

School Resilience and Connection: Assessing the Perception of Caleb University Mass Communication Freshmen on the Course Life Skills and Critical Thinking, CUL-MCM 101

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ABSTRACT: With the proliferation of state-owned and privately owned universities in the country, there has been a surge of teenage undergraduates in the Nigerian universities. While it is a good development, there is concern about the cognitive stamina of teenagers to cope with the rigour of campus life. Though the government agency in charge of admissions-Joint Admission and Matriculation Board-JAMB, has relaxed the required age limit for university applicants to 16, some individuals are of the view that such teenage applicants do not have the mental faculty to navigate through the complexities of workloads and interpersonal relations common with university life. The Caleb University, therefore, introduced a course to help new entrants learn about the exigencies of campus life and how to handle any social challenge their new environment may unfold. Giving to the significance of this programme, this paper examines the impact of the course developed by Caleb University, Life Skills and Critical Thinking, CUL-MCM 101. Following three research objectives, descriptive survey was adopted to collate response from the students. A 19-item questionnaire was developed and administered to the freshmen who just completed the course in the 2024/2025 academic session. Results collated show that the freshmen found the course very helpful as many respondents stated that they have developed life skills like active listening and critical thinking and this knowledge is helping them foster better relationship with their colleagues, lecturers and parents. The study is underpinned by the Norman Garnezy theory of resilience. It is recommended that studies in this area of students' resilience be intensified in the country and the course Life Skills and Critical Thinking be made a compulsory programme for all freshmen across the country.

KEYWORDS: Campus Life, Cognitive Development, Critical Thinking, Life Skills, Positive Psychology.

INTRODUCTION

From 1948 when the first university was established in Ibadan till 2024, the number of universities in Nigeria has increased to 275 as of December 2024. This rise in the number of university education in the country has led to the presence of 149 private universities, 63 state and 63 federal universities of December 2024 (Sasu, 2024). this number has increased since January 2025 to June 2025 as more university licensed were granted in the first half of 2025. As reported by Ogundapo (2024), the then acting executive secretary of the Nigeria university commission (NUC), Chris Mayaki, called on the Nigerian government to establish more universities in the country. Citing the large number of university applicants annually on the inadequate number of universities to admit many of the applicants as urgent reason to establish more universities. According to the acting executive secretary, only five hundred or seven hundred thousand university applicants in Nigeria usually secure university admission where over one million three hundred thousand are usually left out. Many pro-university advocates in Nigeria believe that the number of universities in the country are insufficient to cater for a nation of 200 million people whereas in other nations with similar population density have over five hundred universities. While this development is considered a positive and welcoming one in the country, there are there is another contentious issue sparking debate between government agencies and parents regarding university admission. The minister of education and the joint admission and matriculation board (JAMB) registrar have raised concerns over the rise of underage

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admission of children into universities across the country. Professor Ishaq Oloyede, registrar and CEO of JAMB openly criticised some federal universities for admitting underage students into universities in a 2024 forum. Though, 18 years is the ideal required age for students seeking admission into Nigerian universities, 16 years are also considered while special gifted and exceptional candidates who are less than 16 years are also considered. However, it appears that some Nigerian universities took advantage of the exemption of gifted underage applicants to admit many students who are less than 16 years of age and not gifted. This rising trend sparked controversy as professor Oloyede called out some universities for admitting students who are as young as 10 years old (Ogwo, 2024). He mentioned federal and state-owned universities who have offered underage applicants university admission; notably were university of Nigeria- Nsukka, University of Abuja, Kwara State University, Ambrose Ali University, University of Benin and Imo State University. According to Nigeria's minister of education, Professor Tahir Mamman, who believe that this rising spat of underage admission to those below the standard age of 18 years is causing problems on campus and must be addressed with immediate effect. During a public meeting in 2024 Professor Tahir directed JAMB to admit only candidates who have attained 18 years into tertiary institutions across the country (Erunke, 2024). His directive sparked another round of public argument as some believe that age is not a criteria for university admission so long as the candidate meets up with other criteria like good JAMB score and 5 credit passes in O'level result. However, the minister of education insisted that underage admission into the university is responsible for some of the problems being encountered in higher institutions. Pointing to the inability of immature undergraduates to better manage their own affairs on campus. As quoted by a Punch journalist Tolu-Kolawole (2024), the minister said, "Some of them (underage) are too young to understand what a university education is all about...that account for some of the problems we are seeing in the university." JAMB registrar decried this issue when he noted that between 2017 to 2020, over one million students were illegally admitted into various universities before this illicit development was detected by the body and the ministry of education subsequently intervened. He declared underage admission to the university irregular and illegal as it can damage Nigeria's education system (Adeegbe, 2024). One of the major counter arguments against underage university candidates in Nigeria came from a prominent lawyer, educationist, and university owner, Aare Afe Babalola, who published on his university website www.abuad.gn.com, a brief monograph. In the article titled "Admission of infant/underage geniuses into universities," Afe Babalola argued that universities in the country reserve the rights and statutory powers to admit infant geniuses. He cited the case of one bright Nigerian student, Ekene Franklin Ezeunala who scored 347/400 in the 2019 jamb and was denied admission to the university because the candidate was 15 years old at that time. Afe Babalola who is a professional lawyer and a respected statesman in the country revealed that there is no constitutional age limit provided by the Nigerian constitution for university applicants. Instead, the constitution empowers university senate to make academic rules regarding admissions into the university, including determining age requirements and other criteria. Pointing to the laws of the federation of Nigeria, 2004 8(1) which clearly states the senate as the one who regulate the age requirement of university applicants. Afe did cited many instances of exceptional underage candidates who earned BSc, masters and Phds at age 13, 14, 17 and 20 years old respectively. However, he did not emphasize on the applicants in Nigerian universities which is now becoming a common affair in the university system.

