# Assessing Major Adjustment Problems of First Year Students in Ethiopia, Wolaita Sodo University

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**Abstract** The main objective of the study was to assess the adjustment problems and to determine the relationship between the overall campus adjustment and academic achievement of first year students at wolaita Sodo University. The population was 1873 first year students accepted to the university in regular programme in the year 2012/13. Among these, 250 (175 male and 75 female) students were selected using multi-stage sampling technique and involved in the study. The data were collected using questionnaires and interview guidelines. The questionnaires were adapted from the already existing tools, but the interview guide was locally developed based on literature in the area. For analysis, both qualitative and quantitative methods were employed. The qualitative data depicted that the students were challenged by adjustment problems from four basic dimensions. These adjustment problem dimensions were academic, social, personal-emotional and institutional attachment dimensions. Quantitative analysis findings showed that students' overall campus adjustment was at moderate level and male students were found to be better adjusted compared to female students. According to the results of the study there was statistically significant positive relationship between students' adjustment and their academic achievement. Academic adjustment became the first predictor of the students' academic performance and followed by the personal-emotional adjustment.

*Keywords: adjustment, first year students*

**Cite This Article:** Aklilu Ayele, "Assessing Major Adjustment Problems of First Year Students in Ethiopia, Wolaita Sodo University." *American Journal of Educational Research*, vol. 6, no. 9 (2018): 1326-1332. doi: 10.12691/education-6-9-13.

## 1. Introduction

The first year of university life is most of the time perceived as overwhelming and stressful time in four aspects of students adjustments in university life such as for social, academic, institutional attachment and personal-emotional adjustment. At this time, first-year students experience a lot of social difficulties (e. g. moving away from their primary support systems-parents) and intellectual challenges (e.g., more demanding course work or heavy work load). In addition, to the above mentioned factors freshman life can be filled with emotional stressors such as loneliness, home sickness, grief, confusion and uncertainty all related to break from their primary attachment figures-parents and or other loved ones [1].

Adjustment is a psychological concept that refers to the behavior that permits people to meet the demands of the environment [2]. A university is a new environment that triggers different reactions among first year students. Thus, life at university for the first year can be exciting and challenging [3]. On the other hand, the student has to reconstruct his or her personal relations in a new environment and this often causes mental and physical distress [4]. The university terrain is drastically different

from that of the secondary school in which the students had been attending their education before they joined the campus. Students get anxious as they adjust to academic, social, personal and lifestyle challenges that the university presents [5]. It is not surprising that today, it is widely recognized that high school graduation is not sufficient to prepare students for academic and social independence at university. This is a cause of concern as adjustment to the university environment is regarded as an important factor in predicting university outcomes and the students' academic performance in their campus life [6].

Attending college or university is considered to be a very exciting experience that could give satisfaction to students. However, there are many students who are unable to complete their studies due to adjustment difficulties students' encounter during their freshman campus life. A study conducted by Tinto [7] showed that 40% of all students in America who started out in a four year college failed to earn a degree; and nearly 57% of all dropouts left before the start of their second year. Another study conducted by Kidwell, K. S. [8]. Understanding the college first-year experience. The Clearing House, 78(6), 253-255. on the persistence to graduate amongst 944 undergraduate students in a Canadian university reported that within six years, 57.9% of the students had graduated, 9% remained enrolled, and 33.1% were neither enrolled

nor graduated. Research conducted showed that this failure was caused by adjustment difficulties [9].

According to Smith and Renk [10], the combination of many stressors of university life, such as planning for the future, struggling with exams and assignments, coping with demands and challenging professors, deciding on a major, and transitioning into financial and emotional independence, can be an overwhelming experience for many students. Hence, almost all new students go through an adjustment phase upon entry to a university with each student varied in his or her own pace of development (Blimling and Miltenberger, cited in [11]). Past researches also showed that adjustment difficulties are found to be the most common problems among first year students who are going through an active adjustment phase in universities [12]. Many previous studies for example: Aldwin, C. M. & Revenson, T. A. [13] indicated four aspects of adjustment to college. These are; academic adjustment (dealing with various educational demands of the college), social adjustment (interacting and forming relationships with peers and staff), personal-emotional adjustment (sense of psychological and physiological well being, feeling of calm and stable) and institutional attachment (feeling about the institution and satisfaction with the institution). All these aspects require changes in roles, relationships, academic and social demands [14].

