

Original Research Article

A Study to Assess the Adaptation of Freshmen to College Life in a Selected University, Ajman, UAE

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Abstract: **Background:** The period of transition from High School to University presents a significant challenge for students, requiring them to adapt to a new learning environment and take on increased responsibilities. **Objectives:** This study aimed to assess the adaptation of freshmen to College life, associate the adaptation of freshmen to college life with their demographic variables and correlate the Academic/ Personal/Social and Institutional Adaptation of Freshmen to College life. **Methods:** A quantitative approach using a descriptive cross-sectional design was employed. A total of 201 freshmen were selected from a private University in Ajman, UAE. Data were collected through the Student Adjustment to College Questionnaire (SACQ). **Results:** The findings indicated that 86% of freshmen exhibited moderate levels of adaptation, while 10% demonstrated higher levels. Additionally, a significant difference was observed between male and female freshmen, with females showing higher levels of adaptation. Furthermore, the findings revealed a significant association between freshmen's gender and demographic factors at a 0.05 level of significance. There was a significant positive correlation between all four components namely Academic Adaptation, Personal Adaptation, Social Adaptation and Institutional Adaptation. These findings shed light on the challenges faced by freshmen during the transition to University life and highlight the influence of demographic variables on their adaptation process.

Keywords: Freshmen, College Life, University, Academic, Personal, Social and Institutional Adaptation.

INTRODUCTION

Transitioning from high school to college is a significant milestone in a student's life. It represents a period of personal growth, academic challenges, and new found independence. However, this transition can also be a daunting experience for many freshmen, as they face numerous adjustments and uncertainties in their new college environment (Horowitz and Graf, 2019). Billions of students have been struggling due to the sudden changes after entering university life. Students had to study under a new form of learning system where they must to be more responsible at this stage. This change has its fair share of consequences as they face some resistance in adapting. The process of adapting to college life involves navigating academic demands, social dynamics, and personal responsibilities, which can have a profound impact on students' overall well-being and academic success (Niu, Ren & Li, 2022).

Academic pressure tops the list of difficulties that youths experience; 61% of teens report feeling a lot of pressure to do well in school. But this frequently comes with unforeseen difficulties, such as feelings of isolation, perplexity, and a craving for the security and comfort of your native country. A lot of students don't anticipate how challenging it might be to adapt to those new developments. There are many things to anticipate, including discovering a new place, making new acquaintances, and perhaps even discovering a renewed sense of freedom and independence (Sevinc and Gizir, 2014). The college experience can vary significantly depending on the institution, its location, and the unique characteristics of its

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student body. Each university presents its own set of challenges and opportunities, making it crucial to study the specific context of freshmen adaptation within a selected university. By understanding the factors influencing freshmen's ability to adapt to college life, educational institutions can develop targeted interventions and support systems to facilitate a smoother transition for incoming students (Yazedjian & Toews, 2006).

Impact of parents expectations on college students is generally underrated. Disparities between college students' and their parents' expectations may be related to their transition since college students frequently set goals based on the views of their parents' expectations. A study among 69 male and 105 female freshmen and sophomores at a major university in the south-eastern United States examined parent-college student expectation disparities and communication reciprocity as determinants of college students' adjustment. According to the correlational findings, college students reported feeling less self-worth and less able to change when there are more expectations gaps between them and their parents while these results suggested that fostering favorable outcomes for college students may be accomplished by training assertive communication skills to parents and college students (Agliata & Renk, 2008).

Statement of the Problem

A Study to Assess the Adaptation of Freshmen to College Life in a Selected University, Ajman, UAE.

OBJECTIVES

- Assess adaptation of freshmen to college life.
- Associate the adaptation of freshmen to college life with their demographic variables.
- Correlate the Academic/ Personal/Social and Institutional Adaptation of Freshmen to College life

Hypothesis

H₀₁ - There will be no significant association between the adaptation of freshmen to college life with their demographic variables.

H₀₂ - There will be no significant correlation between the Academic/ Personal/Social and Institutional Adaptation of Freshmen to College life.

MATERIALS & METHODS

Research Approach and Design

A Quantitative research approach with a descriptive Cross-sectional design was used to assess the adaptation of Freshmen to college life in a selected university.

Research Setting

The study was conducted at Gulf Medical University, Ajman, UAE.

