

Students' Emotional and Behavioural Adjustments as Factors Influencing Academic Success

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Abstract

The present study takes into consideration several important aspects connected to students' emotional and behavioral adjustment during the transition period from high school to university. Students' adjustment is part of the explanation concerning students' performance in their academic path, the decision of dropping out of university and success in their future professional life. Our study investigates students' capacity to adapt to new systems and standards as imposed by academic life. As observed by numerous researchers, adjustments to academic life involve a number of modifications on several plans, which allow students to meet the new requirements they are confronted with in order to effectively participate to courses and activities. These are varied and complex and comprise several levels of their life. Our attention is particularly focused on identifying and observing those tightly connected to their emotional and behavioral adjustments which can be improved by the academic systems.

Key words: students' adjustment, emotional, behavioral, intellectual, academic success

J.E.L. classification: Z13

1. Introduction

First-year students are exposed to a multitude of changes, challenges and even transformations that go beyond the academic environment or standard academic structure, involving greater individual autonomy and determination. The concern of the universities about the way in which their students manage to accommodate and cope with these “obstacles”, is reflected in the number of studies carried out, the orientation programs initiated and the counselling centers addressed to them. Individual adjustment is concerned with the capacity of a person to adapt to the surrounding environment. Our adaptive characteristic is present all along our dimensions (intellectual, emotional, social, vocational etc.) and it regulates the inner processes through which we cope with the challenges we encounter.

Education plays an important role in young people's individual development and psycho-social environment, as well as in their future studies and career opportunities. The subjects of our present study are young adults, with ages ranging approximately from 18 through 23. For them this period of their life is extremely exigent because of the transition, continuous change and exploration possibilities which open in front of them. This period is often associated with mental health difficulties derived from stress, anxiety, the feeling of loneliness etc., difficulties which in time can lead to drop out, affecting mainly the first two year of university students. For universities it is important to spot and understand these issues and be able to develop internal mechanisms in order to trigger a positive adjustment among young students. It is well known that stress is omnipresent in academic life, whether determined by a tight deadline pressure, or by the inability to accomplish the intellectual tasks imposed by the academic system. Reaching the right amount of stress in order to better focus on required tasks and not transforming this stress into a chronic condition or surpassing the right amount is a necessary condition in order to succeed.

2. Literature review

Initially seen as a unique variable, academic adjustment is analyzed as a multifaceted concept on the basis of four indices: “academic achievement” (comprising the motivation for learning and the ability to earn satisfactory grades), “social adjustment” (centered around the ability to establish social networks), “personal emotional adjustment” (psychological and physical conditions) and “institutional adjustment” -reflecting students’ relationships with the academic environment (Baker & Siryk, 1989). The challenges faced especially by first-year students are grouped by other authors around : the capacity to “navigate a new social environment” , the possibility to acquire an institutional “orientation”, the ability to “become productive members” of the community, being able to adapt to new responsibilities, managing to overcome the separation from friends and family members and being actively involved in making personal career decisions (Credé, M. & Niehorster S., 2012).

Under the comprehensive umbrella of: flexibility, transition and change, Hazard, L., and Carter, S, 2018, group first-year university students experience in six areas: *academic adjustment* (in which self-regulatory behaviors such as workload and time management skills are exercised, establishing relationships with professors etc); *cultural adjustment* (being confronted with a diverse student environment, language differences (Wu, H. P., Garza, E., & Guzman, N, 2015, p. 2), or to different belief systems; *emotional adjustment* brings challenges associated to stress management and the development of various strategies useful in handling mental health issues, emotional aspects of student’s lives re-shaped by educational systems, as teaching and feeling function as a whole (Mărunțelu C. L. and Gălbează A., 2020). Any educational mission is an act of generosity which starts from limited resources, aiming at limitless innovative and creative gestures which can in time impact entire communities, a lack of adequate human capital negatively impacts economic growth (Moise–Titei A., 2016).