In an effort to provide a balanced view on the debate of underage admission to Nigerian universities, Oyewole Sarumi, a professor of leadership and enterprises, in an August 31, 2024 article titled "Age 18 for university admission in Nigeria: a panacea for children to mature," cited the comment by the minister of education professor Tahir Mamman on a life TV interview where the minister reiterated the fact that students seeking admission to the university must attain 18 years to ensure that the young applicants are academically and developed necessary cognitive comments before entering tertiary institutions. This position was taken, giving to the fact most underage candidates lack the cognitive, social, and emotional maturity needed to cope with the rigour of university life. Going by the Nigerian ministry of education policy, a child must be at least 6 years old to enrol in primary school and following the 6:3:3:4 model (now 9:3:4) the child should be at least 18 years when applying for admission into the university (Ikenwa, 2025; Zerofy Editorial, n.d. Aiden Scholars, 2023, Kareem, 2024, Nwachukwu 2024). Sarumi who favours the minister's stand on underage admission, outlined many benefits associated with maturity before enrolling in the university, which include: enhanced cognitive development, improved emotional stability, better social integration, fostering a culture of responsibility etc. It is argued that with a well emotionally and mentally developed at a good level, young university applicants would have been prepared to grasp complex concepts, engage in critical thinking, analytical thinking and contribute meaningfully to academic discourse, and build resilience against social challenges. Unlike Aare Afe Babalola whose brief article was only in support of underage university applicants, Sarumi clearly recognised the need for supporting gifted underage children in the university system, as he called for requisite efforts to integrate this class of students into the higher learning environment. The 2025 JAMB performance shows that, of the 40, 247 underage candidates (those below 15 years of age), only 467, which is 1.16% were classified under the exceptional ability category (Africa Eye News, 2025. though Professor Oloyede acknowledges exceptional underage students who are below 15 years, he gave them conditions for admission into the university. according to the jamb registrar, this class of candidates must score not less than 280/400 marks in UTME, plus having exceptional O'level results and perform above average in post-UTME (Oloyede, 2025). One thing fueling the underage admission debate is the fierce opposition to the government agency's 18-year benchmark by many quarters in the society. For example, in 2024 a lawyer by the name John Aikpokpo sued JAMB to court over the 18-year admission

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benchmark and won his suit (Musa, 2024). Parents across Nigeria are also protesting against the 18-year benchmark as they argue that children who successfully complete secondary school education on time should not be forced to stay home till, they are 18 years old (Sunday Trust, 2025; Editorial Board, 2024; Adeyemi, 2024). The employment policy which also pegged graduate entry level age to 25 years is another concern as many societal challenges do not make it feasible for most Nigerian graduate to complete their university programme before they turn 25. The realities about the situation is that underage admission is not going to stop as the society powered by technological advancement is rapidly evolving. People and organisations are beginning to embrace this development and are making efforts to balance the situation. Caleb University, Lagos-Nigeria, a leading private university in the country introduced the course Life Skills and Critical Thinking, CUL-MCM 101 in 2022. The course content were largely drawn from the UNESCO model of Life Skills and Critical Thinking, designed to empower young people between the ages of 13-19 with requisite social skills to cope with the changing society. The course was first taught by the mass communication facilitators to the 2023/2024 freshmen, and the 2024/2025 freshmen also take the course. This paper was conceived after the Positive Psychology Association of Nigeria, PoPAN called for its 2025 international conference themed “Thriving in a changing World: Harnessing Resilience and Connection.” Therefore, the thesis of this paper was centered on how the mass communication 2024/2025 freshmen class building resilience in the university environment after taking the course. The three objectives drawn below provide the background for the survey questions generated in the research instrument- questionnaire.