Population

The study population comprised of all Freshmen in Gulf Medical University, Ajman, UAE.

Criteria for Sample Selection

Inclusion Criteria

- All freshmen from Bachelors programs of Nursing, Medicine, Dentistry, Physiotherapy, Medical Imaging Sciences, Medical Laboratory Sciences and Anesthesia technology in Gulf Medical University who belong to the 2022 Cohort.
- Those who gave consent for participation.

Exclusion Criteria

- Students who did not give consent.
- Students who were repeating first year.

Sample Size

Using total enumeration sampling method, all freshmen who met the inclusion were recruited for the study. The sample size was 201.

Sampling Technique

Non-Probability convenient sampling technique was used to select samples for the study.

Research Tool

The study instrument consisted of 3 sections:

Section A – Demographic Details of Freshmen

Section B – Demographic Details of Family of the Freshmen

Section C – SACQ (Student Adjustment to College Questionnaire). The SACQ is a 67 item tool which is a standardized scale.

Procedure of Data Collection

The study was explained to the freshmen students and informed consent was obtained. A google form was shared with them and the responses were collected. The students who were not present during the data collection and who did not fill the informed consent were excluded from the study.

Ethical Consideration

The study proceeded after obtaining approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Gulf Medical University (Ref. no. IRB/CON/STD/61/DEC-2022 dated 12th Jan 2023) as well as permission from the Deans of all Colleges in Gulf Medical University. Informed consent was obtained from the students before proceeding with data collection.

Plan for Data Analysis

- Descriptive and inferential statistics were used for analyzing and interpreting data.
- Frequency and percentage helped to describe the sample characteristics. Chi-square was used to associate the adaptation of freshmen to college life with their demographic variables.
- Spearman's test for correlation was used to find the correlation between Academic/ Personal/Social and Institutional Adaptation of Freshmen to College life
- P-value < 0.05 was set for statistical significance.

RESULTS

I - Demographic Variables of freshmen

Among 201 samples, majority (78.1%) were females, 59.2% were between the age group of 17-19 years, 44.8% were pursuing MBBS, findings on the birth order revealed that, 29.9% were the youngest children in the family, 33.3% were Arabs by nationality and 28.9% stayed in Ajman, while the others travelled from different Emirates. Out of 201 freshers, 73.1% were residing in their homes, 44.3% used their own car to commute, 44.8% reached the University in <30 minutes and 88.6% had never attended any University in the past. Findings showed that, 85.1% were expected to do some house chores, with majority (55.7%) of it being packing their own lunch.

II - Assessment on Overall Adaptation of freshmen to College Life

The adaptation of freshers to college life was assessed based on four dimensions. They were: Academic, Personal/Emotional, Social and Adaptation to the Institution.

Table 1: Adaptation of freshers to College life based on four dimensions

Dimensions of Adaptation	Total	
	Mean	SD
Academic Adjustment	34.6	6.0
Personal/Emotional Adjustment	33.2	6.1
Social Adjustment	22.3	7.7
Attachment to the Institution	31.7	5.7
Total	118.2	16.9

Overall Adaptation of freshmen to College Life in All Four Components

Findings in Figure 1 shows that, majority (86%) of freshmen had moderate level of adaptation to College life while, 10% had high and 4% had low adaptation.

