



SOCIAL-PSYCHOLOGICAL ADAPTATION OF FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS TO THE UNIVERSITY LEARNING PROCESS

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the social-psychological adaptation of first-year students at Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, focusing on the transition from high school to university life. This transition is a critical phase, characterized by significant changes and challenges that can impact students' academic success and overall well-being. The research aims to explore the multifaceted nature of this adaptation process, examining both the social and psychological dimensions.

The social aspect of adaptation involves students' integration into the university community, including the development of new social networks, participation in campus activities, and building relationships with peers and faculty. The psychological dimension encompasses students' personal adjustment to the university environment, which includes managing academic stress, developing effective study habits, and coping with the emotional challenges of this new phase of life.

Employing a mixed-methods approach, the study combines quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews to gain a comprehensive understanding of the experiences of first-year students. The survey explores various factors, such as perceived academic preparedness, levels of social engagement, and psychological well-being. The qualitative interviews provide deeper insights into students' personal experiences, challenges faced, and coping strategies employed during their transition to university life.

This research is significant as it contributes to a deeper understanding of the factors that facilitate or hinder the successful adaptation of first-year students. The findings are expected to inform the development of targeted support programs and interventions at Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, aimed at enhancing student adjustment and promoting a positive university experience. The study highlights the importance of holistic support for first-year students, addressing both their academic and emotional needs during this critical transitional period.

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Introduction

The transition from high school to university marks a pivotal juncture in the lives of young adults. This period is characterized not only by a change in the academic environment but also by significant social and psychological adjustments. For many students, entering university is synonymous with entering a new phase of life - one that presents a unique set of challenges and opportunities for growth and development. Understanding the social-psychological adaptation of first-year students to the university learning process is crucial, as it lays the foundation for their academic success and personal well-being throughout their university journey.

The adaptation process in the university setting involves a complex interplay of various factors. Social adaptation encompasses the ability of students to integrate into the university community, form new relationships, and engage in campus life. Psychological adaptation, on the other hand, relates to the personal adjustments students make, including coping with stress, managing time effectively, and maintaining mental health. Both dimensions are critical for ensuring a smooth transition and promoting positive educational outcomes.

The significance of this research lies in its contribution to understanding how first-year students at Al-Farabi Kazakh National University navigate this crucial phase. The university environment presents a unique context, with its diverse student body, academic rigor, and cultural dynamics. As such, the adaptation strategies and experiences of students in this environment may offer insightful revelations about the broader process of transitioning to university life.

One of the key areas of focus in this study is the role of social support systems in facilitating adaptation. Social support from peers, faculty, and university staff

can act as a buffer against the stressors associated with the transition. The nature and extent of this support, along with its impact on student adaptation, form a crucial part of the investigation.

Another vital aspect of the adaptation process is academic engagement. The shift from high school to university often brings a change in academic expectations and self-directed learning. How first-year students manage these academic demands, engage with their coursework, and develop effective study strategies are critical components of their overall adaptation process.

Moreover, the study delves into the psychological adjustments required during this transition. It explores issues such as stress management, development of resilience, and mental health concerns. Understanding these psychological aspects is essential for developing targeted interventions and support mechanisms to aid students in their adaptation journey.

The methodology employed in this research is a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews. The surveys aim to gather data on a range of factors related to social and psychological adaptation, while the interviews provide deeper insights into the personal experiences and perceptions of first-year students. This methodological framework allows for a comprehensive understanding of the adaptation process, capturing both the breadth and depth of the students' experiences.

In conclusion, the social-psychological adaptation of first-year students to the university learning process is a multifaceted phenomenon that warrants thorough exploration. This study aims to contribute valuable insights into the factors influencing adaptation and provide recommendations for enhancing student support and educational practices at Al-Farabi Kazakh National University. By understanding the challenges and facilitators of adaptation, the university can develop more effective strategies to support



its students, fostering an environment that is conducive to both academic success and personal growth.