OBJECTIVES

1. How has the course, Life Skills and Critical Thinking CUL-MCM 101, helped students to cope with their new campus life?
2. Is the course, Life Skills and Critical Thinking CUL-MCM 101, helpful in anyway?
3. What are the relevant human relations skills learn from the course Life Skills and Critical Thinking-MCM101,

LITERATURE REVIEW

Human society is getting more complex by the day, as variables like higher education and technological innovations are making life not only better but also faster in how people do things. Life in advanced society is operating almost on 24 hours basis and there is increasing pressure on people to meet up with responsibilities, duties, etc. While the age considered to be adult was once about 18 and 21, in contemporary society, the age bracket is now between 16-18 and teenagers are becoming more exposed to the complexities of urban life through mass media and the internet (Quadri, 2024: Teen Life, 2024; Ennis, 2024; Fedotoff, 2023: UNESCO, 2020). In this fast-paced world, the twenty first century people are expected to be intellectually ready to navigate the growing sophisticated society powered by technology and communication advancement. Why adults are usually considered to be mentally and emotionally prepared for a fast-paced evolving world, teenagers are mostly found to be struggling with the fast-changing society, as they face the task of thinking with clarity and purpose. thus, it is safe to conclude that critical thinking skills are not only important but are becoming a necessity for people of this age. An essential set of skills that have become indispensable, especially for young people (Meras, 2024: Coursera, 2015). critical thinking skills become essential to people as they must make informed and rational decision in the constantly fast changing social environment. from preparing for a career path, deciding course of study, choosing institution of interest, selecting life partner, to acquiring property and so on, people are required to think ‘smart’ and aright, to achieve the best results. It is required now than ever before for people to enhance personal development by having open-mindedness, intellectual engagement and reflection on the tons of daily information received (Pradeepa, 2024). With the loads of information options and institutions available, people need a developed thought process to evaluate the information/message beyond surface level to determine the validity and usefulness of the options (Jigsaw, 2024; The Manhattan School, 2023). as the need for these skills become inevitable, several groups have attempted to conceptualised these skills. While there are now several definitions of critical thinking, most of them have certain terminologies in common. for example, Cousera (2025) defines critical thinking as the ability to interpret, evaluate, and analyse facts and information that are available, to form a judgement or decide if something is right or wrong. According to the University of the Potomac (2025) critical thinking is the process of analysing, assessing and synthesising data to reach logical conclusions. Simplitrain (2025) defines critical thinking as the ability to actively analyse, interpret, and evaluate information to make sound judgement and solve complex problems. All the definitions above and many others not mentioned here, all point to the fact that people need to hone their ability to think smart and better in any given situation. The concept is about new approach to decision making by thoughtfully analysing, evaluating, interpreting and making inferences on any issue. It is believed that when people consider a situation from different angles and evaluate its potential impact, they stand a good chance of making a good decision/choice. To utilise these human developmental skills people are encouraged to practice open-mindedness that is, exploring and always attempting to identify biases as personal prejudices and preferences often colour their perception of the situation. It is advised that people view issues objectively and not take sides by considering all stakes involved in the situation. This include providing inconsistent narrative in the situation. People are charged to improve their critical thinking skills by constantly seeking more information, practicing active listening, asking necessary questions, reflect on situations and engage in intellectual discussions (Martins, 2024; Sharma, 2025). these skills are very essential for the contemporary youths who are exposed to societal