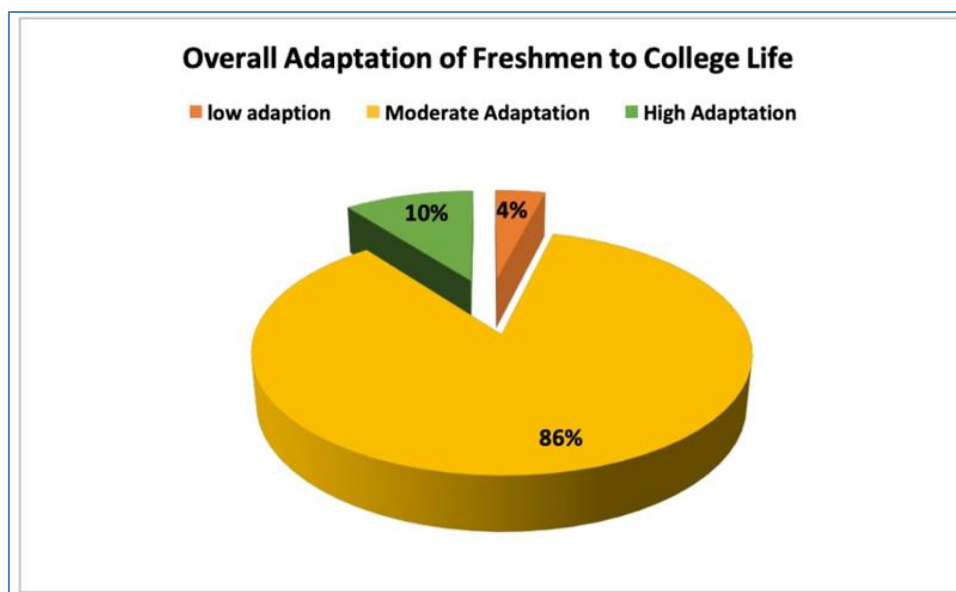


Figure 1: Overall Adaptation of freshmen to College Life

III - Gender Based Adaptation of freshmen to College Life

Gender based adaptation of freshmen to College Life (Figure 2) revealed that, the adaptation of female students was significantly higher than that of the male students.

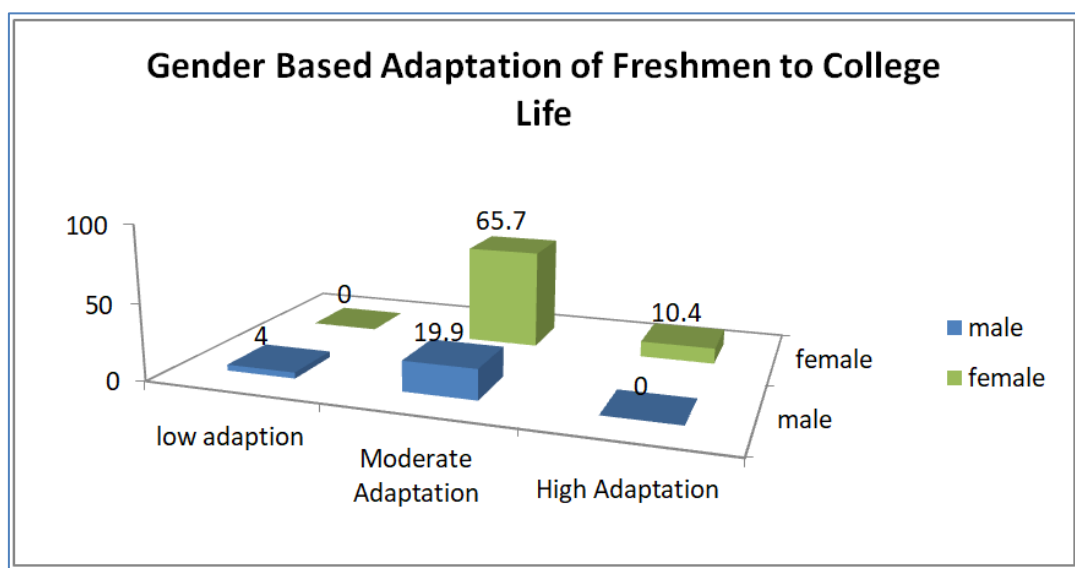


Figure 2: Gender Based Adaptation of freshmen to College Life

Table 2: Gender Based Adaptation of Freshmen to College Life based on the Four Dimensions studied (n=201)

Dimensions	Male		Female		Total		t value	(p) value
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Academic Adjustment	32.7	3.4	35.2	6.5	34.6	6.0	4.004	0.047*
Personal/Emotional Adjustment	30.7	4.5	33.9	6.3	33.2	6.1	1.981	0.161
Social Adjustment	20.2	3.6	22.9	8.5	22.3	7.7	4.082	0.045*
Attachment to the Institution	30.1	3.1	32.3	6.2	31.7	5.7	5.457	0.020*
Total	108.1	19.3	121.5	14.7	118.2	16.9	5.751	0.017*

*Significant (p<0.05)

The above table depicts Gender Based Adaptation of Freshmen to College Life. Findings show the Mean and Standard Deviation of all the four components namely Academic, Personal, Social and Institutional adaptation between both genders, The overall adaptation of females was significantly higher than males in each component, which can be well understood as seen in the mean scores. The ‘t’ test scores revealed that, there was a significant difference between the male

and female scores at $p < 0.05$ level. Hence, the adaptation of female students was significantly higher than that of the male students.

