

Chapter 5

Adapting to the Academic Environment: A Prerequisite for Academic Success

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ABSTRACT

The present study is based on the desire to investigate the possible relationship between the level of adaptation of the students to the university environment and the registration of academic performance. The working hypothesis is, if the level of adaptation to the university environment is high then the level of performance increases. Operationally, the concept of adaptation integrates the following dimensions: motivation, application, performance, satisfaction, academic environment. For the present research, the authors consider only the first subscale of Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire, respectively the academic adaptation, reflected, in turn, in the following indicators: motivation, application, performance, academic environment. The correlation of the data—for the above-mentioned subscales—will generate a qualitative analysis of the degree of satisfaction of students and how it is reflected in academic achievement. The obtained results will allow building strategies to streamline the approach of academic integration with effects on increasing performance.

INTRODUCTION

The transition to university is a major step in an individual's journey. It can be a source of excitement for first-year students, but also a source of concern regarding the many challenges that accompany this status because everything is new: the programme, the timetable, the courses, the teachers, the classmates, the student life, sometimes the geographical relocation. The start of academic life is generally met with enthusiasm, confidence and a desire to succeed. However, difficulties can soon arise in terms

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of adaptation and integration, academically, socially and personally-emotionally. The initial enthusiasm is quickly overshadowed by the onset of boredom, isolation, fatigue, doubts and natural worries. In addition, faced with the specifics and demands of each programme of study, many young people applying to university experience uncertainty about the validity of their decision to enter that programme, which, while normal, can be difficult to manage.

Embracing the new status involves many changes, both in terms of academic requirements and pace of life. The young person must learn to combine the responsibilities associated with studies, life outside the parental home, social life and, if necessary, part-time employment. Successfully maintaining a balance between life and study clearly requires good time management, effective management of crisis situations to facilitate transition and, by extension, adaptation to the new environment.

In this context, there is the problem of cultivating skills in students which, on the one hand, reduce the likelihood of maladaptive behaviour and, on the other hand, help shape a balanced, creative and autonomous personality.

FUNDAMENTAL ELEMENTS IN ANALYSING THE CONCEPT OF ADAPTATION TO THE ACADEMIC ENVIRONMENT

The level of adjustment to academic life varies from student to student, and to better understand these variations, researchers have sought to identify factors that may play an important role in the adaptive process. They found that variables such as stress or social support play a role in predicting success when it comes to the integration process.

Academic studies are one of the most significant life experiences for an individual; they are a source of pride, hope and pleasure, but they also have their share of challenges and obstacles. When entering university, most students have to create a new social network, gain more autonomy in relation to their studies and engage in a serious process of career choice. They also have to learn to manage a busy schedule and cope with high academic demands. These challenges and responsibilities are significant stressors and can give rise to many concerns among students. Estrangement from family and friends, lack of time and financial resources, fear of underperforming and not meeting expectations, and fear of failing to create new quality interpersonal relationships are among the concerns most frequently reported by students. Therefore, it is not surprising to find that anxiety is the strongest emotion experienced among students.

Moreover, beyond the inherent complexity of university life, there are certain factors whose presence can make adjusting to university even more difficult. One of these is the student's context, which can exacerbate stress and risk compromising their adjustment. The existence of a highly competitive environment, in which underachieving puts individual goals at risk, the pressure to perform is high and can lead to unhealthy competition that places students in a climate of permanent tension, potentially leading to psychological distress and adjustment problems.

On the other hand, this competition can give rise to conflict between peers, a factor that compromises the development and maintenance of positive peer relationships and, by extension, adaptation. Nevertheless, some students enrolled in competitive programmes persist and graduate, while others drop out, which may lead us to believe that some adapt better than others in a competitive school context, and that the explanation can be found in the fact that adaptation results from a good fit between the personal characteristics of the individual and the characteristics of the environment in which he or she evolves (Dawis, 2002).

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