not just academic instruction but also hands-on experiences and mentorship to better understand their field. Supporting this, Marimat et al. (2019) found that ABM students experience significant stress due to heavy academic workloads, tight deadlines, and performance expectations, all of which have notable effects on their physical and mental well-being. Meanwhile, studies on self-perception and learning strategies, such as those by Magnaye (2020) and Ronquillo et al. (2025), show that while ABM students generally believe they are

academically prepared, emotional readiness and social support remain equally important. These findings suggest that the academic experiences of ABM learners are influenced not only by curriculum demands but also by their emotional resilience, study habits, and access to support systems.

At the local level, research focusing specifically on ABM students in Baguio City or the Cordillera Administrative Region remains scarce. However, available reports indicate that the academic landscape in the region is changing and becoming increasingly demanding. The Philippine News Agency (2023) reported that about 20 schools in the Cordillera region have adopted a strengthened senior high school curriculum that emphasizes rigorous academic standards and greater specialization. This shift points to a more challenging learning environment where students may experience heightened expectations and academic pressures. For ABM learners, these conditions may shape how they cope with academic workloads, manage stress, stay motivated, and build resilience. The limited local research highlights the need for studies that capture students' voices and provide a closer look at how they navigate these evolving academic demands. Understanding their lived experiences can help educators and policymakers design better interventions and support systems tailored to the needs of ABM students in the region.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological research design to gain a deeper understanding of the lived academic experiences of ABM students in a private science high school in Baguio City. This design was chosen because phenomenology focuses on how individuals interpret and give meaning to their personal experiences. It enabled the researcher to explore not only the academic challenges encountered by the students but also the significant moments, insights, and emotions that shaped their learning journey within a highly demanding academic environment.

The participants were ABM students who had completed at least one semester in the program. They were selected because they were fully immersed in both the business-oriented curriculum and the academically intensive atmosphere of a science-focused institution. This ensured that they had already encountered the realities and expectations of their strand. Only students who voluntarily agreed to participate and could clearly express their thoughts and experiences during interviews were included. Those who had just transferred, belonged to other strands, or were unable to attend the scheduled interviews were excluded to maintain the quality and depth of responses.

Data collection was carried out through semi-structured interviews using a validated interview guide. The guide consisted of open-ended questions designed to encourage students to share their stories, challenges, motivations, coping strategies, and meaningful academic experiences. The semi-structured format allowed the researcher to ask follow-up questions and seek clarification when needed, while still keeping the discussion aligned with the study's objectives. Before data gathering began, permission was obtained from the school

administration, and the purpose and procedures of the study were thoroughly explained to the participants.

The interviews were conducted individually, lasting approximately 20 to 30 minutes, depending on the flow of each participant's responses. To ensure accuracy, each interview was audio-recorded with the students' consent and later transcribed verbatim. Throughout the process, the researcher strictly adhered to ethical principles, including voluntary participation, respect for confidentiality, and proper handling and storage of all collected data.

Once transcription was completed, the data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2019) thematic analysis. This method involved carefully reading the transcripts, assigning codes to meaningful segments, and identifying patterns that emerged across the participants' narratives. Through this systematic process, recurring themes were developed, allowing the researcher to present the findings in a clear, organized, and credible manner grounded in the students' own voices and lived experiences.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the study's findings and explains their implications for the participants' experiences. The purpose of this research was to explore how ABM students in a private science high school in Baguio City experience their academic life, including the challenges they face, the support they receive, and the moments that shaped their journey. After reviewing and organizing the interview responses, several meaningful themes appeared that described their everyday experiences.

These themes emerged from the students' stories and reflections, which described what it is like to meet the academic demands of the ABM strand while studying in a science-oriented school. Their accounts revealed patterns related to academic pressure, time management, motivation, relationships with teachers and classmates, and their personal growth throughout the school year. The following sections present these themes, supported by students' own words, along with explanations that connect their experiences to ideas from previous studies.

1. To explore how ABM students experience and interpret their daily academic life, including the challenges, motivations, and strategies they employ to cope with the demands of a rigorous science high school curriculum.

Staying Committed to the ABM Strand

Many students shared that choosing the ABM strand because it aligns with their interests and future career goals helps them stay motivated, even when the workload becomes challenging. One respondent explained that having a personal connection to the strand makes the academic tasks feel more meaningful and easier to manage. Another mentioned that they enjoy their major subjects more because they intentionally selected the strand, which strengthens their sense of purpose in their studies.

These insights reflect the idea that students are more engaged when their academic choices match their personal aspirations. Abella (2019) similarly found that learners who pursue a strand aligned with their goals are more motivated and committed to their schoolwork. This alignment helps them view difficulties not as burdens but as steps toward something they genuinely want to achieve.

The students' experiences also support Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), which emphasizes the importance of intrinsic motivation. When learners engage in activities that matter to them, they show greater persistence, effort, and resilience. For these ABM students, their decision to choose the strand themselves becomes a source of drive, making their academic journey more purposeful and rewarding.