IV - Association between the Adaptation of freshmen to College Life and Their Demographic Variables.

This section deals with the Adaptation of Freshmen to College life and their Demographic Variables like Program of Study, age, gender, birth order, ethnicity, emirate of stay, place staying in, mode of transportation, time taken to reach University and type of domestic work involved with.

Table 3: Association between the Adaptation of Freshmen to College life and their Demographic Variables.

Demographic Variables of Freshmen	Low Adaptation	Moderate Adaptation	High Adaptation	Chi Square test (p)
Program of Study				
Nursing	4(2.0)	32(15.9)	6(3.0)	13.350 (0.499)
Anesthesia	1(0.5)	12(6.0)	1(0.5)	
Medical Laboratory Sciences	2(1.0)	27(13.4)	4(2.0)	
Dentistry	0	7(3.5)	1(0.5)	
Health Care Economics	0	5(2.5)	2(1.0)	
Biomedical Sciences	0	3(1.5)	0	
Medicine	1(0.5)	83(41.3)	6(3.0)	
Physiotherapy	0	3(1.5)	1(0.5)	
Age				
17-19 years	6(3.0)	100(49.8)	13(6.5)	2.440 (0.964)
20-22 years	2(1.0)	51(25.4)	6(3.0)	
23-25 years	0	16(8.0)	1(0.5)	
26-28 years	0	4(2.0)	1(0.5)	
29 years and more	0	1(0.5)	0	
Gender				
Male	8(4.0)	40(19.9)	0	32.125 (0.001*)
Female	0	132(65.7)	21(10.4)	
Birth Order				
Only child	2(1.0)	44(21.9)	3(1.5)	4.909 (0.556)
Youngest child	1(0.5)	52(25.9)	7(3.5)	
Middle child	1(0.5)	36(17.9)	4(2.0)	
Oldest child	4(2.0)	40(19.9)	7(3.5)	
Ethnicity				
Arab	3(1.5)	55(27.4)	9(4.5)	10.173 (0.253)
Indian	1(0.5)	39(19.4)	1(0.5)	
GCC	2(1.0)	37(18.4)	6(3.0)	
African	0	31(15.4)	3(1.5)	
Others	2(1.0)	10(5.0)	2(1.0)	
Emirate belonging to				
Ajman	1(0.5)	49(24.4)	8(4.0)	12.552 (0.402)
Sharjah	1(0.5)	15(7.5)	2(1.0)	
Dubai	4(2.0)	39(19.4)	2(1.0)	
RAK	0	23(11.4)	3(1.5)	
Fujairah	2(1.0)	20(10.0)	5(2.5)	
UAQ	0	18(9.0)	1(0.5)	
Abu Dhabi	0	8(4.0)	0	
Place of Stay				
Home	8(4.0)	124(61.7)	15(7.5)	3.642 (0.457)
Hostel	0	15(7.5)	1(0.5)	
Rented room	0	33(16.4)	5(2.5)	
Mode of Transportation to University				
Bus	3(1.5)	42(20.9)	8(4.0)	9.089 (0.524)
Own car	3(1.5)	77(38.3)	9(4.5)	
Parents	2(1.0)	20(10.0)	0	
Friends	0	15(7.5)	3(1.5)	
Public transportation	0	8(4.0)	1(0.5)	

Demographic Variables of Freshmen	Low Adaptation	Moderate Adaptation	High Adaptation	Chi Square test (p)
Walking	0	10(5.0)	0	
Time taken to reach University				
<30 minutes	4(2.0)	78(38.8)	8(4.0)	5.650 (0.227)
30-60 minutes	4(2.0)	66(32.8)	6(3.0)	
1 hour and more	0	28(13.9)	7(3.5)	
Transfer/Enrollment in a Previous University				
Yes	1(0.5)	18(9.0)	4(2.0)	1.370
No	7(3.5)	154(76.6)	17(8.5)	(0.504)
Helping with house hold chores				
Yes	8(4.0)	146(72.6)	17(8.5)	1.689
No	0	26(12.9)	4(2.0)	(0.430)
If Yes,				
Packing your own lunch	5(2.5)	96(47.8)	11(5.5)	4.605 (0.916)
Doing your laundry	1(0.5)	21(10.4)	3(1.5)	
Tidying up the house	2(1.0)	16(8.0)	2(1.0)	
Cooking	0	9(4.5)	1(0.5)	
Ironing Clothes	0	4(2.0)	0	

*Significant ($p < 0.05$).