According to Yusuf [15] Ethiopian university and college level students also pass through same difficulties and challenges during their freshman university life. Yusuf [16] asserts that students continuing higher education experience with different kinds of challenges 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. Furthermore, students may experience additional problems due to cultural differences and language barriers, in multicultural campus society like wolaita Sodo University. In general, research findings in the area of student adjustment process and difficulties indicated that if students are unable to adapt to the challenges they could face in university, there is greater chance to refrain from their studies. And the result would be more deplorable [17].

Concerning with different challenges that students are supposed to adjust to, it would be desirable to assess the students" alternative coping strategies. Help seeking, a form of coping strategy that relies on other people, is defined as communicating with other people to obtain help in terms of understanding, advice, information, treatment, and general support in response to a problem or distressing experiences Letseka, M. [18] With regard to the intentions of help seeking Lemmens, J. [19] wrote that some people seek professional help when they are dissatisfied with themselves or because of concern expressed by family members, friends or co-workers.

# 2. Present Study

Different from the previous studies, this study assessed four university adjustment dimensions specifically (Academic, Social, Personal-Emotional and Institutional Attachment) but most of the previous studies incorporated three dimensions of campus adjustment under their assessment. The relationship between students' campus adjustment and their academic achievement was another variable which has not been assessed by many previous studies but assessed under this study.

Following questions were forwarded by the current researcher to be answered at the end of the study:

- What was the level of major adjustment problems of freshman students in wolaita Sodo University?
- Was there statistically significant difference between male and female students in their university adjustment?
- What was the relationship between students' campus adjustment and their academic achievement?

# 3. Methods

The specific research design applied in this study was a cross sectional survey with both quantitative and qualitative approach. The purpose of cross sectional surveys, according to Ezeani [20], is to collect detailed and factual information that describes an existing phenomenon. Therefore, survey research design was used in order to collect sufficient data and achieve the purpose of this particular study: assessing major adjustment problems of freshman students at Wolaita Sodo University).

## 3.1. Participants

Participants of the study were wolaita sodo university first year students who were enrolled in the University programs in 2012/13 academic year in six colleges of the university. These six colleges are: College of Natural Science, College of Business and Economics, College of Social Science, College of Engineering, College of Health and College of Agriculture. All colleges contain minimum of four and maximum of six departments under it. Under each department there are minimum of two and maximum of four sections and each section has also minimum of 70 and maximum of 83 students. To select representative respondents, multi-stage sampling technique was employed. Primarily, considering the 6 colleges as strata, 1 sample department was randomly selected from each college. From each randomly selected department the researcher determined the sample size of this research by using the stratified random sampling technique. To determine the sample size by strata from each stratum the researcher uses the following formula.

$$n_k = \left( \frac{n}{N} \right) N_k$$

Where: $n_k$ = the sample size for $k^{th}$ strata
$N_k$ = the population size of the $k^{th}$ strata
N  = the total population size
n = the total sample size

**The Departments Taken from each College to Represent the Six Colleges of the University (Departments Internally)**

| Strata/Departments/ | Strata size | Sample size by strata |
|---|---|---|
| College of Natural science /Biology/ | $322 = N_1$ | $43 = n_1$ |
| College of Health /Health officer (HO)/ | $287 = N_2$ | $38 = n_2$ |
| College of Social science /Psychology/ | $296 = N_3$ | $40 = n_3$ |
| College of Engineering /Civil Engineering/ | $331 = N_4$ | $44 = n_4$ |
| College of business and Economics /Economics/ | $316 = N_5$ | $42 = n_5$ |
| College of Agriculture/ Rural development/ | $321 = N_6$ | $43 = n_6$ |
| Total | $1873 = N$ | $250 = n$ |

## 3.2. Variables

This study had the following main variables: major adjustment problems which include (social, academic, personal-emotional and institutional attachment) and academic achievement of the students.