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dynamics at a very early age. With the new age bracket recognised as youth ranging between 15-24, there are more responsibilities, threats and opportunities the youths to navigate through (Humanityuap, n.d.). The concept of youth may have stir argument among sociologists, Munir (2015) points to two main factors to consider whenever people want to define the concept of youth: biological and social dimensions. In the first instance, youth is a person who is no longer regarded as a child but is not accorded the full honour of an adult. by these criteria, a youth may fall in any age within, or outside the above-mentioned age bracket, 15-24. again, there is the seized dimension which considers the physical development of an individual, especially from the period of puberty to the adult age. Consequently, a youth, considering both sociological dimensions, is anyone within the age of 15 to 24. by implication, youths age still vulnerable as they are still physically, emotionally and psychologically developing. Being at the university at this age bracket means releasing youths in another world outside their homes they grow and they are charged to learn professional skills with mostly strangers outside their comfort zone (Smart tech, 2024; Candice & Michaeline, 2020). Concerned group and governments recognised this situation and are making conscious effort to teach youths scientifically proven life skills like development (Munir, 2015). life skills, as explained by Dudhede (2016), are set of knowledge, skills, work habits, and character traits that are believed to be critically important/necessary for people to succeed in contemporary world. They include critical thinking, self-awareness, problem solving, empathy, interpersonal relationship, decision making etc. They are broadly classified into three categories namely: social skills (self-awareness, empathy, interpersonal relationship, effective communication), thinking skills (decision making, problem solving critical thinking) and coping skills (coping with stress, coping with emotions). The United Nations also identified and developed basic life skills to help people live better and productive life. These life skills code developed by the WHO include problem solving, self-awareness, coping with stress, critical thinking, empathy, effective communication, coping with emotions, decision making, coping with stress, and effective communication (Davis, 2019). The United Nations Organisation has not only prepare the life skills, but has also inculcated them into school students through new curriculum, cutting across every level of formal learning. While there are life skills education taught at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels (WHO, 1996; Roy, 2014). The scope of this study lies on university (tertiary level) and looks into the life skills education on the impact on college students. There are different life skills prescribed for students in primary/basic, secondary and tertiary institution by various individuals and groups. For example, Rebekah (2025) outlined 28 life skills for students in tertiary institutions. Her codes include the life skills developed by WHO, with additional skills like time management, financial skill, timely health check, keeping documents, online safety, understanding risks of drugs and alcohol use, home keeping/home chores, self-advocacy, social etiquette and others. This knowledge is still relatively new in the higher education in Nigeria and only few universities have incorporated programme in their curriculum for their freshmen. While there is dearth of study in this emerging curriculum in the country, there is urgent need to understudy the situation. Young people tagged 'youths' in this present age are very young individuals who need guidance as they join the university world at early age of 15. It is therefore important to examine their new environment and inquire how they are coping with the new skills they acquire through the life skills course. Studies have revealed how contemporary university students are finding it difficult to adjust/adapt to the new found campus life. A 2017 study by van Breda published in the South African Journal of Higher Education shows how many university freshmen in the country find their new academic environment is complicated with many challenges ranging from poverty and emotional issues, caused by the shock of losing family members. The study reveal that some of the students sustained the negative impact of these challenges to their sophomore and even third year on campus. Similarly, a 2023 study by Mulaudzi, shows how first year university students struggle to cope with financial management and mental issues like homesick and depression. According to the study findings, the transition into the university environment where the young adults experience larger class size, freedom from parental watch, rigorous academic expectations and peer pressure, usually pose significant challenges for them. Garcia-Navarro, Garcia-Navarro, Araugo-Hernandez, Ortega-Galan and Caceras-Titos (2024) in their study on nursing students, reveal that many freshmen who are overwhelmed by these campus problems/demands, often complicated their problem by seeking temporary relief that further exacerbate their long-term struggles. They added that lack of meaningful relationship in the academic environment increase their suffering. Olsen (2025) identified social adjustments as another challenges of fresh university students. adding inadequate sleep, physical health and campus expenses as contributing factors to students anxieties and other mental issues. A BBC report documented by McFadden in July 2025, reveals disturbing complexities in teenage university mental issues in the UK. According to the report many teenagers in British universities suffer mental issues since 2016. the crisis peaked in 2022-2023 when HESA (Higher Education Statistics Agency) reports stated that the number of mental health condition among students in the UK almost quadrupled in 2023-2024, with many of the sufferers committing suicide. Most adolescents notably undergraduates and women constitute 122, 430 (out of 2.9 million) students in the UK said they had mental condition. These reports have recommended practical solutions contained in the WHO life skills curriculum i.e. financial skill, financial aid, time management, active listening, stress management programmes etc (Olsen, 2025; McFadden, 2025; The Safeguarding Alliance, 2024)

EMPIRICAL REVIEW

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In a study by Aduale published in 2022 titled 'Challenges of undergraduate students in Nigerian universities,' to examine the common problems faced on campus, especially in the 2018/2019 academic session in the university of Benin. Using a multistage random sampling technique, four hundred respondents were selected from the faculty of education. It was gathered that female students, more than their male counterparts, usually sought for help from the office of the dean over academic, emotional and institutional related challenges of undergraduate students. It was observed that most designated offices for the purpose of providing support for students were not adequately staffed for handling some of the challenges the students sought help. The study recommends that the university management conducts periodic seminars and workshops to enlighten and educate students on the right office to seek assistance/help, on how to manage and cope with various school challenges they face. Ibrahim, Ndubueze and Amali (2024) carried out a study titled 'Cyberbullying implications among teenage undergraduates in a Nigerian public university. The study focused on teenage undergraduates at the University of Maiduguri in the 2021/2022 session. Using a multistage sampling method, three hundred and seventy-five undergraduates between the age of 16-19 were selected in a survey while 6 were randomly selected to participate in key informant survey.interview. Findings revealed that the pattern of cyberbullying mostly experienced by teenagers at the university is online harassment whereby the leak personal and humiliating information about the victims. Which usually cause the victim emotional distress, anxiety, depression and low self-esteem. Consequently, cyberbullying affected the academic performance of students and some of them who are largely teenager's carryover courses they were disoriented to concentrate on their exams. The study recommends that the university should develop cybercrime specific rules to be included in orientation materials for students in the school. A group of researchers Kukoyi, Orok, Oluwafemi, Oluwadare, Oni, Bamitale, Jaiyesimi, Ojo and Eze in 2022, conducted a study titled 'Factors affecting the utilisation of mental health services among undergraduates in a Nigerian university,' to assess the factors affecting the utilisation of students' mental health services. They did a cross-sectional survey among students of Afe Babalola University where a semi-structured questionnaire was used for collection of data. Four hundred and fifty students participated in the survey and results show that 87.5% showed good attitude, 67.8% health seeking behaviour, while 69.4% poor social support towards mental health services. Key findings revealed that the only those students above 20 years appreciate God utilisation of mental health services. The study called for an intervention to consider variables like age, gender, sources of information to boost student's utilisation of mental health services. In another another study, Benedict (2022) explored the topic 'Undergraduates' use of adolescent substance in Nigerian universities,' where he surveyed nine hundred and thirty Nigerian freshmen across select Nigerian universities. He served five hundred male freshmen and four hundred and thirty female freshmen questionnaire at the university of Abuja, Nasarawa State University, and Kaduna State University, using the Substance Abuse Effects and Consequences Awareness Questionnaire (SAECAQ). the study sought to ascertain how the use of substance affects their physical, psychological and academic performances. Findings reveal that there is difference in the academic performance of teenage undergraduate drug users and adolescent undergraduate non-users. Non-users performed better than drug users in academic as health of substance abusers usually deteriorate and impede learning while some struggle to cope and others drop out of school. The study recommends sensitisation campaign against drug abuse on campus. In a similar study, Ajayi, Owolabi and Olajire (2019) published a study titled 'Alcohol use among Nigerian university students: prevalence, correlates and frequency of use.' they set out to determine the prevalence, correlate and frequency of alcohol use among young Nigerian undergraduates. Two Nigerian universities in north central were selected and 784 students filled the questionnaire after the researchers used a stratified random sampling technique. The time for the study was between February and April 2018 as the student alcohol use was observed during this time. Findings revealed that (i) more than one third of the undergraduates use alcohol and they consume it at least once in three days, and sometimes in ten days interval; (ii) male undergraduates who are 19 years above consume alcohol more than female undergraduates (iii) most of the undergraduates who consume alcohol usually avoid religious activities and are mostly from rich and middle-class families (iv) young adults who live with their fathers are not prone to alcohol uses. The study calls for a deliberate media sensitisation and strict measures against liquor companies.

