ORIGINAL ARTICLE

ASSESSING MAJOR ADJUSTMENT PROBLEMS OF FRESHMAN STUDENTS IN JIMMA UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

The primary purpose of this study was to explore the level and correlates of adjustment problems freshman students are facing in Jimma University. The study utilized three separately designed adjustment measures to collect data from 204 samples selected by multi-stage sampling procedure from the six colleges of the university. The data was analyzed by using both descriptive and inferential statistical methods. The result showed that half (50%) of freshman students in Jimma University experience social adjustment problems than educational and personal-psychological, which were found to be moderate. The study further revealed that female students are more prone to all forms of such adjustment difficulties, particularly of social adjustment difficulties (t (202) = -2.63, p = 0.05) as compared to their male counterparts. Finally, some implications are forwarded to further reinforce similar studies and intervention mechanisms are suggested.

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INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Every year, successful secondary school graduate students move from one place to another to pursue tertiary level education. Students transferring to colleges and universities are increasing as the number and capacity of higher institutions in the country is growing. According to William (2004) with tripled enrollment rate, the system of higher education in Ethiopia is rapidly expanding. Nevertheless, the multiple and complex problems university students facing, especially during the freshman year are not getting attention.

Though several variables have been linked to students drop outs, a great proportion of first year students leave universities as a result of adjustment problems. According to Tinto (1987), (as cited in Justin and Hammer, 2002), out of the total 40% of college and university level students who face adjustment difficulties and fail to get their degrees, 75% of them leave higher learning institutions during their first two years.

In particular to first year university students, attrition rate is found to be higher than those at senior levels. Abebayehu (2000) (as cited in William 2004) affirms that first year dropouts in Ethiopian higher learning institutions have reached 10 to 15 per cent in recent years. It is often associated with "difficulty in adjusting to campus life away from home" (William 2004).

Depending on the context, adjustment has been defined differently by different researchers and writers. Chauhan (1998) for example describes adjustment as "a reaction to the demands and pressures of social environment imposed upon the individual." Benoy (2006) on his part defines adjustment as a positive capacity of an individual which require appreciating reality, harmonizing with the environment and a consistent attempt to change the environment in the way it satisfies personal needs. In this study, adjustment can be understood as a process by which freshman students balance the educational, social and personal psychological demands in acceptable manner while adjustment problem is the failure to meet successfully the three demands which are changing from time to time.

Many researchers (Eg., Bennett and Okinaka, 1990 and Martha, 2003) reveal that almost all freshman level college/university students face some form of adjustment problems during transition to higher level education and several factors have been documented as causes. Besides, the psychological makeup individual students built up during the pre-university period, expectations of campus climate equally contribute to freshman students' adaptation to campus life.

In explaining the interactive effect of both personal and environmental issues, Sandhu (1994) indicated that psychosocial distress caused by maladjustment is associated with intrapersonal issues rooted within self and external factors such as environment and cultural background.

As a consequence of moving to university campuses and decreased social support of their parents and guardians, freshman students may experience feeling of discrimination (Hazel, Catherine and Marvella, 2006) which in turn may also decrease self-esteem, gradually affecting their social adjustment process. Besides, intrapersonal distress as profound sense of loss, sense of inferiority and sense of uncertainty, threat to cultural identity, mistrust, and perceived hatred are among the most prevailing psychological adjustment difficulties of freshman students (Sandhu, 1994).

Such individual factors of adjustment problems can be further exacerbated by unforeseen events. There are many debilitating factors for freshman students from quickly adjusting to the campus culture. Among them, the new values, norms and unexpected standards that are overwhelming (Bennett and Okinaka (1990) as cited in Sylvia, Deborah and Albert, 1996); academic demands, financial problems and homesickness, (Yusuf 1998; Jennifer & Ria K. 2003); and interpersonal stressors associated with communication barriers, culture shock, and different educational expectations (Sandhu, 1994) are the major once.

