



UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

**CORRELATES OF UNIVERSITY ADJUSTMENT
AMONG MALAYSIAN STUDENTS**

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AMONG MALAYSIAN STUDENTS**

By

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The present study is intended for a better understanding of university adjustment of Malaysian adolescents. More specifically, the purpose of this research was to examine the factors contributing to the adjustment of these adolescents in the university.

The target population was Bachelor students (Teaching English as a Second Language) at Universiti Putra Malaysia in the age range of 18 and 23 years. Since the population was only 178, the whole population was studied. Eleven respondents filled the questionnaires for the pilot study and a total of 150 subjects filled the questionnaires for the main study, but only 130 questionnaire sets were valid. The study is correlational in nature. Based on previous research studies and theories, nine independent variables were chosen to investigate their relationship with university adjustment. The Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire was used to measure university adjustment of Malaysian adolescents. The Self-Esteem Inventory and Coping Skills Inventory were used to study self-esteem and coping skills respectively. The Students Perception of University Student

Services Inventory, developed by the researcher, was used to measure university factors.

The study was limited to late adolescents and most of the respondents were female Malay Muslims. The analysis of the data showed, that most of the respondents had an average level on all the four components of university adjustment. A significant relationship was found between 35 of the 36 relationships studied. There was no significant relationship found between personal-emotional adjustment and academic advising. Coping skills and financial issues predicted all four components of university adjustment.

The implications of this study are directed towards both counselors and the University. Counselors should take into consideration the family environment and peers of students when dealing with their adjustment problems. Counselors should also employ outreach programs to improve students' self-esteem and coping skills to facilitate university adjustment. The University can also help the students in adjustment by providing for a longer and more population specific orientation program. They can also aid the students by providing various means of financial support. The University should also concentrate on the role of the academic advisor, who can facilitate university adjustment. Suggestions and recommendations were made based on the study.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia
sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk Ijazah Master Sains

**FAKTOR KORELASI PENYESUAIAN UNIVERSITI DI KALANGAN
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Tujuan kajian ini dijalankan ialah untuk mendapatkan pemahaman terhadap penyesuaian di universiti di kalangan kelompok remaja. Secara terperinci, tujuan kajian ini dijalankan ialah untuk menyelidik faktor-faktor penyumbang kepada penyesuaian di universiti di kalangan kelompok remaja.

Populasi sasaran ialah pelajar-pelajar Bachelor Pendidikan (Pengajaran Bahasa Inggeris Sebagai Bahasa Kedua) di Universiti Putra Malaysia yang berada di dalam lingkungan umur 18 hingga 23 tahun. Oleh kerana populasi sasaran adalah seramai 178 orang, maka keseluruhan populasi telah dikaji. Seramai 11 orang responden telah menjawab set soalselidik bagi tujuan kajian rintis dan seramai 150 orang subjek menjawab soal selidik bagi kajian utama, tetapi hanya 130 set soalselidik sahaja yang sah. Kajian ini adalah kajian korelasi. Berasaskan kepada teori-teori dan kajian-kajian lepas, sembilan pembolehubah bebas telah dipilih untuk mengkaji hubungannya dengan penyesuaian di universiti. The Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire telah digunakan untuk mengukur

penyesuaian di universiti di kalangan kelompok remaja. Self-Esteem Inventory dan Coping Skills Inventory telah digunakan untuk mengkaji konsep sendiri dan kemahiran keupayaan. Pengkaji telah membentuk “Student Perception of University Student Services Inventory” untuk mengkaji faktor-faktor universiti.

Kajian ini terhad kepada lewat remaja dan majoriti responden adalah wanita Melayu Muslim. Analisis data menunjukkan bahawa kebanyakan responden memiliki aras sederhana di dalam keempat-empat komponen penyesuaian universiti. Hubungan yang signifikan telah didapati di antara 35 daripada 36 hubungan yang dikaji. Hubungan yang tidak signifikan ditemui di antara penyesuaian peribadi – emosi dan penasihat akademik. Kemahiran keupayaan dan isu-isu kewangan telah meramalkan kesemua keempat-empat komponen penyesuaian universiti.