Handling Academic Pressure

Students also described the curriculum as highly demanding, noting that balancing their ABM subjects with the science-oriented courses required in their school can be mentally and physically exhausting. Many respondents shared that lessons move quickly, workloads pile up easily, and managing multiple subjects at once often becomes overwhelming. They emphasized that these pressures are a major source of stress, especially when deadlines overlap or when complex topics are covered in a short period of time.

These experiences are consistent with the findings of Malinao and Guzman (2025), who reported that ABM students frequently feel pressured due to the difficulty and intensity of their specialized subjects. Their study highlights that the combination of technical business courses and other core requirements contributes to students' academic strain, mirroring what the respondents in this study expressed.

The students' insights also align with the Allocation of Resources Theory, which explains that individuals must strategically distribute their time, energy, and attention to meet competing demands. In this context, ABM students are constantly making decisions about how to manage their limited resources to keep up with their academic responsibilities. Their responses show that success in their strand requires not only cognitive ability but also strong time management, self-regulation, and prioritization skills.

Coping Strategies

Despite the pressure, many students described practical ways they cope with the demands of their workload. They shared that planning study schedules, joining group study sessions, and taking short breaks help them stay organized and prevent burnout. Several respondents also explained that maintaining a positive mindset makes the tasks feel more manageable. Just as importantly, many emphasized the comfort and motivation they get from friends who are going through the same challenges, noting that shared experiences make the academic journey easier to navigate.

These coping strategies reflect the findings of Valenzuela et al. (2025), who reported that ABM students with strong support systems and effective self-management habits tend to show greater resilience and overall well-being. Their study suggests that students who can rely on both personal strategies and social

networks are better equipped to adapt to academic pressure and maintain their performance.

From a theoretical standpoint, the students' approaches also align with Self-Determination Theory, which highlights the importance of competence, autonomy, and social connection in sustaining motivation. The respondents' strategies—organizing their schedules, choosing study methods that work for them, and relying on peer support—show that they are actively managing their academic responsibilities in ways that strengthen these three needs. Their actions demonstrate that even in a demanding environment, students can develop adaptive ways to stay motivated, balanced, and focused.

Personal Growth and Future Orientation

Students also shared that their experiences in the ABM strand contributed significantly to their personal growth. They explained that difficult lessons, low grades, and academic setbacks pushed them to reflect on their habits and find ways to improve. Many said that these daily challenges taught them discipline, time management, and a stronger sense of responsibility. Others emphasized that facing academic pressure helped them stay focused on their long-term goals, such as preparing for college or building a future business career.

These insights support the findings of Lumanta, De Villa, and De Mesa (2020), who noted that ABM students often view challenges not as obstacles but as opportunities to build essential skills and competencies. According to their study, students become more resilient, resourceful, and goal-oriented when they are exposed to difficult academic situations that require persistence and adaptation.

This perspective also aligns with the Dual-Sector Model, which emphasizes that the effort students invest in the present—despite hardships—leads to long-term benefits. The students in this study clearly recognize that their hard work plays a key role in shaping their future success. For them, the ABM strand is not just an academic track but a training ground where they develop the habits, mindset, and competencies they will need in their professional and personal lives.

2. To examine the significant events and experiences, both positive and challenging, that have shaped ABM students' personal and academic development throughout their senior high school journey.

Active Participation in Events and Activities

Many respondents highlighted the significance of participating in school events, especially those tailored for ABM students, such as E-Startup Day and outreach programs. These activities offer opportunities for hands-on learning, allowing students to apply concepts from entrepreneurship, business management, and leadership in practical settings. Respondent 1 shared that being involved in organizing E-Startup Day helps students develop both academically and personally, as they practice skills like planning, teamwork, and problem-solving. Similarly, Respondent 5 noted that outreach programs provide

a chance to transfer classroom knowledge to real-world situations, such as teaching elementary students basic business and financial concepts.

These experiences are consistent with the principles of experiential learning (Abella, 2019), which emphasize that students gain confidence and develop essential skills when actively engaged in meaningful, practical tasks. By participating in events like E-Startup Day and community outreach, students are not only applying what they have learned but also refining their abilities in leadership, communication, and organization.

Furthermore, involvement in these activities aligns with the Dual-Sector Model, which posits that effort invested in practical experiences contributes to long-term skill acquisition and career readiness. Through these events, ABM students gain early exposure to professional practices and real-world challenges, helping them build competencies that support both their current academic growth and future success in the business field.

Learning Through Challenges

All respondents agreed that challenges play a crucial role in their personal and academic development. They identified difficulties such as meeting strict deadlines, managing heavy workloads, dealing with miscommunication during school events, and translating abstract academic concepts into practical applications. Respondent 2 explained that facing tight deadlines and personal struggles taught them responsibility, patience, and resilience. Similarly, Respondent 6 shared that organizing ENTREP Day involved unexpected delays and pressure, but navigating these challenges ultimately helped them acquire important real-life skills and confidence.