As a result, most of them may feel incompetent and could face difficulty in coping with life style in universities, which may in turn cause psychological distress including high test anxiety, lower academic self-efficacy and poor time management and use of study resources (Martha, 2003); and in the worst case scenario, students may commit suicide, 'the second leading cause of death' in western colleges and universities (Spincer & Jeffrey, 1995).

Ethiopian university and college level students undergo similar challenges, if not worse. Yusuf (1998), asserts that students continuing higher education encounter 'all kinds of problems', while economic, psychosocial, educational, and health are among the dominant concerns. Specially, newly enrolled students suffer from either multiple or at least one form of the commonly reported problems more frequently than seniors (Yusuf, 1998). Furthermore, students may experience additional problems due to cultural differences and language barriers, in multi-cultural campus society like Jimma University.

In general, research findings in the area of student adjustment process and difficulties indicate that if students are not able to normalize their state of mind to the potential challenges they could face in universities, there is greater chance to refrain from their studies. And the consequences would be distressing. Taking this into consideration, the present study is conducted focusing on some of the dominant adjustment issues freshman students experience in Jimma University.

By focusing on major attributes to adjustment difficulties, the study is believed to have its contribution by suggesting possible remedial strategies and implications to further understand factors that are related to students' multifaceted problems in higher institutions in Ethiopia in general and in Jimma University in particular.

Statements of the Problem

For many students, to continue higher level education is one of the major life changing experiences. At the same time, it usually involves the first prolonged separation from parents, and an opportunity to taste personal responsibilities for meeting life's problems without the benefit of parental authority or guidance.

In colleges and universities, it is generally acknowledged that freshman students are expected to demonstrate academic competence during their first year to continue their study until their graduation. Correspondingly, they are required to successfully adjust to the inevitable transitional academic, social and personal-psychological difficulties almost all of them could experience.

This implies that, in addition to the infrastructural facilitations higher institutions currently accomplish, due attention to the many factors that affect students' educational and personal life areas during their study years needs a serious concern. As a matter of fact it is worth to recognize the practical measures some higher institutions in Ethiopia began to take to alleviate the diverse problems of disadvantaged

students. For example, an Affirmative Action Program (AAP), with its multi-support system is introduced to exclusively assist female students in higher institutions (Yusuf, 1998; Aseresash, Ruth and Kassahun, 2002). Though such essential actions were helpful to encourage the competence of female university students which ultimately contribute to the reduction of attrition rate, the program disregards male students who almost equally experience adjustment complexities in their university life.

Thus, understanding context based extent of the educational, social and personal-psychological adjustment problems of freshman students in university life is both timely and necessary.   Based on this rationale, the study attempted to answer the following basic research questions.

- What is the extent of major adjustment problems freshman students in Jimma University are facing?

- What are the specific correlates associated to the adjustment problems?

- Do male and female students show a significant difference in their adjustment problems?

- What factors contribute to the adjustment problems of freshman student?

- What are the implications and possible measures that could be taken to assist freshman students easily adjust to life in Jimma University?

Objectives of the Study

General Objective

The main objective of the study is to investigate the major adjustment problems of first year students of Jimma University

Specific objectives

- To identify the level of major adjustment problems of first year students in Jimma University.

- To assess the relationship between demographic variables and major adjustment problems of first year students.

- To identify the interdependence of variables related to adjustment process to university life.

- To see whether there is gender difference in freshman students' adjustment to university life.

- To point out some implications and forward possible recommendations so that students get assistance and adjust themselves with university life.

Significance of the Study

The very objective of the study is to identify factors related to adjustment problems of freshman students in Jimma University. The study is significant in a sense that it will find out ways and means in which student support systems could be strengthened, if they already existed, or offer recommendations on how they could be initiated and implemented. Beside this, the following are among the main contributions of the study.

- The identification of students' adjustment problems commonly encountered by freshman students provides the whole picture of the situation.   This in turn allows university administrators, guidance and counselors and student affair offices design appropriate policy and program with varieties of support packages to address the needs of the freshman students.

- Discovery of adjustment problems of freshman students, particularly of those related to academics, will help teachers to design appropriate strategies, in collaboration with respective colleges and departments so that students may be helped.

