



Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development

**INVESTIGATION INTO FIRST YEAR STUDENTS' ADJUSTMENT
TO UNIVERSITY AT THE FACULTY OF COGNITIVE
SCIENCES AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT**

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**Bachelor of Science with Honours
(Cognitive Science)
2017**

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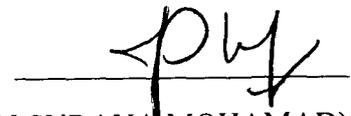
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ABSTRACT

Fifty seven percent of dropouts from Malaysian Universities are dissatisfied with their university life since their first year. This study aims at finding out first year students' adjustment to university, specifically those enrolled full time at the Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development (FCSHD). The objective of this study is to identify the overall adjustment level experienced by first year students at the faculty. The study investigates if there is a significant difference in different adjustment sub-scales based on gender, socio-economic status and place of origin. The different adjustment sub-scales encompass of academic adjustment, social adjustment, personal-emotional adjustment, and goal commitment-institutional attachment. The study used quantitative survey method to collect data from 82 respondents who are first year full time students at the faculty. The instrument used was Student Adaptations to College Questionnaire (SACQ) by Baker and Syrik that consists of 67 items. Independent sample t-Test and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) were used to analyse the data. Findings indicate that there is no significant difference in different adjustment sub-scales based on gender, socio-economic status and places of origin. However, female respondents are found to be more successful in all four sub-scales including overall adjustment sub-scale, comparatively to male respondents. This study also revealed that respondents from lower income families possess a higher level of adjustment to university compared to respondents from higher income families. The study also showed that respondents from West Malaysia adjusted better than those respondents from East Malaysia.

Keywords: adjustment, academic adjustment, social adjustment, personal-emotional adjustment, goal commitment-institutional attachment.

ABSTRAK

Seramai lapan puluh tujuh peratus pelajar tercicir daripada universiti di Malaysia tidak berpuas hati dengan kehidupan mereka di universiti. Kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji tahap penyesuaian universiti bagi pelajar-pelajar tahun satu khususnya pelajar yang mendaftar sebagai pelajar sepenuh masa di Fakulti Sains Kognitif dan Pembangunan Manusia (FSKPM). Objektif kajian ini dijalankan adalah untuk mengenalpasti tahap penyesuaian keseluruhan pelajar tahun satu di FSKPM. Kajian ini juga dijalankan bagi melihat sama ada wujud perbezaan yang signifikan atau tidak dalam sub-skala penyesuaian mengikut jantina, status sosioekonomi dan tempat asal. Sub-skala penyesuaian terdiri daripada sub-skala penyesuaian keseluruhan, sub-skala penyesuaian akademik, sub-skala penyesuaian sosial, sub-skala penyesuaian peribadi emosi dan penyesuaian komitmen matlamat/peribadi institusi. Kajian ini menggunakan kaedah tinjauan kuantitatif untuk mengumpul data daripada 82 orang responden yang merupakan pelajar tahun satu sepenuh masa di fakulti tersebut.. *Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ)* daripada Baker dan Syrik yang mengandungi 67 item telah digunakan untuk mengakses tahap penyesuaian pelajar tahun satu tersebut. *Independent sample t-Test* dan *Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)* telah digunakan untuk menganalisis data yang diperolehi. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa tiada perbezaan yang signifikan dalam semua sub-skala penyesuaian mengikut jantina, status sosioekonomi dan tempat asal. Walau bagaimanapun, dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa responden perempuan mempunyai tahap penyesuaian yang lebih tinggi dalam semua sub-skala penyesuaian termasuk sub-skala penyesuaian keseluruhan berbanding responden lelaki. Kajian ini juga mendapati bahawa responden daripada keluarga berpendapatan rendah mempunyai tahap penyesuaian yang lebih tinggi berbanding responden daripada keluarga berpendapatan tinggi. Selain itu, kajian juga mendapati bahawa responden berasal dari Barat

Malaysia mempunyai tahap penyesuaian yang lebih tinggi berbanding responden dari Timur Malaysia.

Kata Kunci: penyesuaian, penyesuaian akademik, penyesuaian sosial, penyesuaian peribadi emosi, komitmen matlamat/peribadi institusi

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Transition from high school to university life counts as a major life changing event while others might say it is a milestone on the journey between adolescence and adulthood. Changes sometimes can cause uncertainty and stress, and the phenomenon also exists when someone moves from a school environment to a university. Demands of university-level study and a more independent life especially for those who have never left the comfort of their homes are examples of how adaptation problems that causes stress.

