

ACADEMIC ADJUSTMENT NEEDS OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS OF UNIVERSITIES IN SOUTHERN GHANA

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Abstract

The study investigated the academic adjustment needs of regular undergraduate international students of universities in southern Ghana. The descriptive survey design of the quantitative research approach was employed for the study. The data were analysed using both descriptive (mean, standard deviation and rank) and inferential (Independent-samples t-test) statistics. The findings showed that the academic adjustment needs of international students were quite serious or weighty, and there was no significant difference in the academic adjustment needs of undergraduate regular international students on the basis of gender. On the basis of these findings, it was recommended, among other things, that policy makers and management of the universities must take into account the reality of the academic adjustment needs of regular undergraduate international students no matter their gender. They should also consider effective ways of making their stay in universities in southern Ghana less stressful.

Keywords: Academic adjustment, undergraduates, international students, southern Ghana, university education, academic environment.

Introduction

The concept of adjustment was originally used in biology. It was modeled after the biological term “adaptation”, which refers to effect by a species to adjust to change in its environment. The term adjustment is often used as a synonym for accommodation and adaptation. Academic adjustment refers to students developing their coping skills and learning strategies aimed at achieving satisfactory academic results. It can also be seen as modifications on how students participate in lectures and other activities such as. These modifications allow students to meet standards, but do not necessarily change them. It is by being able to adjust that students get equal access to their educational opportunities in universities (Ramsay, Jones, & Barker, 2007).

Student adjustment has been defined by Baker and Siryk (1989) as a combination of students’ social, personal-emotional, and academic adjustment along with their reported feelings of commitment to the institution. Knight (2011) opined that adjusting to university life involves the complementary processes of desocialization and socialization. Desocialization involves the changing of core values, beliefs and traits one brings to university in response to the university experience. Socialization, however, has been explained by Coles and Swami (2012) as the process of being exposed to and taking on some of the new values, attitudes, beliefs and perspectives to which one is exposed at university. These complementary processes are what influence how well a regular undergraduate international student will adjust to the university environment.

International students in universities are required to successfully adjust to the inevitable transitional, academic, social and personal-psychological difficulties they encounter. When international students enter the university, they are confronted with new challenges both personal and interpersonal. The challenges arise from their need to establish new relationships, modify existing ones and cope with the pressures of the new academic environment. The difficulties faced by international students adversely influence their academic achievement and life experience (Adams, 2018). If they cannot overcome the difficulties and adjust successfully, they are unable to reach their pre-set goals.

In the view of Hayashi (2013), international students may keep daily or frequent interaction with family by way of phone or computer, but they make many more personal decisions and choices than they did

in high school. Some of the choices that international students make include, but not limited to the following: how to study, how to socialize with new acquaintances, how to become involved in activities, how to budget money, how to do exercise and manage their time (Smetana, Campione-Barr & Metzger, 2006). International students typically experience changing demands on their time especially as days are less routine and less predictable (Seloni, 2011).

Some international students feel they have virtually no time for themselves because of the task of managing multiple obligations. International students have to adjust to new surroundings and relate to unfamiliar people at the university. This is made difficult since other students they meet on campus often seem very different from family, friends and acquaintances from home (Lee, 2009). From the above, it can be seen that international students' experience in the university is a huge task that places great demand on them in terms of adjustment.

Generally, the primary goal of any international student is to achieve success in academic performance. However, from the literature reviewed, it is apparent that international students face massive adjustment challenges in their new environments. Needless to say, the negative impact of the adjustment challenges they face will be exacerbated in their academic work, the very area in which they wish to record the most satisfactory performance. Indeed, Chun and Poole (2009) emphasize that among all the reasons causing stress to international students, academic stress is the most important. Hence, the current researchers deemed it necessary and important to investigate the academic adjustment needs of regular undergraduate international students in universities in southern Ghana.

Objective of the Study

The objective of this study was to investigate the academic adjustment needs of regular undergraduate international students of universities in Southern Ghana.

Research Question

The research question formulated to guide the conduct of the study was: What are the academic adjustment needs of regular undergraduate international students of universities in southern Ghana?

Hypothesis

There is no significant difference between male and female regular undergraduate international students of universities in southern Ghana in their academic adjustment needs.

Methodology

This study adopted the descriptive survey research design. Descriptive survey design involves collecting data in order to test hypotheses or answer research questions concerning the current status of the subjects of the study (Gay, as cited in Amedahe & Asamoah Gyimah, 2012). The descriptive survey design was used because it helped the researchers to find out the existing situation of the academic adjustment needs of international students, which was their primary concern. It also helped in analyzing, interpreting and reporting the present status of the academic adjustment needs of international students in the study area (Taylor & Buku, 2006).