THEORETICAL UNDERPINNING: NORMAN GARMEZY THEORY OF RESILIENCE

In 1991 Norman Garmezy posited that resilience is designed to reflect the capacity for recovery and maintained adaptive behaviour that follow initial retreat or incapacity upon initiating a stressful event (Shean, 2015). Adding that young people need to show 'functional adequacies' as a benchmark of resilient behaviour under stress. Moore (2019) explains that the thrust of resilience theory posits that it is not the nature of adversity that is most important, but how people deal with it. Further explained that genetic factors do have an important influence on people's response to trauma and stress. Garmezy experiment reveals that children with families that had high cohesion and stability were more intelligent, more competent, and less likely to become disruptive under high levels of stress. Conversely, children with low family cohesion and stability were less intelligent, less competent and more likely to be exposed to high levels of stress. Norman Garmezy became famous or was credited as the leading scholar who pioneered research on the study of children at risk for psychopathology and developmental problems- the study of resilience and developmental sciences (Masten & Cicchetti, 2012). Zimmerman (2014) avers that resilience theory provides the background for scholars to understand how some vulnerable adolescents overcome a difficult environment. He explains that resilience direct attention on positive

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contextual, social, and individual variables that disrupt developmental growth from risk to problem behaviours. Zimmerman further explained that these positive contextual, social, and individual variables are called positive factors and they help youth overcome negative effects of risk exposure. The theory takes cognizance of the facts and realities of human existence, especially at this early stage of life where young people experience happy and miserable moments. Though humans at various stages face many life challenges; the challenges faced by adolescents could easily break them because they are vulnerable with little or no experience, skills, training, qualifications to cope with the various difficulties they face (The Happiness Coach, n.d.). Norman Garmezy acknowledges the fact that people deal with life adversities differently as some would thrive while others would resort to grieving under same situation. Southwick et al (2014) noted that people could be more resilient at one point in their lives and less during another, and that they may be more resilient in some aspects/area of their lives than others. While analysing Garmezy's theory of resilience, Southwick and Charney (2012), added that resilience is the main thing that sustains people in the face of adversities. Shean (2015) noted that this realisation spurred further studies into the concept of resilience, as it is critical for mental health and positive development of young people in the face of risk. It is believe that the positive shift in the mental health affects not only their current functioning but also have a broader implication on the society at large (Luthar, Cicchetti & Becker, 2000).

METHODOLOGY

Considering the nature of this study survey naturally fit as the most suitable means of gathering data from the students who had taken the course CUL-MCM 101 Life Skills and Critical Thinking. Survey helps us to provide a critical source of data and insight for the freshmen in the department. This method enables us prepare essential questions that are clearer, concise and unbiased to elicit answers to the objectives of this study (Bhat, 2023; Qualtrics, n.d.). Considering the present age where most activities are done online, self-administered computer survey was conducted and questionnaire employed as the tool to collate the needed information. The sample frame of this study were the entire 100 level mass communication students in the 2024/2025 academic session who had completed the course in their first semester, August -December 2024. The students totaling two hundred and ninety, were all encouraged to fill the online questionnaire prepared on google forms. Using a free version, a multiple choice 19-item questionnaire was sent through digitally generated link to the freshmen. The link was shared on their class WhatsApp platform and the result was automatically collated on the google form page in pie chart. The frequencies and percentages were copied on a set of simple frequency tables, after three days window where students were encouraged to fill the online form. (Salvatori, 2023; Mahmutovic, 2021)

DATA PRESENTATION

The following tables represents the responses of the CUL freshmen who took the course CUL-MCM 101, Life Skills and Critical Thinking, and participated in the survey on resilience.