Many studies (Tinto, 1993, 1996; Martin Jr., Swartz & Madson, 1999; Ackermann & Morrow, 2007-2008) revealed that there are many students who failed to complete their studies. Tinto (1996) revealed that 40% of all four years students from the United States of America failed to earn a degree. The same study also highlighted that 57% from dropouts tended to leave the university at the start of their second year.

There are a number of possible adjustment difficulties that possibly affect first year experience and they pose as the most critical factor for college adaptation. Numerous relevant constructs linked with university/college adjustment were revealed in previous literature on adjustment, such as anxiety, depression, stress vulnerability, anger, mood and mental illness, indicating negative adaptation. However, the counter-balances that indicate positive adaptation are good psychological adjustment, ability to develop new coping strategies, domain satisfaction, a better sense of ego functioning, and well-being.

Independent functioning is crucial in order for students to have a good first year transition. Examples of independent functioning are the ability to negotiate with a complex and new world, having a good time and money management, developing internal motivation for learning, attending classes and keeping up with assignments (Mattanah, Handcock, & Brand, 2004). Tinto (1996) also claimed that the major causes of students' dropout from universities are difficulties in academic and adjustment, weak commitment, difficulties in achieving new and difficult goals and external motivation for learning, lack of financial support and isolation.

Problem statement

Elias, Mahyuddin and Uli (2009) in their study that investigated the adjustment amongst first year students in Malaysian University stated that 57% of dropouts or those who failed to complete their studies claimed that they are dissatisfied with their university life since the time they enter the university. Financial issues, physical problems, family problems, lack of job opportunities, course difficulties, and family problems are recognized as the commonly cited factors that relate to the lack of satisfaction. All of the antecedents mentioned could directly or indirectly influence to the adaptation issue.

Adaptation difficulties as defined by Farris (2010) are the problem of making friends, getting involved, being away from home and many others. Farris also stated that approximately one of three students faces some form of adaptation difficulties. Increase in dropout rates and lower levels of academic achievement have a relation with difficulties in adapting also known as maladaptation (Elias, Mahyuddin & Uli, 2009).

A number of studies indicate that a first-year student, who has interpersonal and personal obstacles, experiences a full-of-stress transition from school environment to university life. Elias, Mahyuddin and Uli (2009) also studied about the impact of adaptation to university life regarding academic achievement. They found that students who have difficulties in adjustment tend to achieve lower grades compared to those who successfully adjusted. From their research, they also concluded that another important role in adapting to university life is gender. It is said that female students tended to experience more problems to adapt to the demands of university life comparatively to male students.

Khamis, Yaakub, Shaari, Zailani, & Yusoff (2002) found four categories of problems that are categorised as important because they can generate weak adaptation for students from a local public university in Malaysia. They are academic problems, health problems, financial crisis and social and personal problems. Being alone or experiencing the combination of the four categories of problems can create serious adjustment problems which could cause students' failure to complete their studies. On another perspective, Abdullah, Elias, Mahyuddin, & Uli (2009) reported that first year students' academic achievement is found to be significantly predicted by college overall adjustment, academic adjustment, and personal-emotional adjustment throughout a period of one semester.

The uniqueness of each person thereby varies the adjustment process. However, gender, socioeconomic status and places of origin also been identified as important factors influencing successful adaptations (Elias, Mahyuddin & Uli, 2009; Chandra & Azimuddin, 2013; Christopher & Edward, 2012). According to Dewan Rakyat (2009), 4,800 students drop out of or are expelled from public institutions of higher learning every year.

Despite the prominence of this issue in many universities in Malaysia and in the world, there is a lack of research to examine the issue of adaptation in first-year students in Malaysian universities. At Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, the problem is just as prevalent. The proposed study aims to explore the overall adjustment aspect experienced by first year students at the Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development. The faculty represents one of the largest enrolment of new students each year, and it also faces issues with drop-outs and failures. The study also intends to see whether there is a significant difference in each adjustment sub-scales based on gender, socio-economic status and places of origin among first-year students in FCSHD. The adjustment sub-scales encompass of academic adjustment, social adjustment, personal-emotional adjustment and goal commitment-institutional attachment.

Objective of study

Firstly, the research seeks to identify the overall adjustment level experienced by first year students at FCSHD. The study will investigate how gender, socio-economic status and places of origin relate to academic adjustment, social adjustment, personal-emotional adjustment and goal commitment-institutional attachment.

Research questions

- What is the overall adjustment level experienced by first year students at FCSHD?
- Is there any significant difference in different adjustment sub-scales based on gender?
- Is there any significant difference in different adjustment sub-scales based on socio-economic status?