- It is hoped that the study will provide insight for the university administrators, Ministry of Education and Ministry of Health in general to formulate preventive mechanisms before students join higher education institutions.

- Through dissemination of the research findings, students may recognize their situation and are encouraged to seek more timely assistance and services.

In general, in order for higher institutions to better accommodate the significant number of students, it is crucial to identify and understand the many factors that affect the satisfaction and retention of these students. This study, therefore, is expected to be relevant to students, to the guidance counseling officers, university administrators, teachers, and researchers in the field, policy makers and education and health officials at different levels.

Scope of the Study

This study, as a pilot is delimited to only regular freshman students of Jimma University enrolled in the six colleges in 2009/2010 academic year. The study was also restricted to investigation of major adjustment problems in particular reference to educational, social and personal-psychological variables.

METHOD

Research Design and Sampling

Cross-sectional survey method was applied in order to investigate major adjustment problems of freshman students in Jimma University. To select representative respondents, multi-stage sampling was employed. Primarily, considering the 6 colleges as strata, 1 sample department was randomly selected from each college. Then, sample sections (some freshman classes have two or more sections) under each department were identified in same procedure. Finally, 50 students were randomly selected from a sample section using random number table for the study and the questionnaires were distributed accordingly.

Setting

Jimma University was founded 1983 as Health Science Institute in Ethiopia. However since 1992 it is providing higher level education in many disciplines, which was clustered in to six colleges. These colleges run variety of undergraduate and few post graduate programs leading to the award of degrees, masters and PHD degrees. Furthermore, there is a great initiative to launch postgraduate programs almost in all fields of study.

Participants

In 2009/2010 academic year, Jimma University enrolled 4,449 freshman students. Primarily, it was planned to include a total of 350 participants. However only two hundred four (n=204) participants returned the questionnaires. They were all between the age of 18 and 25, while the mean age was 20.3 year (SD 1.32). In terms of participants' sex composition, there were more male participants than female participants, 170 (83%) and 34(17%) respectively.

Instruments/Measures

The study included measures of socio-demographic characteristics. It utilized a 52 item questionnaire using a 5-point

Likert scale ranging from "Strongly agree" to "Strongly disagree". In addition, it is divided into three principal categories that focus on three aspects of adjustment to college. It includes:

The Educational Adjustment Measure, which covers component of measures of motivation, application, performance and academic environment adopted from The Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire, developed by Baker and Siryk (1989);

Social Adjustment Measures, adopted from two separate scales (Revised Check and Buss Shyness Scale (RCBS) developed by Check and Buss and Loneliness and Social Dissatisfaction Questionnaire, developed by Asher et. Al.,(1984).

Finally, the Personal-psychological Adjustment Measure, adopted from Rosenberg's Self-esteem Scale (1989) and Measures of depression, anxiety and stress were adopted from Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (http://www.psy.unsw.edu.au/Groups/Dass/order.htm) was used to assess students' intra-psychic state including degree of general psychological distress and somatic symptoms of distress experienced during their adjustment period.

After preparing the English version of the instrument, it was also translated into both Amharic and Afan Oromo by language instructors from the respective departments. As a matter of fact, the tools were psychometrically tested instruments, used at many colleges and universities, designed to measure how well students adapt to the college experience, e.g. (Baker and Siryk, 1989) For their validity and reliability two measurement experts from the department of psychology revised the tools and the necessary modifications have been done.

Data Collection Procedure

Data were collected in the following two stages:

- Pilot study

- Main study

The purpose of the pilot study was to assess the relevance of the instruments designed to collect data for the study. Accordingly 30 psychology students of freshman section were randomly selected and responded to the questionnaire.

Before administrating the final instrument for data collection in the selected sections, a short training was given to two research assistants on how to conduct the questionnaire survey. All the respondents were informed about the purpose of the study and on how to complete the questionnaire.