These experiences align with the findings of Malinao and Guzman (2025), who emphasized that the difficulties inherent in specialized ABM subjects encourage students to develop problem-solving abilities, perseverance, and adaptability. By confronting these challenges, students are not only learning content but also honing skills that are essential for future academic and professional success.

From a theoretical perspective, these findings support Self-Determination Theory, which suggests that students remain motivated when they find personal meaning and purpose in their efforts. Despite encountering obstacles, students in this study continued to stay engaged and driven, motivated both intrinsically by personal growth and extrinsically by preparation for future goals. Their responses illustrate how challenges can serve as catalysts for skill development, resilience, and long-term achievement.

Social and Collaborative Growth

Another prominent theme that emerged from the students' experiences was the social and collaborative aspect of learning. Respondent 3 shared that, although it was initially challenging to connect with classmates, teamwork and peer collaboration eventually became essential for overcoming academic and event-related challenges. Respondent 4 noted that involvement in extracurricular activities not only reinforced the importance of teamwork but also helped students discover their personal interests and strengths. Similarly, Respondent 2

highlighted that participating in group tasks improved communication skills and boosted self-confidence, making it easier to handle academic responsibilities.

These experiences align with the findings of Valenzuela et al. (2025), which emphasize that social support and collaborative engagement significantly contribute to students' resilience and overall well-being. For ABM students, the ability to work effectively with peers goes beyond completing tasks – it fosters personal development, enhances interpersonal skills, and strengthens academic performance.

By learning to navigate challenges collaboratively, students gain practical experience in leadership, cooperation, and problem-solving. These skills not only help them succeed in school-related projects but also prepare them for future professional environments, where teamwork and effective communication are critical to success.

Personal and Academic Development Through Support and Reflection

Finally, respondents emphasized that support from teachers, access to learning resources, and reflection on their experiences were key factors in their personal growth. Respondent 4 explained that guidance from teachers and the availability of quality learning materials helped them navigate challenges more effectively. Respondent 1 added that facing difficult tasks, when combined with active participation in school activities, contributed to their overall development, fostering both academic and personal growth.

These experiences are consistent with the findings of Lumanta, De Villa, and De Mesa (2020), who noted that structured guidance and opportunities for reflection enhance students' competence and prepare them for future responsibilities. Reflective practices allow learners to internalize lessons, assess their progress, and develop strategies for improvement, which strengthens both their skills and confidence.

From a theoretical perspective, these experiences also align with the Allocation of Resources Theory, which highlights the need to strategically manage time, energy, and effort. ABM students must balance academic requirements with extracurricular commitments, and their ability to allocate these resources effectively contributes to resilience, skill development, and overall success.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on this study's findings, ABM students at a private science high school in Baguio City experience their academic life as both challenging and rewarding. Their commitment to the ABM strand, driven by personal interests and future goals, motivates them to persevere despite a demanding curriculum. Students face academic pressure from balancing ABM and science subjects. Yet, they actively develop coping strategies, such as time management, collaborative learning, and maintaining a positive mindset, to navigate these challenges.

Participation in school events, such as E-Startup Day and outreach programs, plays a significant role in their personal and academic growth. These experiences allow students to apply their knowledge in practical contexts, develop leadership

and organizational skills, and learn the value of teamwork and collaboration. Challenges encountered in both curricular and extracurricular activities serve as opportunities for learning, resilience, and skill development. Support from teachers and access to learning resources further enhance their capacity to manage responsibilities and achieve personal and academic growth.

Overall, the experiences of ABM students reflect a holistic process of development, in which intrinsic motivation, social collaboration, reflection, and adequate time and effort management contribute to both personal growth and preparation for future academic and career paths.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are suggested:

- For ABM Students: ABM students are encouraged to stay motivated by connecting their academic work and extracurricular activities to their personal interests and future goals. They should continue using practical coping strategies, such as managing their time well, working closely with classmates, and reflecting on their daily experiences. Actively participating in school events such as E-Startup Day and outreach programs can provide hands-on learning, build leadership and teamwork skills, and support both personal and academic growth.
- For Teachers and School Administrators: Teachers and administrators are encouraged to provide guidance and support by offering accessible learning materials, mentorship opportunities, and structured activities that connect classroom lessons to real-life experiences. Encouraging student participation in meaningful events can boost confidence and practical skills. Establishing peer-support systems can also strengthen collaboration and social skills, helping students better handle the challenges of a demanding curriculum.

FURTHER STUDY

For Future Research: Future researchers are encouraged to examine the long-term effects of experiential and extracurricular activities on students' academic performance and career preparation. Research could also explore additional ways to support students in managing academic stress while maintaining their well-being. Comparing students' experiences and coping strategies across different strands or types of senior high schools could provide valuable insights to improve programs that support both personal and academic development.

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