Sample and Sampling Procedure

The population for this study was all international students (graduate and undergraduate) in southern Ghana universities. The target population was all undergraduate international students in southern Ghana universities. All undergraduate international students from the four selected universities formed the accessible population which has 2,102 students. According to Burns and Grove (2003, p. 23), it is from the accessible population that the sample is chosen. Hence, the sample size of 322 was arrived at for this study by using the Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) table for determining sample size (Table 1).

Table 1: Total number of International Students in each University as at June 2018

Name of University	Accessible Population	Sample size
University of Cape Coast	108	17
University of Ghana	829	127
Zenith University	171	26
Ashesi University	994	152
Total	2,102	322

Source: Field Data, (2018)

Table 1 shows a sample size of 322 international students out of an accessible population of 2,102 from four selected universities. These universities were The University of Cape Coast, University of Ghana, Zenith University and Ashesi University. These four universities were chosen purposely because they have quite a substantial number of foreign students.

Instrumentation

A questionnaire titled “Academic Adjustment Needs of Undergraduate International Students” (AANUIS) was used for data collection. AANUIS was adapted from the “Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire” (SACQ) developed by Baker and Siryk (1999). The adaptation was achieved by modifying some of the items in SACQ in order to make the final questionnaire become more suitable for use in the current research. For instance, an item in the original questionnaire reads, “*I get mad often.*” This was modified to read, “*I get angry easily*” because to “*get mad*” can connote a different meaning to some of the participants especially those from Francophone countries. The students were asked to rate their academic adjustment needs using the four-point, Likert-type scale ranging from Strongly Disagree (weighted as 1), Disagree (weighted as 2), Agree (weighted as 3), to Strongly Agree (weighted as 4). According to Beyers and Goosen (2002), the reliability coefficient of SACQ is .92. The AANUIS which was adapted from it for use in the current study has a reliability coefficient of .75 which was adjudged as sufficiently high, according to DeVellis, as cited in Pallant (2010, p. 97).

Results

Research Question: What are the academic adjustments needs of regular undergraduate international students of universities in southern Ghana?

This research question was used to find out the academic adjustment needs that international student experienced in southern Ghana universities. Table 2 presents the results:

The results in Table 2 show that generally, most of the regular undergraduate international students in the universities in southern Ghana experience quite serious or weighty academic adjustment needs: the value of the mean of means (MM=3.28) was far above the cut-off point of 2.50; and no item had a mean score of less than this cut-off

point mean. The items that scored very high mean values include the following: “I am not working as hard as I should at my course work” ($M=3.49$, $SD=.581$); this was followed in second place by, “I am not attending classes regularly” ($M=3.47$, $SD=.802$). In third place was, “I have not been performing well during examinations” ($M=3.42$, $SD=.449$).

Table 2 - Means, Standard Deviations and Ranks of Academic Adjustment Needs of Undergraduate International students

Academic Adjustment Needs	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Rank
I am not working as hard as I should at my course work	3.49	.581	1 st
I am not attending classes regularly	3.47	.802	2 nd
I have not been performing well during examinations	3.42	.494	3 rd
I’m not doing well enough academically for the amount of work I put in	3.39	.538	4 th
I am not satisfied with the professors I have now in my courses	3.37	.719	5 th
I am finding academic work at university difficult	3.36	.538	6 th
I’m not really smart enough for academic work I am expected to be doing now	3.35	.479	7 th
I really haven’t had much motivation for studying lately	3.31	.687	8 th
I haven’t been very efficient in the use of study time lately	3.25	.714	9 th
Getting a university degree is very important for me	3.19	1.00	10 th
I am not enjoying my academic work at university	3.18	.633	11 th
Recently I have had trouble concentrating when I try to study	3.17	1.04	12 th
I have not been keeping up to date with my academic work	2.98	.869	13 th
I am not satisfied with the level at which I am performing academically	2.83	1.14	14 th
I get angry easily as a result of the academic pressure on me	2.66	1.14	15 th
Mean of means/Standard Deviation	3.21	.764	

Source: Field Data, (2018)

Research Hypothesis: There is no significant difference between male and female regular undergraduate international students of universities in southern Ghana in their academic adjustment needs.

The objective of testing this hypothesis was to determine if there was any significant difference in the academic adjustment needs of male and female regular undergraduate international students in the universities in southern Ghana. To achieve this, the independent samples t-test was used to test the hypothesis. The independent samples t-test was utilized because it appropriately helps to determine whether there is a statistically significant difference between the means of two unrelated groups. The dependent variable here was academic adjustment needs and the independent variable was gender (male and female).

Before applying the t-test for testing the hypothesis, the researchers ensured that the assumptions governing its use were met. For instance, the dependent variable (academic adjustment needs) was determined using a continuous scale, the four-point, Likert-type scale. Also, a random sample of the population of international students of universities in southern Ghana was selected for participation. Furthermore, independence of observations requirement was ensured through properly monitoring the administration of the questionnaire: participants were reached individually, not as a group so that they would not interact with one another. The population from which the sample was selected was normally distributed, and the variability of scores for each of the groups was similar when Levene's test for equality of variances was performed on them. The results are presented in Table 3.