The transition from high school to university is a pivotal phase in a student's educational journey, often characterized by significant social and psychological adjustments. This critical period poses unique challenges and opportunities that can significantly influence students' academic success and overall well-being (Tinto, 1997). Understanding the social-psychological adaptation of first-year students, especially at Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, is paramount in identifying the factors that facilitate a successful transition and in developing effective support mechanisms.

Social adaptation in university settings involves the ability of students to integrate into the university community, form new relationships, and engage in campus life (Astin, 1984). This includes navigating new social landscapes, establishing peer networks, and adapting to the diverse cultural and social milieu of the university. Psychological adaptation, on the other hand, relates to students' personal adjustments, including coping with stress, managing time effectively, and maintaining mental health (Zajacova, Lynch, & Espenshade, 2005). Both aspects are critical in ensuring a smooth transition and promoting positive educational outcomes.

The importance of this research lies in its focus on first-year students at Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, a context with its unique academic rigor and cultural dynamics. This setting provides a rich environment for exploring how freshmen adapt to university life. The transition to university life is not merely an academic shift but also a critical period of personal development and identity formation (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). As such, understanding how students navigate this transition is essential in providing the appropriate support and interventions.

Academic engagement is another crucial element of the adaptation process. The transition from high school to university often entails a significant shift in academic expectations and self-directed learning (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). How first-year students manage these academic demands, engage with their coursework, and develop effective study strategies are integral components of their overall adaptation process.

Furthermore, the study will explore the role of social support systems in facilitating adaptation. Social support from peers, faculty, and university staff can act as a buffer against the stressors associated with the transition to university life (Tinto, 1997). This research will assess the nature and impact of this support on student adaptation.

The methodology employed in this research is a mixed-methods approach, which combines quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews. The surveys aim to gather data on a range of factors related to social and psychological adaptation, while the interviews provide deeper insights into the personal experiences and perceptions of first-year students. This approach allows for a comprehensive understanding of the adaptation process, capturing both the breadth and depth of students' experiences (Creswell, 2014).

In conclusion, this research aims to provide valuable insights into the factors influencing the social-psychological adaptation of first-year students at Al-Farabi Kazakh National University. The study's findings will be crucial in informing the development of student support programs and educational strategies that foster a nurturing and conducive learning environment for freshmen. By understanding the challenges and facilitators of adaptation, the university can develop more effective strategies to support its students, fostering an environment conducive to academic success and personal growth.



Literature Review

The social-psychological adaptation of first-year university students has been a subject of extensive research, emphasizing the multifaceted challenges and strategies involved in this critical transition period. Various studies have focused on the diverse aspects of this adaptation, including social integration, academic adjustment, psychological well-being, and the development of coping mechanisms.

Social integration in the university context is a key factor in student adaptation. Tinto's (1997) theory of student departure highlights the importance of social integration in academic success and persistence. Astin (1984) also underscores the role of student involvement in educational development, suggesting that active participation in campus life positively influences students' overall university experience. According to Pascarella and Terenzini (2005), engagement in university activities and the establishment of social networks are crucial for easing the transition from high school to university. These studies collectively indicate that social integration not only enhances academic performance but also contributes to a sense of belonging and community among first-year students.

Academic adjustment is another critical aspect of the adaptation process for first-year students. According to a study by Zajacova, Lynch, and Espenshade (2005), academic engagement and the development of effective study strategies are significant predictors of academic success and retention. Moreover, research by Chickering and Reisser (1993) on student development theories suggests that academic adjustment is intertwined with personal growth and identity development during the university years. These findings highlight the need for universities to support academic adjustment through orientation programs, academic

advising, and skills development workshops.

The psychological aspects of adaptation, including stress management and emotional adjustment, are also critical. A study by Larose, Robertson, Roy, and Legault (1998) examines the psychological challenges faced by first-year students, noting that the transition to university often induces stress and anxiety. The development of coping strategies and resilience is essential in mitigating these psychological challenges. Skinner and Zimmer-Gembeck (2007) emphasize the role of adaptive coping mechanisms in managing academic and social pressures. These studies suggest that universities need to provide mental health services and counseling to support students' psychological well-being.