## 3.3. Instruments

The adjustment measure employed in this study was the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire /SACQ/ constructed by Baker and Siryk [14]. SACQ consists of 67 self-rating responses.

## 3.4. Procedures

The researcher collected the data by using two mechanisms: pilot study and main study. The main intention of pilot test was to consider the reliability of the data collection instruments to gather data for the main study. To collect data for the pilot study 75 sociology students of first year were randomly selected to respond to the questionnaire. The researcher was give training for the 2 data collectors/research assistants/ about the data collection procedure. The research participants were informed about the purpose of the study, confidentiality issue, as their information would only be used for the study and the way how to fill the questionnaire. The research participants were also shown a model example that would help them to properly complete the questionnaire during the questionnaire administration. The participants were told by the data collectors as there is no time limit for the completion of the questionnaire. The students were politely asked by the research assistants to fill their own responses and that there were no correct or incorrect answers. If any clarification needed on any item, the research assistants were ready to give clarification to the participants during the administration of the questionnaire.

## 3.5. Data Analysis

Data obtained from both questionnaire and interview was analyzed in line with the research objectives. To analyze the collected data, both descriptive and inferential statistics were used. Mean, standard deviation and Pearson product moment correlation were applied. Inferential statistics such as analysis of mean comparison (t-test,) was computed to investigate the differences between male and female students in their adjustment in this study. A multiple regression analysis was conducted to determine the amount of variance in academic achievement explained by university adjustment.

Pearson product moment was conducted to determine the relationship between students' overall campus adjustment and their academic achievement.

Descriptive statistics such as percentage and frequency was used to find out the level of major adjustment problems of first year students in wolaita sodo University. All the analysis was conducted using SPSS software version 16. In the study, to determine the statistical significance of the mean difference, 0.05 levels of significance was used and t-test values were presented in the mean and SD format.

## 3.6. Ethical Issues Considered during the Study

Prior to commencement of the study, permission to conduct the study was obtained from the university. In addition, informed consent was obtained from the respondents. Respondents gave their assent after the purpose of the study was clearly explained to them. To preserve the anonymity of the respondents, their actual names were neither used nor recorded. Based on their agreement, the purpose of the study was clarified, confidentiality was assured and they were told that they can withdraw from the research at any time they want. Finally, time and place were arranged in advance. Thus, participants were made to fill out the questionnaire in the same room out of regular class schedule, without time pressure.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Scio-Demographic Data of the Participants

This section presents the data obtained from the research questionnaire about the Scio-demographic data of the research respondents. The result obtained is presented in Table 1 below.

The presented data in Table 1 shows Scio-demographic characteristics of the research respondents. According to the table, of the total 250 respondents, 175 (70%) were male students and the remaining 75 (30%) were female. Participants of this study were selected from six different colleges of the wolaita Sodo University. From each college one department was randomly selected and from each department again sample size of the study was determined by using stratified random sampling formula.

**Table 1. Demographic Data of the Research Participants**

| Characteristics | | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Department** | Biology | 46 | 18.4 % |
| | Economics | 44 | 17.6 % |
| | Psychology | 35 | 14 % |
| | Rural development | 45 | 18 % |
| | Health officer | 32 | 12.8 % |
| | Civil Engineering | 48 | 19.2 % |
| **Age** | Below 20 | 105 | 42 % |
| | 21-25 | 85 | 34 % |
| | Above 25 | 60 | 24 % |
| **Gender** | M | 175 | 70 % |
| | F | 75 | 30 % |

## 4.2. Adjustment problems of respondents

The result presented in the table above 2 shows that 71.2 % of wolaita Sodo freshman students overall adjustment was at moderate level and in other side only 3.2 % of the students and the remaining 25.6 % of the total participants found to be in high and low adjustment level respectively for their overall adjustment. According to the data collected and analyzed regarding to the four different areas of adjustment, majority of the (more than 53%) participants were under moderate category. In the other hand it means that most of the students in this university had moderate adjustment level in four areas of adjustment. But 43.2 % of the subjects were found to be at low level for their personal-emotional adjustment scale. This showed that most of the respondents in this study had been experiencing psychological and somatic problems in adjusting themselves to campus life.