Table 1: Age Bracket

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
16-20	184	92.5%
21-25	15	7.5%
26-30	0	%
Above 30 years	0	%
Total	199	100%

Source: online survey 2025. The data presenter above shows the young age of the students. This freshman class is dominated mostly by teenagers who are most likely to be vulnerable due to their inadequate life experience and their natural state of naivety.

Table 2: Gender

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Males	54	27.3%
Females	144	72.5%
Total	198	100%

Source: online survey 2025. Data shows how there are more female students than their male counterparts in class.

Table 3: Religious Affiliation

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Christianity	177	88.9%
Islam	22	11.1%
Traditional belief	0	%
Others	0	%

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Total **199** **100%**

Source: online survey 2025. Majority of the students in that class align with the christian faith.

Table 4: If life on campus wasn't what they thought before coming to the university

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly agree	80	40%
Agree	80	40%
Neutral	30	15%
Disagree	8	4%
Strongly disagree	2	1%
0	0	0
Total	200	100%

Source: online survey 2025. About 80 percent of the students (SA+A) attest that campus life wasn't exactly like they had hoped before joining the programme.

Table 5: If Life on campus was more difficult than they thought

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly agree	60	30.2%
Agree	72	36.2%
Neutral	49	24.6%
Disagree	18	9%
Strongly disagree		%
0	0	0
Total	199	100%

Source: online survey 2025. Over 56 percent of the freshmen (SA+A) agreed that life on campus is difficult than they had thought. While about of them remain neutral, a mere 9 percent disagree with this statement.

Table 6: Did it take them a while to adjust to the realities of campus life

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly agree	53	26.6%
Agree	89	44.7%
Neutral	39	19.6%
Disagree	18	9%
Strongly disagree	0	%
0	0	0
Total	199	100%

Source: online survey 2025. A fair number of the freshmen took a while to adjust to the realities of campus life, as 70% (SA+A) agreed to this while only 9% differ on the question. This justifies the impetus for the UN and other concerned groups to prepare courses for freshmen on campuses.

Table 7: If the course, Life Skills and Critical Thinking, MCM 101, is just the kind of lessons they needed most when they first arrived campus

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly agree	59	29.5%
Agree	97	48.5%
Neutral	40	20%
Disagree	4	2%
Strongly disagree	0	%
0	0	0
Total	200	100%

Source: online survey 2025. A fair number of the respondents 77% (SA+A) agreed that the course Life Skills and Critical Thinking, MCM 101 they offered in their first semester was just the kind of lessons they needed most as they arrived the university campus. This appears to a justification of the pragmatic approach by the Caleb University management.

Table 8: Whether while taking the course Life Skills and Critical Thinking-MCM101, they began to evaluate their activities and set personal priorities right on campus

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Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly agree	43	21.5%
Agree	112	56%
Neutral	41	20.5%
Disagree	3	1.5%
Strongly disagree	1	0.5%
0	0	0
Total	200	100%

Source: online survey 2025. About 77% (SA+A) of the respondents agreed that they began evaluating their personal activities and priorities on campus while they began taking the course Life Skills and Critical Thinking, MCM 101. This is another indicator that the introduction of this course to freshmen is round peg in a round hole.

Table 9: If they had not taken the course Life Skills and Critical Thinking-MCM101 at that stage they probably would still be taking many wrong steps

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly agree	19	9.5%
Agree	69	34.5%
Neutral	61	30.5%
Disagree	43	21.5%
Strongly disagree	8	4%
0	0	0
Total	200	100%

Source: online survey 2025. About 24% (SA+A) of the respondents agreed they would probably be making wrong choices if they had not taken the course Life Skills and Critical Thinking-MCM 101, while 25% differ on this.

Table 10: Whether taking the course Life Skills and Critical Thinking-MCM101, have impacted their early life on campus positively and they are happy they took the course

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly agree	36	18.1%
Agree	116	58.3%
Neutral	43	21.6%
Disagree	2	1%
Strongly disagree	2	1%
0	0	0
Total	199	100%

Source: online survey 2025. When asked, about 76% (SA+A) of the freshmen respondents agreed that the course Life Skills and Critical Thinking-MCM 101 have positive impact on their early life on campus, they are also happy about the course.

Table 11: If since they began taking the course Life Skills and Critical Thinking-MCM 101, relationship with their colleagues has improved

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly agree	19	9.5%
Agree	90	45%
Neutral	78	39%
Disagree	9	4.5%
Strongly disagree	4	2%
0	0	0
Total	200	100%

Source: online survey 2025. Over 56% (SA+A) of the respondents agreed that the course Life Skills and Critical Thinking-MCM101 enabled them have improved relationship with their colleagues.

Table 12: If since they began taking the course Life Skills and Critical Thinking-MCM 101 relationship with their lecturers has improved

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly agree	14	7%
Agree	83	41.5%
Neutral	89	44.5%
Disagree	16	8%

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Strongly disagree	4	2%
0	0	0
Total	200	100%

Source: online survey 2025. About 49% (SA+A) of the respondents agreed that their relationship with lecturers improved after they began taking the course Life Skills and Critical Thinking-MCM 101.

