

Chapter 3

Coping Mechanisms for First-Year Students: Phases of Adjustment Among First- Years Students at the University

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ABSTRACT

After secondary education, many students around the world make transit to institutions of higher learning. This transition necessitates the need for appropriate adjustment, which has been classified into academic, emotional, and social. Each student should know copying mechanisms that they can consider adapting during their transition. Successful transition from secondary school to university is essential for the academic, emotional, and social success of any student and smooth adjustment process can be achieved through internalizing the character, culture, and behavioral norms of the institution in which the student is enrolled. Students who are given adequate parental love are likely to adjust themselves more quickly than students who are deprived of this. The study recommends good relationships with lecturers and social integration with other students for positive adjustments of the learners. The students' ability to set goals and achieve a balance between academic and social activities is critical during the first-year transition.

INTRODUCTION

Each year, several million students around the world make the change from secondary to higher education. A lot of importance is pegged to university as expanding minds, but it also makes them a little uncomfortable, challenges their identity, and at times, makes them doubt their abilities. In most cases university is transformative at an individual level, community level and at the national level more broadly

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through the development of a “love of learning for its own sake and a passion for intellectual discovery” Bradley, et al., (2008). For this transformation to happen, however, it means that the students will need to be open to the transformation and allow necessary changes to occur. Though the students are normally excited to join the higher learning institutions, they are hardly prepared for the new academic expectations that await them. The students need adequate information that will help them to adjust themselves appropriately if they are to succeed thereafter. This chapter focuses on three spheres of adjustments that each student need to be informed on the researched coping mechanisms that they can consider adapting during their transition phase at the university. These are: Academic adjustments, emotional adjustments and social adjustments.

ACADEMIC ADJUSTMENTS AMONG FIRST YEAR STUDENTS AT UNIVERSITY

The core business of any student transiting to any higher learning institution is academic advancement. Many new students start their academic year in an entirely new environment, in a campus of a far larger scale than that of their school and with a different attendance policy. Reading through will provide guidance and support for new students joining university to enable them have easy academic adjustments.

Self Determination Theory

The principles of adjustments are guided by self-determination theory. The theory originated from Edward (1970) as cited by Fuller (2003) and has further been expounded by Courtney (2018). The theory links personality, human motivation and optimal functioning. The entry point is on the process of making one’s own choices and controlling one’s own life. At this level, the students have the feeling of controlling their own lives, especially after having come from a restrictive high school environment. At this stage, they are expected to have the desire to guide their own lives more. They therefore need to be guided to become autonomous so that they can control their own behaviors for optimum academic advancement. The availed information will trigger the drive of the learners and hence build their own behaviors with the knowledge that this is a defining stage of their destiny. It is paramount for the students to understand that they need to do this not in isolation but with functional networks amongst themselves. Each student need to know that at this stage, they are their own drivers into the desired destiny. The following are the areas to focus on for successful academic adjustments:

Awareness of the Demands Of Course Work

First-year students need to be aware that unlike in secondary schools, the courses at the university are heavily loaded and the time span for covering each is short. Whereas some lecturers give notes, in-depth reading is expected of them for each course. Many lecturers only give guidelines on the concepts but are not obligated to give details. Active reading should begin the moment the learners are given course outlines. The lecturers are not obligated to cover everything in the course outlines and yet any aspect of the course outline can be set in an exam. During the first days at the university, the students should be a regular visitor at the library to read more about the courses that are offered in their specialty. The antecedents or predictor of academic performance is on how well students are prepared for the expected work study engagement and the perceived course load (Kabtamu, 2011). The student should inquire

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