During administrating the questionnaire, respondents were shown a model example that would help them to easily complete the questionnaire. No time limit was made for the completion of the questionnaire. Students were also asked to give their own responses and told that there is no right or wrong answers. Similarly chances for clarification of any item were given during the administration of the questionnaire.

RESULTS

In order to study the major adjustment problems of freshman students, an attempt was made to deal with the following basic research questions:

- What is the extent of major adjustment problems freshman students in Jimma University facing?

- What are the specific correlates associated to the adjustment problems?

- Do male and female students show a significant difference in their adjustment problems?

- What factors contribute to the adjustment problems of freshman student?

- What are the implications and possible measures that could be taken to assist freshman students positively adjust to life in Jimma University?

With the help of three adjustment measures, educational, social and personal psychological adjustments of freshman students were assessed. Based on the data obtained the following findings were obtained:

As it was mentioned previously, 204 questionnaires were found to be suitable for data analysis. One hundred and forty six (146) representing 41% of the total questionnaires were not filled and returned and thus rejected due to incomplete and missing data. The demographic distribution below summarizes respondents' representations from a department under each college.

Table 1: Socio-demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Category	Number (%)
Gender	
Male	170 (83.3)
Female	34(16.7)
Age	
18-20	150(73.5)
21-25	4 (26.5)
Place of Origin	
Rural	118(57.8)
Urban	86(42.2)
Course of Study	
Environmental Health	46(22.5)
Afan Oromo	34(16.7)
Business Management	46(22.5)
Rural Development	34(16.7)
Civil Engineering	27(13.2)
Mathematics	17(8.3)
Choice of study field	
Personal interest	170(83.3)
Peer influence	14(6.9)
Pressure of supporting agents	5(2.5)
Others*	
Family type	
Live with two parents	147(72.1)
Live with mother only	24(11.8)
Live with father only	2(1.0)
Live with step parents	14(6.9)
Live outside family	17(8.3)

*urban area in this study refers to big cities like Addis Ababa, Hawassa, Adama, Mekele, Harar, Bahir Dar,   Gondor, Dire Dawa and few similar towns in the country.

**others: refers to care takers, guardians, institutions, etc.

In the table above, categories of students' representation showed that they were drown from the six faculties. Accordingly, Environmental Health (46 students, 22.5%) from School of Medicine and Public Health; Oromeffa (34 students, 16.7%) from Social Science and Law, Business Management (46 students, 22.5%) from Business and Economics, Rural Development (34 students, 16.7%) from Agriculture and Veterinary Medicine, Civil Engineering (27 students, 13.2%) from Engineering and Mathematics (17 students, 8.3%) from Natural Science were included.

With regards to respondents' place of origin the majority (118/57.8%) of them were from rural while the remaining (86/42.2%) were from urban areas.

In relation to choice of study area, 170 (83.3%) of them indicated that they joined their departments by their own choice while 14(6.9%) respondents mentioned they were influenced by their peers. The remaining 5(2.5%) and 15(7.4%) joined their departments because of some form of influence from significant persons and for any other reason that they didn't know respectively.

Respondents family type show that 147 (72.1%) of them used to live with both parents and 26 (12.8%) were from single parent headed family. In addition, 14 (69%) of the respondents lived with step parents while 17 (8.3%) responded that they were not with their family before they moved to Jimma University.

Table 2 Summarized Levels of Students' Adjustment Problem Scores

Adjustment types	Above average		Below Average		No of Items	Mean
	F	%	F	%		
Total Adjustment Score	98	48	106	52	52	156
Educational Adjustment Score	90	44	114	56	15	45
Social Adjustment Score	102	50	102	50	13	39
Personal Psychological Adjustment Score	98	48	106	52	24	72

To address the first objective of this study, students' adjustment scores were determined by dividing into two categories (a score higher than mean indicating greater difficulty of adjustment, while below average showing lesser manifestation of adjustment problems) based on the suggestions provided by the authors in the manual. The subscales scores were calculated and categorized in the same manner.