Implikasi kajian ini lebih terarah kepada para kaunselor dan pihak universiti. Para kaunselor perlu mempertimbangkan persekitaran keluarga dan rakan sebaya pelajar-pelajar apabila berhadapan dengan permasalahan penyesuaian pelajar. Para kaunselor juga perlu menjalankan program yang dapat meningkatkan konsep sendiri dan kemahiran keupayaan pelajar-pelajar di dalam membantu penyesuaian di universiti. Pihak universiti juga boleh membantu pelajar-pelajar di dalam penyesuaian dengan menyediakan program orientasi yang lebih panjang dan khusus kepada populasi tertentu. Mereka juga boleh membantu pelajar-pelajar menerusi pelbagai bentuk bantuan kewangan. Pihak

universiti juga perlu melihat kembali peranan penasihat akademik, di mana mereka dapat memudahkan penyesuaian di universiti. Cadangan-cadangan telah dikemukakan berdasarkan kajian.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

GPA	Grade Point Average
IPPA	Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment
SACQ	Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire
SD	Standard Deviation
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Science
SPUSSI	Student Perception of University Student Services
TESL	Teaching of English as a Second Language
UPM	Universiti Putra Malaysia

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Overview

This chapter introduces the research topic, the statement of the problem being studied and the objectives and significance of the study. It also includes the basic assumptions, limitations and definition of the terms relevant to the study.

Introduction

University time, for many adolescents is the first time they move out of their family environment. It's the first time they are relatively independent and on their own. It is a time when they have to adjust to their new environment, cope with peer and academic pressure, understand the workings of a completely new education system, handle their new found freedom as well as being responsible for themselves. Earlier studies describe late adolescence as a period characterized by challenge, change and transition (Rice, FitzGerald, Whaley & Gibbs, 1995). University life, according to Levinson (1978), is a phase when a person moves on to learn and take up adult roles and responsibilities. It's a mentally taxing period, requiring the individuals to adjust their abilities to their new

environment. Psychologically stimulating and difficult areas of identity exploration and commitment are taken up by individuals at this age (Erikson, 1968).

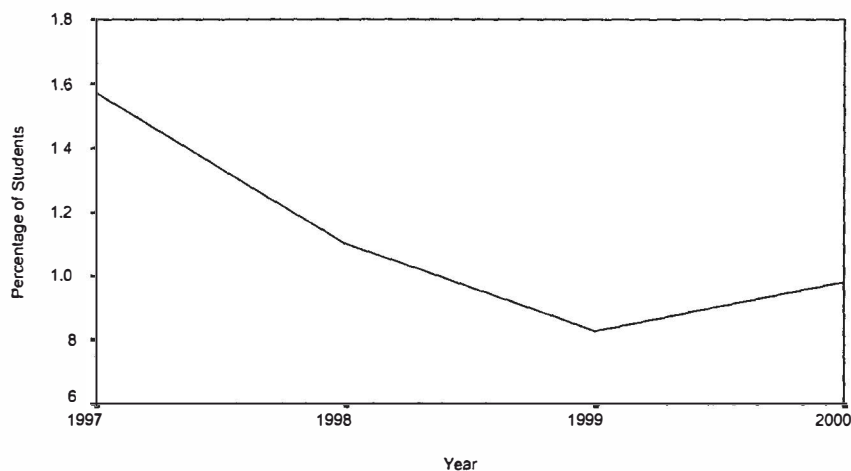


Figure1: Percentage of Students visiting Universiti Putra Malaysia's Counseling Center.

As cited in Atwater (1979, pp. 5), the Dictionary of Behavior Science (1973) defines adjustment as being:

"A harmonious relationship with the environment involving the ability to satisfy most of one's needs and meet most of the demands, both physical and social, that are put on one; the variations and changes in behavior that are necessary to satisfy needs and meet demands so that one can establish harmonious relationships with the environment."

Calhoun and Acocella (1990, pp. 13) define adjustment as,"your continuous interaction with your self, with other people and with your

world." Your self here refers to the totality of an individual-body, behavior, thoughts and feelings and values (Calhoun and Acocella, 1990).

The concept of adjustment is closely related to the concept of adaptation. According to Grasha and Kirschenbaum (1980), adaptation is our ability to manage and deal successfully with the various demands as well as problems of our environment. According to them (pp. 60), adjustment can be defined as,

"treating adaptation as a continuum of responses, adjustment refers to the things we do to meet the demands of our environment. Adjustment is concerned with our successes and failures matching skills and abilities to events in our lives. Those things we do to 'get by' or to 'hold our heads above water'; to meet basic needs; and otherwise keep ourselves free of symptoms of problems in living are typically associated with adequate adjustment."

The level of adjustment reached depends upon a number of factors such as our genes and life experiences as well as acts of nature (Cohen, 1994). University life requires the individual to seek mastery in both adjustive challenges and adjustive demands. In these circumstances, there is a subtle distinction between adjustive demands and adjustive challenges. Adjustive challenges provide a potential for personal growth (Cohen, 1994).