Table 13: if since they began taking the course Life Skills and Critical Thinking-MCM 101 relationship with their parents has improved

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly agree	28	14.1%
Agree	95	48%
Neutral	62	31.3%
Disagree	10	5.1%
Strongly disagree	3	1.5%
0	0	0
Total	198	100%

Source: online survey 2025. About 62% (SA+A) agreed that there has been improved relationship with their parents since they began taking the course Life Skills and Critical Thinking-MCM 101. only a small percentage 6.6% (D+SD) disagreed with the statement.

Table 14: Since taking the course Life Skills and Critical Thinking-MCM101, would they say their thinking faculty and way of rationalising issues have improved

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly agree	30	15%
Agree	113	56.5%
Neutral	53	26.5%
Disagree	3	1.5%
Strongly disagree	1	0.5%
0	0	0
Total	200	100%

Source: online survey 2025. About 71% (SA+A) of the freshmen respondents agreed that their thinking and way of rationalising issues have improved, only 2% (D+SD) disagreed with the statement.

Table 15: whether the lessons from Life Skills and Critical Thinking-MCM 101 are helping them cope with the stress of academic environment

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly agree	22	11.1%
Agree	115	57.8%
Neutral	48	24.1%
Disagree	10	5%
Strongly disagree	4	2%
0	0	0
Total	199	100%

Source: online survey 2025. About 68% (SA+A) of the freshmen respondents agreed that the course Life Skills and Critical Thinking-MCM 101 is helping them to cope with the stress of academic environment. Only 7% differ on this statement.

Table 16: After taking the course Life Skills and Critical Thinking-MCM101, can they say that they are prepared to face any situation

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly agree	17	8.5%
Agree	111	55.5%
Neutral	61	30.5%
Disagree	10	5%
Strongly disagree	1	0.5%
0	0	0
Total	200	100%

Source: online survey 2025. About 64% (SA+A) agreed that the course Life Skills and Critical Thinking- MCM 101 prepared them to face any situation, as 5% differ on this statement.

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Table 17: After taking the course Life Skills and Critical Thinking-MCM 101, have they developed any basic skills as given by the United Nations?

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Listening skill	29	14.5%
Empathy	9	4.5%
Goal-setting	17	8.5%
Stress managemnet	13	6.5%
Emotional regulation	4	2%
Managing relationship	7	3.5%
Decision making	27	13.5%
Resilience	5	2.5%
More than 2 of the skills	89	44.5%
0	200	100%
Total	0	100%

Source: online survey 2025. About 45% of the freshmen respondents agreed that by taking the course Life Skills and Critical Thinking-MCM 101 they have acquired at least 2 of the essential skills given by the United Nations.

Table 18: After undergoing the course Life Skills and Critical Thinking-MCM 101, have they find one of these critical thinking skills very helpful

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Identification of biases	13	6.5%
Research	12	6%
Open mindeness	60	30%
Analysis	14	7%
Problem solving	40	20%
At least two of the skills	61	30.5%
Total	200	100%

Source: online survey 2025. Over 30% of the freshmen respondents agreed that they have found at least 2 of these critical thinking skills (identification of biases, research, open mindedness, analysis, problem solving) very helpful. About 30% said that they found open mindedness very helpful, while 20% said they found problem skills very helpful.

Table 19: Whether after taking the course they found these tips on improving critical thinking very helpful; asking questions, practice active listening and develop logical reasoning

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly agree	54	27%
Agree	113	56.5%
Neutral	30	15%
Disagree	2	10%
Strongly disagree	1	0.5%
0	0	0
Total	200	100%

Source: online survey 2025. Over 80% (SA+A) agreed that found the tips on improving critical thinking: asking questions, practice active listening and developing reasoning, very helpful.

ANSWERING RESEARCH QUESTION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

1. How has the course, Life Skills and Critical Thinking CUL-MCM 101, helped students to cope with their new campus life?

This critical question was subjected to public opinion among first time undergraduates at the department of mass communication, Caleb University and results show the respondents' views. In table 4, about 80 percent of the students (SA+A) attest that campus life wasn't exactly like they had hoped before joining the programme. This confirms many articles reviewed that freshmen are usually met with culture shock on campus and struggle to cope in their new environment (Olsen, 2025; Mulaudzi, 2023). Just like Olsen (2025) and Van Breda (2017) had stated in their articles, adolescent undergraduates often found campus life strenuous than they had expected. Table 5 affirms this subject matter as over 56 percent of the freshmen (SA+A) agreed that life on campus is difficult than they had thought. While about of them remain neutral, a mere 9 percent disagree with this statement. However, response from the Caleb University students who have undergone the life skills and critical thinking programme, reveals that the course had helped them face the strenuous university environment. Table 15 data reads 'About 68% (SA+A) of the freshmen respondents agreed that

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the course Life Skills and Critical Thinking-MCM 101 is helping them to cope with the stress of academic environment. Only 7% differ on this statement.' also, as seen in table 8, about 77% (SA+A) of the respondents agreed that they began evaluating their personal activities and priorities on campus while they began taking the course Life Skills and Critical Thinking, MCM 101. This is another indicator that the introduction of this course to freshmen is a round peg in a round hole. Interestingly, data in tables 11, 12 and 13 reveal how their relationship with colleagues (56%), lecturers (49%) and parents (62%) have relatively improved ever since they began taking the course Life Skills and Critical Thinking, MCM 101.