## 4.3. Respondents Mean Scores in Their Four Adjustment Dimensions

The result obtained from the research questionnaire about the respondents mean scores in their four adjustment dimensions is presented in this section. The researcher used descriptive statistics to assess the research participants mean result in their four areas of the campus adjustment during their freshman campus life. The result obtained is presented in table 3 below.

The collected data was analyzed and interpreted to compare students' adjustment in four dimensions of university adjustment. According to the presented data in the table 3, wolaita sodo freshman students are achieved highest level of adjustment in institutional adjustment (M= 6.35, SD= 0.75). Students achieved second highest adjustment level in social adjustment dimension (M= 6.09, SD= 0.89) next to institutional adjustment, academic adjustment (M=5.72, SD=0.91) and personal-emotional adjustment (M= 4.95, SD= 1.36). According to the presented data in table 3, students are not well adjusted /achieved least adjustment/ in personal-emotional dimension among other three dimensions of adjustment. Personal-emotional dimension of adjustment involves 14 items among the whole 67 items of adjustment questionnaire. Among these 14 items the specific problems in this dimension were identified based on the 14 items under this dimension.

## 4.4. Gender and Adjustment Problems among Respondents

**Table 2. Participants' Adjustment Level in Four Areas of Adjustment Dimensions**

| variable | High | | | moderate | | | Low | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Score | F | % | Score | f | % | Score | f | % |
| Overall Adjustment | 488 &above | 8 | 3.2 | 361-348 | 178 | 71.2 | 360 &below | 64 | 25.6 |
| Academic Adjustment | 173& above | 15 | 6 | 122-172 | 165 | 66 | 121 &below | 70 | 28 |
| Social adjustment | 156& above | 4 | 1.6 | 104-155 | 206 | 82.4 | 103 &below | 40 | 16 |
| Personal-emotional adjustment | 111& above | 8 | 3.2 | 71-110 | 134 | 53.6 | 70 & below | 108 | 43.2 |
| Institutional Attachment | 125& above | 2 | 0.8 | 84-124 | 210 | 84 | 83 & below | 38 | 15.2 |

N =250, f: frequency.

**Table 3. Respondents Mean Scores in their Four Adjustment Dimensions**

| Variable | M | SD |
|---|---|---|
| Overall Adjustment | 5.84 | 0.75 |
| Personal-Emotional Adjustment | 4.95 | 1.36 |
| Social Adjustment | 6.09 | 0.89 |
| Academic Adjustment | 5.72 | 0.91 |
| Institutional Attachment | 6.35 | 0.75 |

**Notes**: *M*=Mean; *SD*=Standard Deviation N=250.

**Table 4. Male and Female Students Overall Adjustment**

| Variable (Gender) | N | M | SD | t-value (2-tailed) | Sig. (p-value) | $\eta 2$ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Male | 175 | 6.12 | 0.75 | -2.567 | 0.007 | 0.031 |
| Female | 75 | 5.88 | 0.68 | | | |

**Notes**: Levene test indicates that the *p* value of equal variances assumed was used; *M*=Mean; *SD*=Standard Deviation; Sig. =Significant; *η2*=eta-squared.

The researcher conducted a preliminary testing to check for normality and equality of variance between the two groups with no serious violation noted. The result presented in the Table 4 above shows that there was significant difference between male and female students in their mean overall adjustment score. The result of an independent t-test showed that mean of overall adjustment for male (M= 6.12, SD= 0.75) and female students (M= 5.88, SD=0.68), $t_{(248)}$ = -2.567, P=0.031. As the result of the two means showed that male students were scored better in their overall adjustment score compared to their counter female students. Comparing the eta-squared value obtained ($\eta2$ = 0.031) to Cohen's [21] criteria (1988, 0.01 = small effect, 0.06 = moderate effect, and 0.14 = large effect), it was very obvious that the effect size of 0.031 obtained was considered to be small. A small effect suggested that the mean difference of the overall adjustment score for the male and female students was rather small. The difference between male and female students in their university adjustment may be due to the difference between male and female students in their coping strategies when they encounter adjustment problems /stress and depression/. Male students most of the time use coping mechanisms such as; suppress depression rather than escape and isolating themselves from different types of social relationships, social experiences and activities but female students in other side use coping strategies such as; in crying, self blame and isolating themselves from social relationships [22].