- Is there any significant difference in different adjustment sub-scales based on place of origin?

Research Hypothesis

There is no significant difference in different adjustment sub-scales based on gender.

1. There is no significant difference in academic adjustment based on gender.
2. There is no significant difference in personal-emotional adjustment based on gender.
3. There is no significant difference in social adjustment based on gender.
4. There is no significant difference in goal commitment-institutional attachment based on gender.

There is no significant difference in different adjustment sub-scales based on Socio-economic Status.

1. There is no significant difference in academic adjustment based on Socio-economic Status.
2. There is no significant difference in personal-emotional adjustment based on Socio-economic Status.
3. There is no significant difference in social adjustment based on Socio-economic Status.
4. There is no significant difference in goal commitment-institutional attachment based on Socio-economic Status.

There is no significant difference in different adjustment sub-scales based on place of origin.

1. There is no significant difference in academic adjustment based on place of origin.

2. There is no significant difference in personal-emotional adjustment based on place of origin.
3. There is no significant difference in social adjustment based on place of origin.
4. There is no significant difference in goal commitment-institutional attachment based on place of origin.

Conceptual framework

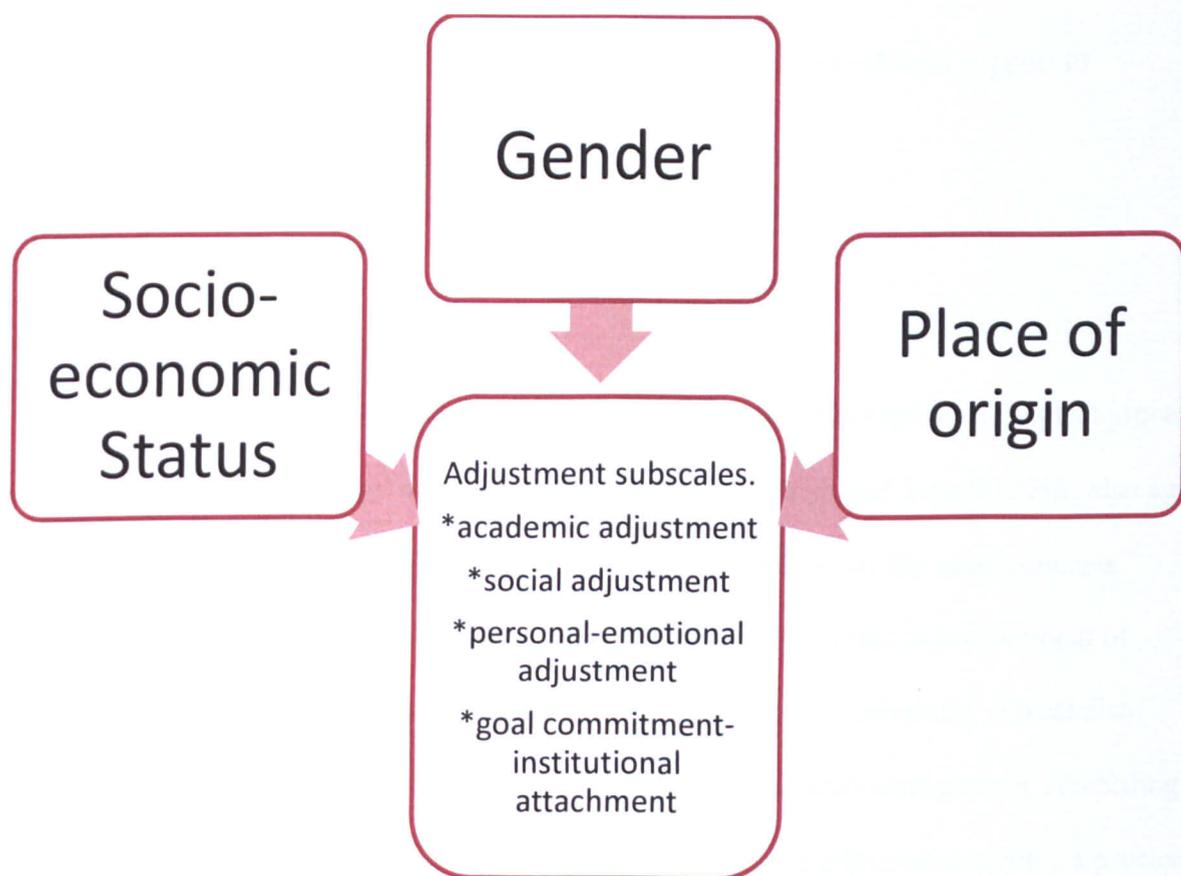


Figure 1 .Conceptual framework shows an interaction between demographic characteristics such gender, Socio-Economic Status and place of origin with each adjustment sub-scale.