2. Is the course, Life Skills and Critical Thinking CUL-MCM 101, helpful in anyway?

This question was included in the survey and the respondents answered as they understood it. As seen in table 14, data shows that about 71% (SA+A) of the freshmen respondents agreed that their thinking and way of rationalising issues have improved, only 2% (D+SD) disagreed with the statement. This brings hope to concerned body and shows that more effort would further empower university freshmen to cope with the campus life and make headway. As noted among the nursing students' study in Europe conducted by Garcia-Navarro et al (2024), would not seek alternative relief from their campus life in the wrong direction but faced the situation with a well-informed lesson provided by the university management. In this study, respondents agreed that the course is what they need on their first time on campus. Table 7 reads 'A fair number of the respondents 77% (SA+A) agreed that the course Life Skills and Critical Thinking, MCM 101 they offered in their first semester was just the kind of lessons they needed most as they arrived the university campus. This appears to be a justification of the pragmatic approach by the Caleb University management.' From their response, the course was prepared at the perfect time for them. When asked, about 76% (SA+A) of the freshmen respondents agreed that the course Life Skills and Critical Thinking-MCM 101 have positive impact on their early life on campus, they are also happy about the course. As seen in table 16, about 64% (SA+A) agreed that the course Life Skills and Critical Thinking- MCM 101 prepared them to face any situation, as 5% differ on this statement. This affirms the prediction and support Mulaudzi (2023), stated as aid for younger adolescent undergraduates.

3. What are the relevant human relations skills learn from the course Life Skills and Critical Thinking-MCM101, Conclusion

Respondents reveal that taking the course Life Skills and Critical Thinking has made them improve some of the life skills recommended by the United Nations. Nearly 45% of the freshmen respondents agreed that by taking the course Life Skills and Critical Thinking-MCM 101 they have acquired at least 2 of the essential skills given by the United Nations (table 17). Over 30% of the freshmen respondents agreed that they have found at least 2 of these critical thinking skills (identification of biases, research, open mindedness, analysis, problem solving) very helpful. About 30% said that they found open mindedness very helpful, while 20% said they found problem skills very helpful (table 18). Dudhade (2016) and McFadden (2025) had strongly recommended that these life skills should be taught among freshmen on campus to better prepare them for the tumultuous campus life they are going to put up with, and the response from this current study has proven the recommendations helpful.

CONCLUSION

This study was launched to examine the situation of first-time students on university students, regarding their mental state in the face of new challenges they face. Studies have show that life on campus can be very challenging for freshmen on campus and their search for alternative coping mechanism have led some into disastrous paths (van Breda, 2017; Olsen, 2025; Garcia-NNavarro et al, 2024). scholars like Norman Garnezy had propounded the theory of resilience to help people build inner strength during challenging times. In view of this proposition, Moore (2019) explains that the thrust of resilience theory posits that it is not the nature of adversity that is most important, but how people deal with it. Southwick and Charney (2012), added that resilience is the main thing that sustains people in the face of adversities. International agency like the World Health Organisation (WHO), and some governments have not only recognised the impact of the social challenges young people are facing on campus but have also made efforts to check this growing situation. WHO developed and promote the life skills and critical thinking programme across the world. However, not many institutions are teaching these life skills to their students in spite the fact that young undergraduates, especially freshmen, are increasingly facing many mental health challenges due to the tumultuous campus life (Garcia-Navarro et al, 2024; Olsen, 2025; McFadden, 2025; Rebekah, 2025; Roy 2014; Fedotoff, 2023). this study therefore launched an enquiry into freshmen students of Caleb University who among the few Nigerian universities to include the life skills programme into its curriculum for freshmen. The result shows positive impact the programme has on the students who undergo the Life Skills and Critical Thinking, CUL-MCM 101

RECOMMENDATIONS

Having examined some related documents of this topic, reviewed empirical works and conducted a survey, the following recommendations become necessary to make:

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1. More empirical studies by local Nigerian scholars must be intensified on the problem of young peoples' mental conditions on campus.
2. Collaborative students with clinical scientists, school councilors and lecturers should be encouraged and tailored toward the peculiar issues of Nigerian underage university campus students and their mental wellbeing.
3. The Nigerian government, through its ministry of education should develop a curriculum for life skills, prescribing life skills for all levels of schools. The higher institution's curriculum for life skills and critical thinking should be made a compulsory orientation programme for freshmen on campus.
4. Universities across the country must make effort to teach their first-time students the importance of developing life skills and critical thinking. This should be carried out as part of an extensive empowerment scheme for new students.
5. Also, the counselling units of universities across the country should include life skills and critical thinking on their list of programmes targeted at students referred to them for any psychoanalytical support.

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