## 4.5. The Relationship between Students' Adjustment and their Academic Achievement.

**Table 5. Estimates of Coefficients for the Academic Achievement Model**

| Independent Variables | Beta(Standardized Coefficients) | t | p-value |
|---|---|---|---|
| Constant | | 12.543 | 0.0001 |
| Social Adjustment | -0.171 | -1.863 | 0.065 |
| Personal-Emotional Adjustment | 0.182 | 3.065 | 0.0021 |
| Academic Adjustment | 0.532 | 8.485 | 0.0001 |
| Institutional Adjustment | -0.024 | -0.652 | 0.523 |

**Note**: $R$=0.768; $R^2$=0.59%; Adj.$R^2$ = 0.5789, $F$ = 29.124, $p$ = 0.0001

**Correlation matrix**

| Variable | M | SD | Academic Achievement |
|---|---|---|---|
| Overall Adjustment | 5.84 | 0.75 | 0.49* |

**Note:** r=0.49, r2=24%.

Determining the relationship between students' academic achievement and their adjustment was the third objective of this study. To address this objective, the researcher used person product-moment correlations to determine the relationship between students' overall adjustment scores and their GPA's obtained at the end of their first semester of their freshman courses. The result presented in the Table 5 shows that there were statistically significant positive relationship between students' overall adjustment (r=0.49) r2=24%, p= 0.01 and their academic achievement

(GPA's). It is to mean that when students better adjusted themselves to their campus new environment, they would have higher academic achievement in terms of GPA's. Findings also indicated that as there is significant and positive relationship between students' academic achievement and academic adjustment (r= 0.56, p= 0.01) as well as personal-emotional adjustment (r= 0.41) r2=17%, p=0.01).

Multiple regression analysis was conducted to determine the amount of variance in academic achievement explicated by university adjustment. As the finding in the table above showed that students' academic achievement is better explained by their academic adjustment (B=0.532, t= 8.485, p= 0.0001) followed by personal-emotional adjustment (B= 0.182, t= 3.065, p=0.0021). Both the academic adjustment and personal-emotional adjustment dimensions were commented to explain 59 % ($R^2$ = 0.589) of the variance in students' academic achievement. According to the result of this study, there was no statistically significant relationship found between academic achievement of students and students' social adjustment and attachment to their university.

## 5. Discussion

This study was conducted in 2012/2013 academic year basically to assess adjustment problems, help seeking behaviors, coping strategies and to identify the relationship between students' adjustment status and their academic performance of first year students in wolaita Sodo University by selecting 250 representative sample students from six different colleges of the institution. To discuss the results of this study one by one the researcher started discussion from the first objective of the study. Consistent with the previous studies conducted by [17,23,24] the result of this study indicated that the most of respondents were under moderate adjustment level in overall adjustment of the university (shown in Table 2). In line with this study Abdullah [23] in his study also identified that 75% of the respondents' overall adjustments were at moderate level, while only 5% obtained a high level of overall adjustment and 20% were found to be in the low category for their overall adjustment. This showed that most of the respondents had a moderate level for all the four areas of adjustment. But in this study 71.2% of the respondents were under moderate level in their overall campus adjustment while 3.2% were under high level in overall adjustment and the remaining 25.6% of the respondents were under low level in their overall campus adjustment (shown in Table 2). In line with Abdullah [23] the result of this study indicated that 43.2 % of the respondents were under low level in their personal-emotional adjustment scale which showed that many respondents in this study experienced psychological and somatic problems in adjusting themselves to campus life. Respondents were under moderate level in both their overall adjustment and four dimensions of campus adjustments to mean that the participants were exposed to some adjustment problems. Consistent with Abdullah [23] in Malaysia putra university participants of this study were achieved the highest level in institutional attachment and the least in personal-emotional adjustment. Consistent

with the previous study [23] these findings showed that many (43.2 %) of the participants in this study were not well adjusted in personal-emotional adjustment dimension (shown in Table 2).