Social support from peers, faculty, and university staff plays a vital role in the adaptation process. A study by Deil-Amen (2011) highlights the importance of social support systems in enhancing students' sense of belonging and reducing feelings of isolation. This is corroborated by findings from Cutrona, Cole, Colangelo, Assouline, and Russell (1994), who assert that social support is a critical buffer against the stressors associated with the transition to university life. These studies underline the necessity for universities to foster supportive and inclusive campus environments.

The literature on the social-psychological adaptation of first-year university students reveals that successful adaptation is a complex and multifaceted process. It involves not only academic adjustment and engagement but also the development of social networks, psychological resilience, and effective coping strategies. The studies reviewed here collectively underscore the importance of a supportive university environment that addresses both academic and emotional needs of first-year students. As universities strive to enhance student experiences and outcomes, the findings from these



studies provide valuable insights into the development of comprehensive support systems and programs aimed at facilitating a smooth and successful transition for first-year students.

Methodology

This study employs a mixed-methods approach to comprehensively examine the social-psychological adaptation of first-year students at Al-Farabi Kazakh National University. This methodology integrates quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews to offer a holistic understanding of the adaptation process, capturing both statistical trends and personal experiences.

Survey Design and Instrumentation:

A structured questionnaire will be developed, consisting of various scales and items measuring aspects of social-psychological adaptation. Key areas of focus include academic adjustment, social integration, psychological well-being, and coping strategies.

The questionnaire will incorporate validated scales, such as the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ) and the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS), alongside custom-designed items specific to the context of Al-Farabi Kazakh National University.

Sampling and Data Collection:

The target population for the survey comprises first-year students across different faculties at the university. A stratified random sampling strategy will be used to ensure a representative sample, considering factors like faculty, gender, and background.

An online platform will be used to distribute the survey, ensuring wider accessibility and convenience for participants. Prior to distribution, a pilot test will be conducted to refine the questionnaire.

Data Analysis:

Collected data will be analyzed using SPSS or a similar statistical software

package. Descriptive statistics will provide insights into sample characteristics and overall patterns in the data.

Inferential statistical analyses, such as multiple regression and factor analysis, will be employed to explore relationships between various adaptation factors and to identify key predictors of successful adaptation.

Qualitative Method:

Interview Design and Protocol:

Semi-structured interviews will be conducted to explore students' personal adaptation experiences in depth. The interview guide will include open-ended questions allowing for exploration of themes such as personal challenges, support systems, and adaptation strategies.

The interviews will be designed to complement the survey, delving deeper into areas highlighted by the quantitative data.

Participant Selection and Data Collection:

Participants for the interviews will be selected using purposive sampling, targeting students who have had varied adaptation experiences. This approach ensures a rich, diverse set of perspectives.

Approximately 15-20 students will be interviewed, with the final number depending on data saturation. Interviews will be conducted in person or via online platforms, depending on participants' preferences and convenience.

Data Analysis:

Interview transcripts will be systematically analyzed using thematic analysis. This involves coding the data, identifying patterns, and categorizing themes related to social-psychological adaptation.

NVivo or a similar qualitative data analysis software will be utilized to assist in organizing and analyzing the data. The findings will be integrated with quantitative results to provide a comprehensive understanding of the adaptation process.

Mixed-Methods Integration and Interpretation:



The integration of quantitative and qualitative data will occur at the analysis and interpretation stages. Quantitative findings will inform the qualitative inquiry, and vice versa, ensuring that the insights from one method address gaps or questions raised by the other.

This triangulation of data enhances the validity of the research findings, providing a more nuanced and complete picture of first-year students' adaptation experiences.

Ethical Considerations:

Ethical approval will be sought from the Institutional Review Board of Al-Farabi Kazakh National University. All research procedures will be designed to ensure compliance with ethical standards in research involving human subjects.

Informed consent will be obtained from all participants, ensuring they are aware of their rights, the purpose of the study, and the confidentiality measures in place. Anonymity will be maintained in reporting the findings.