Table 3 shows the association between Adaptation of Freshmen to College Life with their Demographic Variables. The findings show that, there was a significant association between gender of freshmen and demographic variables at 0.05 level. None of the other variables were associated with the adaptation of freshmen. Hence the null hypothesis H_{01} - There will be no significant association between the adaptation of freshmen to college life with their demographic variables was accepted.

V - Correlation between Academic/ Personal/Social and Institutional Adaptation of freshmen to College Life

Table 4: Correlation between Academic/ Personal/Social and Institutional Adaptation of freshmen to College Life (n=201)

Overall Adaptation of Freshmen to College life	Academic Adaptation		Personal Adaptation		Social Adaptation		Institutional Adaptation	
	r	p	r	p	r	p	r	p
	0.691	0.001*	0.483	0.001*	0.569	0.001*	0.674	0.001*

*Significant ($p < 0.05$) Spearman's test for correlation.

Findings in Table 4 shows that, there is a significant positive correlation between all four components Academic, Personal, Social and Institutional Adaptation.

DISCUSSION

The study assessed the adaptation of freshmen to college life in a selected university, Ajman, UAE using a quantitative approach. The questionnaire was sent as Google forms to the official mail of 398 freshmen pursuing undergraduate studies in Gulf Medical University. Totally 201 samples responded to the survey. The tool was a structured questionnaire on demographic details of freshmen and demographic details of family of the freshmen. The adaptation of the freshmen to college life was assessed using SACQ (Student Adjustment to College Questionnaire). The SACQ is a 67 item tool which is a standardized tool with a reliability of 0.92. A similar study on differences in coping mechanisms and optimism between genders and ages conducted on 298 first-year Undergraduate Italian students (mean age of 23.2years) at the University of Cagliari enrolled in social science courses who were transferring universities had majority of females 152 (51%) like the current study. Effects of optimism and coping mechanisms on students' life satisfaction showed that, both variables had a significant impact on life satisfaction and that gender and age had a significant influence on students' coping mechanisms, optimism, and level of life satisfaction (Cabras & Mondo, 2018). Another study looked at how psychological functioning and adjustment for college freshmen were related to parental attachment, changes in parental attachment, and both. Totally 271 freshmen took self-report tests on parental connection, psychological distress, self-competence, and college adjustment twice throughout the first semester. Findings showed that, for both men and women, a higher level of attachment security was linked to better results. Male candidates who lived at home had a decline in attachment security, despite the fact that individual differences in parental attachment persisted during the initial semester. Students who had reduced parent-child interactions scored worse on the adjustment scales and had higher levels of distress (Hiester, Nordstrom & Swenson, 2009). Another study was conducted among 117 freshmen at Tafila Technical University

in Jordan to determine the impact of gender and place of residence on how well freshmen adjusted to life at the institution. The study participants were from different Jordanian neighborhoods. College adjustment measurement with 36 components across four dimensions was used to collect data. The findings were contrary to the present study indicating that male learners were more likely in adjustment patterns than the females (Al-Qaisy, 2010).

Nursing Implications

This study has several implications for University Education, College Administration and Research.

Limitations of the Study

- Data collection period was only for 2 months.
- The response rate was only 56.41% despite reminders.
- Students from Pharmacy and Physiotherapy never responded.
- Study was limited to those in one particular University alone.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to assess the Adaptation of Freshmen to College Life in a Selected University at Ajman, UAE. The adaptation of freshers needs to be given attention as they are undergoing a period of transition from School to University. Helping freshmen adapt to college life is crucial for their overall well-being and academic success. Several strategies like Comprehensive orientation programs, Peer mentoring, Academic support services, Counselling, Fostering inclusivity, Good Communication and Career exploration can be used. Each student is unique, so a combination of these strategies might work best. Hence, it is very important to create an environment where freshmen feel valued, supported, and empowered to succeed in their college journey.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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