The second objective of this study was to compare the mean overall adjustment score for male and female students. The result of the study indicated that there was statistically significant difference between male and female students in their mean overall adjustment score (shown in Table 4). The finding of the present investigation about the difference in the level of adjustment problem between male and female students is supported by various studies which showed that male students are better than female students in their overall university adjustment [1,17,23] and gender is identified as a significant predictor of students overall university adjustment [12]. In other words, it is to mean that female students are found to experience more adjustment problems in their university life compared to male students particularly in social adjustment dimension of the campus [25]. Consistent with this, many previous studies showed that female students' campus overall adjustment is most of the time affected by their social relationships and experiences students show in their university life [26]. Since female students' social relationships, experiences and social activities are poor and inadequate, it is obvious that their university adjustment would be influenced by their miserable adjustment in social dimension of campus adjustment. Consistent with the study conducted by [27] the difference between male and female students in their university adjustment may be due to the difference between male and female students in their coping strategies when they encounter adjustment problems /stress and depression/. Male students most of the time use coping mechanisms such as; suppress depression rather than escape and isolating themselves from different types of social relationships, social experiences and activities but female students in other side use coping strategies such as; in crying, self blame and more likely to seek assistant when they encounter adjustment problems in their university life [22].

Pearson product-correlation was conducted by the researcher to identify the relationship between the students' adjustment scores and their GPAs obtained at the end of the first semester. As the result of the study indicated there was statistically significant positive relationship between the students' overall adjustment and their GPAs (shown in table 5). This result was consistent with the previous study conducted by the Maria Chong Abdullah [5] which indicated that the better the students adjusted themselves in campus, the higher their academic achievements in terms of GPAs. Findings also indicated that both students' academic adjustment and personal-emotional adjustment had statistically significant and positive relationship with the students' academic achievement (shown in Table 5). This finding was also consistent with the previous study conducted by the Abdullah [23] in Malaysia Purta University showed that there is a significant and positive relationship between students' academic achievement and students' academic adjustment as well as personal-emotional adjustment.

From the result of the computed multiple regression, it has been found that academic adjustment of the students'

was the first predictor of the students' academic achievement and followed by personal-emotional adjustment (shown in Table 5). These two dimensions of adjustment alone were pointed out to explain 59 % (=$R^2$ *0.589*) of the variance in students' academic achievement. But the other two dimensions of adjustment (social adjustment and institutional attachment) had no statistically significant relationship with the students' academic achievement (shown in Table 5). Many previous studies have reported similar findings with this result. For instance, Baker and Siryk [14,28]; Maria Chong, [5] and Zuria [29] all were explaining that students' academic achievement is better explained by their academic adjustment to their campus and followed by their personal-emotional adjustment. So students who better adjust themselves to their new university environment in both academic and personal-emotional adjustment dimensions can perform better academically and would have better GPA's at the end of their first semester.

## 6. Conclusion

Findings of this study were based on the data gathered from first year students of wolaita Sodo University. Four specific areas of university adjustment are covered in this study; personal-emotional adjustment, social adjustment, academic adjustment and attachment and commitment towards educational along with institutional goals. Finding of the study clearly showed that students (71.2%) are at moderate level in overall adjustment in university. Among four specific areas of campus adjustment personal-emotional adjustment (mean score 4.95) dimension is found to be the main concern with respect to university adjustment. Compared to female students (mean score 5.88) male students (mean score 6.12) are found to be better adjusted in their new university environment. Therefore, female students are more exposed to adjustment problems than male students. The study also identified that there is statistically significant and positive relationship (r=0.49, p= 0.01) between university adjustment and students' academic achievement. Thus, students who are well adjusted themselves to the new campus environment are found to exhibit greater academic performance than those who are not well adjusted with the new university life. Academic and personal-emotional adjustments (B=0.532, t= 8.485, p= 0.0001) and (B= 0.182, t= 3.065, p=0.0021 respectively) are found to be the best predictor of the campus success as they play an important role in the students' university academic achievement.

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