The proposed study seeks to measure the relationship and impact of demographic characteristics on first year students' adjustment to university. Full-scale adjustment to university

consists of four subscales which are academic adjustment, social adjustment, personal-emotional adjustment and goal commitment-institutional attachment.

Significance of the study

Findings from the study will possibly provide a perspective into the experiences of first year students at the university, on how they cope with challenges on campus as they learn to shift their learning from the school to the university. The study intends to provide information about student adjustment that will be useful for the university to construct relevant support to accommodate challenges faced by first year students.

Definition of terms

1. Adaptation & adjustment

Conceptual definition: Micheal (1996) claimed that adaptation is used for biological process while adjustment is more related to psychological process. Chelliah and Yusoff (2010) also agree with the terms' representation. Both represent different perspectives of the same concepts. However, Arkoff (1986) use the term adaptation and adjustment to refer to involvement of person with their environment. Since it involves environment of the university, Arkoff also added that adaptation is measured by academic performance and emotional growth. According to Gharaibeh, Ishak, Jdaitawi and Taamneh(2011), they claimed that adjustment involve a process of "adapting to, coping with, managing problems, challenges, tasks and requirements of daily life". Brodsky (1988) claimed that adjustment is about reacting to different life demands.

Operational definition

Operational definition: In this research, the term adjustments and adaptations will be used synonymously. Adjustment and adaptation in this research will refer to student's involvement with their environment in term of academic, social, personal-emotional and goal commitment-institutional attachment.

2. Academic adjustment

Conceptual definition: The ability of student to achieve adjustment with university life and reaching a state of satisfaction on his performance, colleagues, teachers and the environment as a whole (Al-Khatib, Awanleh & Samawi, 2011).

Operational definition: Mean score of academic adjustment sub-scale in SACQ. Academic adjustment sub-scale consists of three adjustment aspects which are motivation, application, performance and academic environment.

3. Personal-emotional adjustment

Conceptual definition: Estrada, Dupoux and Wolmen (2005) define personal-emotional adjustment as psychological processes through which individuals manage or cope with the demands and challenges of everyday life.

Operational definition: Mean score of personal-emotional adjustment sub-scale in SACQ. Personal-emotional comprises of two adjustment aspects which are physical and psychology.

4. Social adjustment

Conceptual definition: According to Houston (1971), social adjustment is the integration into social life, forming a support network, and managing new social freedom.

Operational definition: Mean score of social adjustment sub-scale in SACQ. Social adjustment sub-scales will assess four adjustment aspect which are general, other people, nostalgia and social environment.

5. Goal commitment-institutional attachment

Conceptual definition: Pascarella and Chapman (1983) define as commitment to the goal of graduation, degree of expectation and valuing of education.

Operational definition: Mean score of goal commitment-institutional attachment sub-scale in SACQ. This sub-scale encompasses general and specific goal commitment-institutional attachment.

6. Overall adjustment

Conceptual definition:

Operational definition: Total means score of academic adjustment, personal-emotional adjustment, social adjustment and goal commitment-institutional attachment.

7. Gender

Conceptual definition: Fagot, Leinbach, Hort and Strayer (1997) define gender as social category based on biological differences.

Operational definition: The operational definition for gender in this research is based upon biological sexes which are female and male.

8. Socioeconomic status

Conceptual framework: The social standing of an individual in a social group (American Psychological Association, n.d).

Operational definition: Social class of first-year students in FCSHD measures as a combination of education of head family, occupation of head family and family income per month in Ringgit Malaysia.

9. Place of origin

Conceptual definition: It is the place where someone comes from.

Operational definition: The place where a student from whether East Malaysia or West Malaysia.

Adaptation/adjustment

Brodsky (1988) claimed that adjustment is about reacting to different life demands. According to Rathus and Nevid (1992, p. 14), there are a numbers of controversies regarding the psychology of adjustment and one of the basic controversies is concerning the meaning of adjustment itself.

Accommodation and adaptation is synonym that is commonly used for adjustment (Monroe, 2007). Since there is no distinct definition between adaptation and adjustment in students' university life perspectives, few past researches had used the terms synonymously (Arkoff, 1968; Gharaibeh, Ishak, Jdairawi & Taamneh, 2011; Al-Mahrooqi, Denman & Ahmed Afeeq, n.d).