In the 2021 Healthy Minds Study, depression is indicated as a major condition affecting U.S. College Students (41%), 22% being screened positive for major depression. While other factors, such as loss of motivation, life change or financial difficulties may be indicated as possible reasons for dropout, more recently the number of students indicating mental health issues as a determining factor, is on the increase. *Financial adjustment*, involves developing financial skills, managing personal budget, tuition costs and even finding a part-time job. *Intellectual adjustment* triggering shifts in personal values and taking calculated risks. *Social adjustments* bringing dynamic changes in relationships, handling peer pressure and learning to live with a roommate (Hazard, L., & Carter, S, 2018).

3. Research methodology

The survey consisted of a specially designed Microsoft Forms Questionnaire. 55 students (aged between 19 and 23 years old) participated to the survey. The respondents are students enrolled in the academic year 2022-2023- at the Faculty of Economic Sciences, “Ovidius” University of Constanta, in their first year of study.

The survey consisted of both open and closed answer questions. In case they didn’t feel comfortable with a question, students were allowed to skip it. The questions investigated students’ emotional, behavioral, social and intellectual adjustment to academic life. All the answers were anonymous.

4. Findings

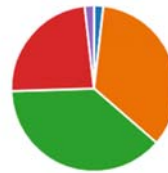
The first question investigated students’ opinions about the set of acquisitions they received during the high school years and their previous work experience (if applicable) that would enable them to bridge the gap between the pre-academic and academic system with confidence, 35% of the respondents opted for “Confident”, 38% for “Somewhat confident”, 24% for “Unconfident”, 2% chose each of the extreme options ranging from “Extremely confident” to “Extremely not confident”.

Table no 1- questions 1, statistical results

1. How confident are you that your high school and/or work experience have prepared you academically for college?

[Mai multe detalii](#)

Extremely confident	1
Confident	19
Somewhat confident	21
Unconfident	13
Extremely not confident	1



Source: Question and chart processed by the author

The second question of our survey aimed to investigate if students, in case they are confronted with a college related experience, which surpasses their initial possibilities seek for help or specialised help in the campus. The options suggested where: “I will likely persist and persevere until I figure it out”, (chosen by 63% of the respondents), “I will likely try to solve the problem, but if it is really difficult I will simply move on to something else” (18%), 10% opted for advice from family members or friends. Whereas 5% of the respondents decided that in this case seeking for help from resources located in campus and dedicated to them would be a suitable option.

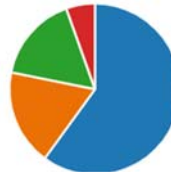
Table no 2- questions 2, statistical results

2.

When you experience a college-related challenge and are not really sure how to solve it, what best describes the action you're likely to take?

[Mai multe detalii](#)

I will likely persist and persevere...	33
I will likely try to solve the probl...	10
I will likely ask my parents or fri...	9
I will likely seek help from resou...	3



Source: Question and chart processed by the author

Considering the fact that academic life is dominated by numerous changes and transformations for which most students declared to be insufficiently prepared, (despite the exam prep programs and the Open Gates Days, initiated by the universities), we asked students opinions about a longer “pre-exposure” period, in which students become more familiar with the target faculty, 95% of the respondents opted for a positive answer to this opportunity.

Students’ motivation plays an important role in guiding them along their academic path. Our aim was to investigate up to what extent this feature intensified or faded during this first semester in which they were confronted with university life. In order to better capture their thoughts, we opted for an open answer question. Out of the 49 answers we received, 8 were negative answers, most of the students confessed that they were reconsidering their initial choice and would like to attend other programmes they see as more suitable to their preferences. Two students opted for an ambiguous “I don't know”, while 39 students expressed with different levels of enthusiasm their motivation and determination to pursue their studies and graduate the chosen programme, from simple “Yes” to “Yes, it's just as strong as it was because I've always known that I want this and I'm not going to give it up” or “I'm very confident that I will graduate this faculty and my determination for this goal is very high”.