Findings in Table 2 indicate that 52% of the respondents' total adjustment problems score were below the average level, while the remaining 48% obtained a high level of total adjustment problems score mainly of social and personal psychological. As for the subscale scores, majority (more than 50%) of the respondents were below the average in educational as well as personal-psychological adjustment problem categories while equal proportions have been found for social adjustment problems score. This shows that most of the respondents have undergone moderate or lower levels of adjustment problems in the three subscale scores as well as the total adjustment, i.e., the composite of the subscales.

Though it does not appear comparatively insignificant, 50% of the

respondents were found to be at higher level for the social adjustment problems which indicated that many subjects in this study were exposed to social and interactional problems in adjusting themselves to campus life. Among the social adjustment problems respondents asked to rate in the 5-point scale, the four dominant issues were: 'I feel inhibited in social situations (M = 3.23)', 'I feel painfully self-conscious when I am around strangers (M = 3.29)', 'I got difficulties in finding true friends in campus (M = 3.18)' and 'I got difficulty to interact with strangers in social gathering situation (M = 3.14).'

Similarly, respondents identified major adjustment difficulties in academic domain, which includes 'having difficulty to concentrate while studying (M = 3.67), 'despite great effort, I feel I scored low grade (M = 3.44), 'I think it is a must to graduate (M = 4.51), and 'most of the time I lose attention while learning in a class (M = 3.93)'.

Finally, the personal-psychological sub-scale has shown three significant adjustment problem areas; 'the courses being given are not interesting (M = 3.15)', 'most of the time I get angry without any reason (M = 3.63)' and 'I wish I have high self-esteem (M = 3.82)'.

In general, the total adjustment and the dimensions of adjustment problems amongst the first year students in this study indicated that they experienced some of the adjustment problems in different levels, social adjustment problem being higher while the total adjustment difficulty indicating lower (Table 2).

Table 3 Means, Standard deviations and T-test for all Adjustment Scores by Gender

Adjustment area	Gender	N	Mean Score	Range		Std. Dev.	Std. Error Mean	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
				Max.	Min.					
Academic adjustment	Male	170	44.06	75	15	7.04	0.54	.136	202	.892
	Female	34	43.88	75	15	6.06	1.04			
Social adjustment	Male	170	37.70	65	13	8.53	0.65	-2.63	202	.009
	Female	34	41.94	65	13	8.92	1.53			
Personal-psychological adjustment	Male	170	64.15	120	24	15.05	1.15	-1.85	202	.065
	Female	34	69.35	120	24	14.49	2.48			
Total adjustment	Male	170	145.90	250	50	25.16	1.93	-1.97	202	.050
	Female	34	155.17	250	50	24.39	4.18			

As can be seen from the above table, except for academic adjustment, mean scores of female participants, 41.94, 69.35 and155.17 for social, personal psychological and total adjustment respectively, are greater than the scores of their male counterparts. It can also be seen from the table that the mean scores of female participants in total adjustment area show a higher proportion.

Initially, a dependent t-test that assumes the dependent variable as continuous to compare only two groups that are randomly selected from a population was conducted to compare the mean scores of adjustment problems for male and female students on the responses of the three sub-scales and the total adjustment score. After preliminary assumption testing was conducted to check for normality and equality of variance with no serious violation, results showed that there is significant difference in the mean social adjustment problem score for male (M = 37.70, SD = 8.53) and female students (M =41.94, SD =8.92), t (202) = -2.63, p = 0.05.

Pearson-r correlation was also employed to determine the relationship between the age of the respondents and their level of adjustment problems in a total adjustment score. The result indicated that there is a weak negative relationship between respondents age and their total adjustment score, r (204) = -0.047, p<0.05. Similarly, Point-biserial correlation coefficient indicate that gender has a negative relationship with total adjustment scores, r (204) = - 0.029, p<0.05.

DISCUSSIONS

For the purpose of assessing the major adjustment problems of freshman students in Jimma University, this study was conducted on 2009/2010 academic year freshman regular students of Jimma University by selecting 204 representative samples from the six colleges. Despite the fact that most freshman students can be affected by multiple personal and environmental challenges, measures of adjustment problems tools used in this study revealed that about half of the study participants experienced at least one form of the common adjustment problems educational, social and personal-psychological.