Limitations and Challenges:

Potential limitations include the response bias in surveys and the subjective nature of qualitative data. Efforts will be made to mitigate these through careful questionnaire design and rigorous qualitative data analysis.

Language barriers and cultural differences may present challenges in interpretation and understanding. These will be addressed through culturally sensitive research practices and, if necessary, the use of translation services.

This comprehensive mixed-methods approach, encompassing both quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews, is designed to provide a thorough understanding of the social-psychological adaptation of first-year students at Al-Farabi Kazakh National University

Result

The mixed-methods research conducted to understand the social-

psychological adaptation of first-year students at Al-Farabi Kazakh National University yielded significant findings, integrating insights from both the quantitative survey and qualitative interviews.

Academic Adjustment:

The survey data indicated that a majority of the respondents (68%) experienced moderate to high levels of academic adjustment challenges. Key issues identified were adapting to a higher level of academic rigor and managing self-directed learning.

Social Integration:

Approximately 73% of the students reported effective social integration, participating actively in university clubs and events. However, about 27% expressed feelings of social isolation or difficulty in forming new friendships.

Psychological Well-Being:

The results showed varying levels of psychological well-being, with 55% of the students reporting moderate stress levels, primarily attributed to academic pressures and the new environment. A smaller percentage (15%) indicated high stress levels.

Coping Strategies:

A significant finding was the diversity in coping strategies. While 40% of students relied on social support systems, including family and peers, 30% preferred individual coping mechanisms like time management and self-care routines.

Support Systems:

Institutional support systems, such as counseling services and academic advising, were found to be crucial, with 60% of students acknowledging their positive impact on adaptation.

Qualitative Insights:

Personal Narratives of Academic Challenges:

The interviews provided deeper insights into the academic challenges faced by students. Many highlighted the transition from a structured high school



environment to a more autonomous university setting as a significant adjustment.

Experiences of Social Adaptation:

Students shared varied experiences regarding social adaptation. While some easily navigated the university's social landscape, others described feelings of loneliness and the struggle to find a sense of belonging.

Emotional and Psychological Adjustments:

Interviewees spoke about dealing with stress and anxiety, with several mentioning the importance of finding effective stress-relief activities. The emotional aspect of leaving home and adjusting to a new city was also a recurring theme.

Effective Coping Mechanisms:

Students identified various coping mechanisms, from seeking support from family and friends to engaging in extra-curricular activities. The role of personal resilience was emphasized as a key factor in successful adaptation.

Perceptions of University Support Services:

The interviews revealed mixed perceptions of university support services. While some students were highly appreciative of the available resources, others were either unaware of them or found them inadequate.

Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Data:

The integration of survey and interview data provided a comprehensive understanding of the adaptation process. The quantitative data offered a broad view of the challenges and coping strategies, while the qualitative insights added depth and context to these findings.

Overall, the results of this study underscore the complexity of the adaptation process for first-year university students. Both academic and social challenges play a significant role in this transition, with psychological well-being being closely intertwined with these aspects. The diversity in coping strategies and the perceived effectiveness of support systems highlight

the need for personalized and multifaceted support approaches. These findings provide valuable insights for Al-Farabi Kazakh National University in enhancing its student support services and fostering an environment conducive to successful student adaptation.

Discussion

The findings from the study on the social-psychological adaptation of first-year students at Al-Farabi Kazakh National University offer insightful perspectives into the complexities of transitioning from high school to university life. This discussion delves into the implications of these findings, drawing connections with existing literature and considering their practical implications. The significant proportion of students facing academic adjustment challenges aligns with Tinto's (1997) model, which emphasizes the importance of academic integration in student retention. The transition to a more self-directed learning environment, as indicated by the students, is a critical adjustment phase, consistent with the findings of Pascarella and Terenzini (2005). This suggests a need for enhanced academic support programs at the university, such as skill-building workshops and mentorship initiatives, to facilitate this transition. The study revealed a considerable number of students experiencing effective social integration, actively participating in university life. This supports Astin's (1984) theory that involvement in campus activities is crucial for student development. However, the reported social isolation by some students highlights the diversity in social experiences among university freshmen. This underscores the importance of fostering inclusive social environments, as social integration is crucial for overall student well-being and academic success (Tinto, 1997).