Adjustive demands are defined by Cohen (1994, pp. 7) as,

“factors originating primarily in the environment that prompt us to respond constructively to change” and adjustive challenges reluctance, or fear that can impede us from responding constructively to change.”

University life is a new phase in an individual's life cycle which offers adjustive challenges. Usually it is the first time the person is living away from home, there is new found freedom in the structure of the curriculum, the students are treated by the teachers as adults and the students in turn are expected to behave as responsible persons. This massive change can be very overwhelming for many, putting adjustive demands upon the students to cope and manage effectively in their new environment. People's coping skills are tested.

Looking into the level of university adjustment alone will, however, serve only a very limited purpose. In order to understand adjustment in its totality, various factors that may contribute to the level of adjustment need to be studied. No single factor can be identified as the sole factor contributing to adjustment. As stated earlier, ability to adjust well depends upon many factors one of which is the level of parent and peer attachment (Greenberg, Siegel & Leitch, 1984). Coping skills are also significant. According to Bowlby (1982), these refer to the ability to manage stress and anxiety that are the result of academic, social, institutional and other inter-

personal pressures. University life as a whole gives rise to high levels of stress and thus the ability to cope successfully becomes a major contributing factor to university adjustment as well.

Many researchers have theorized that individuals with high self-esteem will tend to have more confidence in themselves when dealing with people and the environment and would therefore be better adjusted than those with a low self-esteem (Coopersmith, 1967 and Rosenberg, 1965).

Besides these factors there are also many educational institution factors that may contribute to the students' level of adjustment. This means that a student's educational institute also contributes to university adjustment. These include the quality of the university's orientation program, the health facilities, the knowledge and availability of the institute's counseling services as well as the level of comfort and help that the student's academic advisor provides. Many factors must therefore be studied to explore the impact they have on the level of university adjustment of Malaysian late adolescents.

The problems confronting Malaysian youth are accentuated by the fact that Malaysia is a country that has witnessed vast economic growth in the past decade and many changes in its modern affluent society (Soo Yin, 1999). One of these changes has been in the education sector. In Figure 1, we see that in the undergraduate programs of Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) alone there has been a steady increase in the number of students

enrolling every year, from 34,816 students in 1997 to 51,604 students in 2001. The total number of students enrolling each semester has increased and so has the drop out and failure percentage. Looking at the fact that the youth of today are tomorrow's adult society and that there will be in all probability an annual influx of more students, it becomes important to look into the adjustment level of Malaysian students.

The dropout and failure percentage of Bachelor students in UPM was 2.91% in the 1997/1998 May semester, went as high as 4.31% in the 1999/2000 November semester and was 3.03% in the 2000/2001 November semester. Even though the increase is very low (1.40%), it however shows an increasing trend. With a 48% increase in the number of students enrolling into UPM alone since 1997 to present, it becomes vital to study tomorrow's potential.

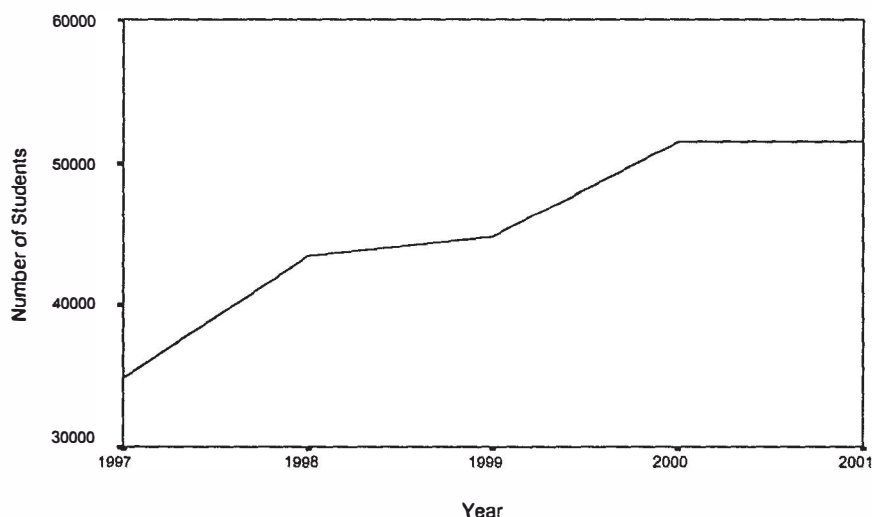


Figure 2: The Number of Students per Academic Year in Universiti Putra Malaysia