

CHARACTERISTICS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO UNIVERSITY ADJUSTMENT: A CASE WITH FIRST YEAR AGRICULTURE STUDENTS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF PERADENIYA

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Introduction

Early experience with university life is often characterized by stress associated with social and academic adjustment (Dunkel-Schetter and Lobel, 1990). Understanding this process of adjustment, including those associated with the students of the B.Sc. (Agricultural Technology and Management programme of the University of Peradeniya is useful to relevant stakeholders to help students through this stage in their lives.

Students of this degree programme begin their university tenure at the Maha-Illuppallama Sub-Campus of the Faculty of Agriculture. The programme tends to have a slightly higher percentage of females, compared to male, with about 85%-90% identifying themselves as Sinhalese. Although most students' native language is Sinhala or Tamil, English is the language of instruction. This study examines the level of adjustment of students of the Faculty and attempts to identify characteristics of those who adjust well relative to those who have difficulties in adjusting. The results may be useful for understanding which students need the most assistance in terms of adjustment.

College adjustment is defined as a multifaceted psychosocial process, which according to Baker and Siryk

(1999) consist of the adjustment facets academic (increases in intensity in academic work), social (nature of their social environment), personal-emotional (personal and emotional pressure at university) and attachment to the University. Much research indicates that adjustment is affected by self perceptions. Two indicators of self perceptions were used in this study: self efficacy, or an individual's perception that they can achieve a certain level of performance on a task (Bandura, 1998) and imposter fears (Clance, 1985), perceptions of illegitimate entrance to a particular role such as the belief that acceptance to the University was a result of luck, manipulation or hard work rather than ability. It is hypothesized that self perceptions would be predictive of university adjustment. Additionally, past research has indicated a link between college adjustment and demographic variables (e.g., Clance 1985). These demographic factors were hypothesized to predict student adjustment.

Materials and Methods

A stratified random sample in which strata were based on gender was used to select 57 female and 43 male first-year students. Data were collected at the middle of the first semester using the Student Adjustment to University Questionnaire (SACQ; Baker and

Siryk, 1999), the Clance IP Scale (Clance, 1985); the Self-Efficacy Scale (Bandura, 1998) and a demographic questionnaire.

Results

Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) on the SACQ suggested that a three factor model in which attachment adjustment was excluded be used in analyses, $\chi^2(52) = 58.17, p > .05$. Results revealed that students reported moderate adjustment in all three dimensions (means for academic, social, personal emotional adjustment are 4.18 ($SD = 1.56$), 5.82 ($SD = 1.15$), and 4.26 ($SD = 1.81$), respectively. There were significant differences in adjustment, $F(2, 198) = 42.45, p < .001$, with higher social than academic, $F(1, 99) = 53.65, p < .001$, and emotional adjustment, $F(1, 99) = 78.52, p < .001$.

Next analyses were conducted to examine the relationship between the adjustment variables and the two self perception variables, self efficacy and imposter fears. Similar to the adjustment variables, EFA conducted on imposter fears, suggested a two factor solution be used, which focus on concerns about worry over evaluation and concerns that past performance was the result of external factors, rather than ability. Regression analyses were conducted to predict the adjustment variables using these three self perceptions variables. The models for only academic, $F(3, 96) = 5.98, p < .001, R^2 = 0.15$, and personal emotional adjustment, $F(3, 96) = 5.82, p < .001, R^2 = 0.39$, were significant. In both models, worry-imposter fears were significant, $\beta_s = 0.23, p < .01, 0.35, p < .001$, respectively, and for only academic adjustment, luck-imposter

fears acted as a significant predictor, $\beta = 0.21, p < .05$.

Finally, the relationship between adjustment and demographic factors was examined, while controlling for self-perceptions. Due to a lack of variability, some variables were left out and analyses only examined gender, parent's qualifications, if their home as in a rural setting, and experience away from home, all coded dichotomously. For academic adjustment, only the self perceptions remained significant. For social adjustment, however, $F(7, 92) = 2.67, p < .05, R^2 = 0.13$, those with experiences away from home, $\beta = 0.23, p < .05$, and those from city/town setting, $\beta = -0.21, p < .05$, reported better adjustment. For personal-emotional adjustment, $F(5, 94) = 4.58, p < .001, R^2 = 0.21$, only gender was significantly predictive, $\beta = 0.25, p < .01$, with men reporting higher adjustment than women. The effects of demographic predictors on adjustment seemed independent of the self-perception effects.

Discussion and Conclusions

This study presents interesting findings about the adjustment of first year students pursuing degrees in Agricultural Technology and Management. Specifically, students' levels of adjustment in all the domains, academic, social, and personal-emotional were on average moderate. However, students seem to have more difficulty in adjusting to the academics of the programme and seem to have more stress and emotion related concerns than social concerns. The fact that students' attachment to the institution was not captured perhaps

because they were not at the main campus, where a 'Faculty of Agriculture' identity would have been more salient.

Predictors of these three domains of adjustment suggest that the process of adjustment for each domain is fairly different. That is, adjusted to the academic environment seems to depend on students' worry about the possibility of failure and how much they attribute their past performance to external factors. Social adjustment is higher for those with experience living away from home and those from towns and cities relative to others. Follow-up research should attempt to understand these relationships as they run counter to past findings and the nature of the course. Personal-emotional adjustment seems to be related to performance related worry and gender. Results also suggest that women have greater difficulty in adjusting to the stress and have harder time in adjusting emotionally. These findings are consistent the Rotter (1954) and McClelland (1961).

Although these findings are revealing, they should be examined within the understanding that this study was able to account for only approximately a fifth of the variability in the adjustment variables. Future research should examine the other demographic variables that this study was unable to examine because of restricted variance. This study suggests, however, areas where the Faculty may wish to focus its resources to improve the levels of

adjustment of students. As students who worry about performance seem to have greater difficulty in adjusting, adopting techniques to reduce such worry may be useful. Further, as academic adjustment seems to be related to concerns over the possibility that past performance was a result of luck and other uncontrollable actors, perhaps creating an environment where students perceive more control may assist with adjustment. The study also highlights the necessity to pay more attention to students who have less experience living outside the home, those who are from rural settings and who are women.

References

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