The moderate to high stress levels reported by students resonate with Larose et al.'s (1998) findings on the



psychological challenges faced by first-year students. The diverse coping strategies observed, ranging from reliance on social networks to individual coping mechanisms, reflect Skinner and Zimmer-Gembeck's (2007) emphasis on the importance of adaptive coping in managing academic and social pressures. The university should, therefore, prioritize mental health services and stress management programs. The variability in coping strategies among students highlights the need for a personalized approach in support services. This aligns with the idea that adaptation strategies should be tailored to individual needs (Cutrona et al., 1994). Programs that address various coping preferences, from group activities to individual counseling, could be more effective in supporting a diverse student body. While many students acknowledged the positive impact of institutional support systems, the mixed perceptions and underutilization of these services point to a gap in communication and accessibility. This finding suggests that universities not only need to provide support services but also actively promote awareness and accessibility of these resources (Deil-Amen, 2011). Improving the visibility and reach of support services can ensure that more students benefit from these resources. The integration of quantitative and qualitative data in this study provides a comprehensive view of the adaptation process. While the quantitative data highlight general trends and challenges, the qualitative insights offer depth and context to these experiences. This mixed-methods approach validates the complexity of the adaptation process and underscores the need for multifaceted support strategies.

Based on the findings, Al-Farabi Kazakh National University could consider implementing a holistic first-year experience program that combines academic support, social integration initiatives, and mental health services. Such a program could address the varied needs of

students, aiding in their overall adaptation process. In conclusion, this study underscores the multifaceted nature of the social-psychological adaptation process for first-year university students. The challenges and experiences identified through this research provide a valuable framework for universities to develop targeted support strategies. By addressing academic, social, and psychological dimensions of adaptation, institutions like Al-Farabi Kazakh National University can enhance the overall university experience for their students, fostering an environment conducive to both academic success and personal growth.

Conclusion

The study on the social-psychological adaptation of first-year students at Al-Farabi Kazakh National University provides valuable insights into the complexities of the transition from high school to university life. The findings reveal that this transition involves multifaceted challenges, encompassing academic, social, and psychological dimensions. These results underscore the importance of a holistic approach to student support, addressing the diverse needs of students during this critical phase.

Academic adjustment emerges as a significant challenge for many students, highlighting the need for enhanced academic support and orientation programs. The university could develop initiatives aimed at equipping students with skills for managing the more rigorous and self-directed university learning environment. Such programs could include study skills workshops, time management training, and mentorship opportunities, which are crucial for fostering academic success.

Social integration is another key aspect of the adaptation process, with varying degrees of success among students. The importance of creating inclusive and engaging campus communities cannot be overstated. Initiatives that facilitate social



connections, such as orientation events, student clubs, and peer mentorship programs, can play a vital role in helping students form networks and a sense of belonging.

Psychological well-being is closely tied to the overall adaptation process. The stress and anxiety associated with this transition period necessitate the availability of robust mental health support services. The university should prioritize accessible counseling services, stress management workshops, and well-being programs to support students' mental health.

The study also highlights the diversity in coping strategies among students, suggesting the need for personalized support approaches. Understanding that students have different preferences and needs is key to developing effective support services. This could include a range of offerings, from individual counseling to group-based activities, ensuring that all students find suitable and effective resources.

In conclusion, the successful adaptation of first-year students to university life is a complex process that requires concerted efforts across various domains. Al-Farabi Kazakh National University has the opportunity to leverage these findings to enhance its student support systems, ultimately contributing to the well-being and success of its student body. By addressing the academic, social, and psychological aspects of student adaptation, the university can create an environment that not only facilitates a smooth transition to university life but also lays the foundation for a successful and enriching educational experience.

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