Among the domains of adjustment problems investigated in this study, social adjustment problem appear to show relative significance as compared to academic and personal-psychological difficulties. Comparison of adjustment problems score revealed that about 50 percent of respondents experienced higher level of social adjustment problem. Contrary to this finding, previous researches done in the university do not reveal similar result. For example, Moges and Amare (2004) concluded that social problems of students in Jimma University are among the least prevalent except that they are mistreated by university staff.

Furthermore, item analysis of responses illustrate that social interaction and establishing quality relationship were the most challenging tasks for the freshman students in campus. Lack of such conducive friendly environment may adversely affect a students' level of college satisfaction in general. However, it is difficult to fully explain the difficulty in sociability as a product of transition to multi-cultural student society in campus. Personality characteristics, which are enduring, may also affect the way students adjust to university life.

Freshman students residential background does not make any difference in the level of adjustment problem they may face in campus. It was also affirmed by other researchers like Bada (2007) indicated that freshman students' adjustment difficulties do not vary for the reason that they were urban or rural dweller before moving to university campus.

Additional analysis done to compare degree of adjustment problems between male and female respondents in general indicate that female students are more challenged by all forms of adjustment (total adjustment) than

males in general and social adjustment problem in particular. Previous studies also identified similar results. In his study on 117 freshman university students in Jordan, Lama (2010) reported that there is a great tendency for female students to experience adjustment problems more than males. This finding implies that male freshman students better adjusted in total adjustment in campus as compared to female students.

While this is the fact, the correlation between the total adjustment problems and two demographic variables (age and gender) have found to be not significant at $p < 0.05$. However, it seems possible to imply that gender could be a predictor of overall adjustment to university life. In this study, it is clear that there was a significant gender imbalance indicating only thirty-four (16.7%) female participants took part and perhaps if there had been a larger sample the results might have been different.

Generally, difficulties adjusting to campus life style affect female students' academic performance in one way or another contributing to increment of female attrition rate in Jimma University. A five year retrospective analysis done by Adula, and colleagues (2007) pointed out that male-female attrition rate ratio in Jimma University reached 1:2, which requires further investigation.

Conclusion and Implications

The study has highlighted the major adjustment problems freshman students are experiencing and identified some correlates influencing the problems. The four major adjustment areas; educational, social, personal-psychological as well as total adjustment scores indicated that respondents of the study faced moderate level adjustment difficulties in Jimma University. The social adjustment dimension is found to be more prevalent than others while female students were highly challenged as compared to males. Level of respondents' interest and

academic adjustment has shown interdependence. On the contrary, students' pre-university residential place and age did not contribute to their adjustment process in the four dimensions.

Based on the findings of this study, several areas of research can be implicated. First, longitudinal studies can be done to clearly identify what determines the level/severity of different forms of adjustment problems on individuals. Furthermore, prior coping mechanisms individual students use may point out factors that are associated with adjustment difficulties and areas of interventions needed. Finally, additional researches using larger samples, gender balanced, diverse background and relevant variables including physical, health and financial issues may yield fruitful indicators of concerns in the area.

Recommendations

Having the major findings of the study as a premise, the following recommendations are forwarded;

☞ Freshman students' orientation program should not be limited to presenting available fields of studies. General information on perceived academic, social and cultural issues in campus environment should be provided in order to make students transition smooth.

☞ Available resources and services must be explained clearly so that students can easily benefit from them. Distribution of printed materials can be a good source of support for students.

☞ Increasing positive staff-student interaction facilitates adaptation by reducing social adjustment difficulties.

☞ Enhancing the qualities of student services including sports and entertainment centers with fair price can make the campus environment conducive for healthy social interactions.

Limitations of the Study: The findings of the study are based on the problems investigated in Jimma University. Thus, generalizations or conclusions may be limited to the study setting.

Despite the fact that freshman students face many challenges, the scope of the present study can not be implicated beyond the three adjustment difficulties.

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