As shown in Table 3, the females ($M=46.50$, $SD=4.999$) experience slightly more academic adjustment needs than their male counterparts ($M=45.41$, $SD=5.724$). However, the calculated t-value of -1.532 was not significant. Hence, the researchers failed to reject the null hypothesis.

Table 3: Results of independent-samples t-test Comparing differences in academic adjustment needs of male and female international students

Variable	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Cal.t-value	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i> -value
Male	240	45.41	5.72	-1.532	320	.127(ns)
Female	82	46.50	4.99			
Total	322					

Source: Field Data, (2018)

Discussion

The results from the present study indicated that most of the undergraduate regular international students in the universities in southern Ghana experience serious or weighty academic adjustment needs; because the mean of means value (3.21) was for above the cut-off point of 2.50. The result confirms the findings of Cooke, Beewick, Barkham, Bradley, and Audin (2006) in the United Kingdom, who found that academic pressure was a major basis for increased levels of anxiety in international students. Moreover, Ahmad, Fauziah, Azemi, Shaari and Zailani (2002) did a study in Malaysia and found that the academic adjustment needs confronted by international students included difficulties in academic work such as registration of courses, comprehension of textbooks, and very early morning lecture.

Enochs and Roland, (as cited in Mudhovozi, 2012), reported that there is support for the argument that male students adapt to new university environments better than their female counterparts. Also, Price, McLeod, Gleich, and Hand (2006), in their study at a Canadian university, found that 19% of female students as compared to 13% of male students met the DSM IV (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorder; APA, 2000) criteria for a major anxiety disorder, while 14% of female students and 7% of male students met the DSM IV criteria for a major depressive disorder. In support of all these findings, Raju and Rahamtullah (2007) stated that males are significantly better adjusted than females on the academic adjustment area while Roy, Ekka, and Ara (2010) observed that female students were better adjusted academically than male students. Similarly, the study of Wu, Garza and Guzman (2015) revealed that there were no statistically significant differences in the academic adjustment needs of male and female international students. This assertion confirms the

findings of the current study and that of Neuman (2012) reporting no significant gender differences in overall adjustment. Kaur (2012) also identified no gender differences in adjustment needs among college students. This was further supported by the findings of Nyamayaro and Saravanan (2013) that there were no significant differences in the overall adjustment needs of male and female students. Mahmondi (2010) found that gender had no differential influence over adjustment scores in home, health, emotional and social area.

On the other hand, the findings of Sulieman and Al-menezzel (1999) revealed that there was a statistically significant difference in the academic adjustment needs of male and female international students. This was, however, not the case in the current study as the results showed that no statistically significant difference between male and female international students with respect to their experiences of academic adjustments needs. The fact that both similarities and differences in the findings of previous studies and the current one has been found to exist, implies that the findings on the issue of gender differences regarding the academic adjustment needs of international students are inconclusive.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it was obvious that regular undergraduate international students do go through academic adjustment needs which are quite serious or weighty. One of the common academic adjustment needs of these students on the various university campuses was “*not being comfortable with the academic pressure*” (attending lectures and writing quizzes). The academic adjustment needs of the regular undergraduate international students were not gender-biased. From this, it can be concluded that the academic adjustment needs of regular international students in the universities in southern Ghana are quite serious or heavy, and cut across gender boundaries.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made based on the findings of the study:

1. For international students to be comfortable in southern Ghana universities, their schedules of academic work or timetable must not be overloaded. This will reduce the burden of the academic

- pressure they experience so as to enhance their achievement in academic work.
2. In addition, the content and the guidelines of the orientation programme which are organized for international students must be modified considering the fact that they come from entirely different cultures. The researchers recommend that a special orientation programme be organised for foreign students in addition to the general orientation for all fresh students. Such special orientation programmes must be specially tailored to meet the peculiar needs of international students. In addition, the services of expatriate lecturers already on ground in the universities concerned can be employed.
 3. International students in the universities in southern Ghana find academic work difficult by not been able to perform well during examinations and they are not doing well enough academically for the amount of work they put in. These students are therefore encouraged to attend orientation programmes organized by their universities. This will help them find their way around campus early on their arrival thereby reducing the amount of academic pressure they go through especially in their first few weeks. The authorities in the halls of residence are in the best position to encourage international students to attend the orientation programmes since they are the first authority figures in the University that international students meet.
 4. The researchers recommend that through the appropriate centres (for example, Counselling Centre), seminars/workshops must be organised intermittently for international students in order to equip them with the necessary skills for handling the problems they are likely to encounter during their stay on university campuses in southern Ghana.

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