

# Chapter 10

## Social Adjustment Challenges of First-Year Students: Peer Influence, Misuse of Freedom, Ignorance of Life Skills Management, Living in Anxiety and Guilt

Solomon Omer

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4009-3382>

*Jordan University College, Tanzania*

### ABSTRACT

*This chapter discusses the social adjustment challenges first-year students face. The search engines such as Google Scholar, Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC), Web of Science, and Psych INFO were used to obtain secondary data. Students joining university today are the most diverse population in terms of their gender, age, socioeconomic status, ethnic composition, family background, native languages, and level of academic preparation. Life transitions, including new experiences and changes, have caused social adjustment challenges in the lives of individuals. Their failure to completely adjust socially may ultimately lead to their failure to take studies seriously and thus perform poorly and or drop out of college all together.*

### INTRODUCTION

This chapter introduces the reader to the social adjustment challenges that the first-year university students face and the strategies they adopt to mitigate the challenges so that they fit well in their university life. The emphasis on this chapter is on the adjustment to social challenges. The information in this chapter was obtained from the four cluster groups of 5 first year students drawn from the department of education (coded as EFG) made up 5 students; 5 law students (LFG); 5 sociology students (SFG) and 5 psychology students (PFG) who voluntarily participated in the focus group discussion. The interview guide was designed by the researcher and was semi-structured. Thus, even though it had three major questions

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concerning the challenges of adjusting to personal-social challenges, its effects and coping strategies of the freshmen, other questions were asked depending on the responses given by the participants. Document analysis was adopted as the research methodology. The search engines such as Google Scholar, Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC), Web of Science, Psych INFO, Science Direct, and JSTOR were used to obtain secondary data. Peer-reviewed journal articles were also used to obtain the secondary data on the challenges of social adjustment to the university life. The data analysis was carried out thematically for ease of narration. The chapter is sub divided into Five themes namely; the social challenges, effects of these challenges and the strategies to address the identified challenges for adjustment.

### **Background Information**

Social adjustment can be defined as a psychological process that includes handling of new social standards and values for individual acceptance (Jain, 2012). Integrating into the social life of a university, a city, and a country; building an environmental network; and managing social freedoms in a new environment are important elements of social adjustment. Thus, social adjustment poses an enduring challenge for first year students. The changes can be attributed to the acculturation process. They occur across physical, biological, cultural, social relationship, and psychological (behavior and mental health status) domains. Adjustment is also looked at as a process of dealing with the tensions, stress, conflicts and meeting the individual's needs. Students come from different backgrounds with their own norms and values, to join a new educational institution they require molding their behavior to fit in the institution (Robinson, 2009). In the process of adjustment, the individual tries to develop and maintain a smooth relationship with its environment. Almost every new student in university environment goes through an adjustment phase with his or her own pace of development. The adjustment level of each student is different from the others depending on the age wise development of the student (Dyson & Renk, 2006).

Students joining university today are the most diverse population in terms of their gender, age, socioeconomic status, ethnic composition, family background, native languages and level of academic preparation (Hurtado & Pryor, 2006). Life transitions, including new experiences and changes, naturally involve an adjustment process in the lives of individuals. The shift from high school to university is one major life transition for young adults. This transition period is a change and adjustment process accompanied by significant challenges and stresses for emerging adults to meet the personal demands of the new academic and social environment (Dyson & Renk, 2006). These challenges have their consequences on the life of newly admitted students who may fail completely to adjust socially either due to their acquired freedom which they never experienced while at high school or lack of exposure and immaturity which may ultimately lead to their failure to take studies seriously and thus perform poorly and or drop out of college all together.

When students enter into university life for the first time, they are expected to adjust their academic habits and life style different from what they were used to while in high school. The time given for this adjustment is usually very short and thus lead to operating under crisis most of the time. Students are not sure about their abilities to meet the new challenges of new environment of the university where they have to learn to think independently and not to rely on their teachers or parents for their course work (Robinson, 2009). They need to form new social relations to meet the increased academic demands (Monroe, 2009). According to Round (2005) the students are faced with challenge of hard work with lengthy class duration, different teaching techniques, heavy assignments and at the same time manag-

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