In order to obtain a clearer image of their concerns and sources of stress associated with their educational life, we grouped the most common worries expressed by students and asked the respondents to rank them in order of importance- the options available reflected the amount of work required in the courses, the lack of friends, the inability to handle all the obligations, making good grades necessary to continue studying, the concern of not belonging to this space. The last option comprised all previously mentioned ideas and the fact that many students ranked this last option as the most worrying indicates, in our opinion, the fact that many other various unspoken difficulties

are present in the educational and personal life of our students. In terms of quantity and variety of courses available to them, 58% of the respondents expressed their agreement, 11% strongly agreed, 27% were neutral and 4% were in disagreement with this idea.

Intellectual challenges are varied, especially for first-year students, considering the existence of the so-called *impostor syndrome*, in which students affected feel they don't belong to the academic environment, the respondents were asked to indicate to what extent they feel smart enough for the academic work they are expected to be doing. 33% disagreed and 11% strongly disagreed to this idea, 27% were neutral, whereas 24% agreed and 5% strongly agreed. When asked about feeling that they fit in well as part of the college environment, 40% expressed their neutrality, 45% agreed, 11% strongly agreed and 4% were in disagreement.

Table no. 3- questions 8, statistical results

8. I feel that I fit in well as part of the college environment.

Mai multe detalii

Strongly agree	6
Agree	25
Neutral	22
Disagree	2
Strongly disagree	0



Source: Question and chart processed by the author

In terms of emotional adjustment, our intention was to investigate the students' mood and in question nine, we asked students if they have been feeling tense or nervous lately. The answers indicated that a certain amount of tension accumulated already, despite the fact that the period of exams was still distant: 4% opted for “Never”, 25% for “Rarely”, 36% for “Sometimes”, 29% for “Often” and 5% for “Always”.

The testing of the intellectual adjustment in question 10- “I have been keeping up to date on my academic work” indicated that 69% of the respondents feel confident, while 31% still encounter difficulties in this respect. As for the social adjustment, we chose to investigate their capacity of making as many new friends as they would like and their satisfaction degree concerning meeting new people, 64% indicated a positive answer, 36% a negative one.

5. Conclusions

Developing a supporting network dedicated not only to dealing with academic issues, but also to help develop professional connexions beyond the educational environment. In this way, students will be more alert, will be given a sense of orientation and be better advised in terms of strategies to be adopted on the long term useful when dealing with the labour market.

The aim of achieving self-determination in terms of learning and personal development and being more easily adjusted through the assimilation of adequate behaviours in terms of proper communication, being and feeling deeply involved in the academic community and making full use of resources provided by the university.

In order to positively contribute and promote an advantageous partnership to benefit students, it is important to involve and at the same time find a bridge between academics and student affairs programmes. In this respect, reducing individual responsibilities and transforming them into an advocacy for student development, being aware that fully acknowledging the unicity of the university system in terms of its mission, importance, individual culture, student body features.

Institutional agents and academics share a common personal goal- to develop in a timely manner a welcoming atmosphere for newcomers that fosters student integration, adaptation and adjustment, guaranteeing their academic success.

Developing more dedicated monitoring and tutoring programmes, with more staff, to be included in the curricula, which explain the structure and the requirements in more detail. More time for common social events- to develop a sense of community, encourage students to do things by themselves, to stop worrying about making mistakes, not to ignore their health needs and encourage them to take up healthy stress reducing activities, teaching intellectual hygiene.

We consider that the present study can be extended and offer a transversal view on students’ adaptive mechanisms through correlation with a second questionnaire carried out at the end of the second semester of the first year of study, investigating the initial parameters under discussion, in this way the intervention of the academic systems and the help offered to students can be fine-tuned more efficiently and reach them in a timely manner.

6. References

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