



# Student's adjustment to university and its relation to gender, residence and family factors

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## Abstract

The main objective of this study was to examine the influence of gender, residence and family factors to first-year student's adjustment. Data were collected by using survey method from a random sample of 801 first-year students studying at Nong Lam University. The data were analyzed by using t-test, ANOVA. The results revealed that there was significant correlation between place of permanent residence and Personal-Emotional Adjustment, between place of permanent residence and Social Adjustment. There was significant correlation between overall adjustment, social adjustment, emotional adjustment, goal commitment/institutional attachment with place of residence. There was also significant correlation between gender and personal-emotional adjustment. There was no significant correlation between place of residence and Academic Adjustment, between place of residence and Goal commitment/Institutional Attachment. There was also no significant correlation between parent's marital status and overall student adaptation (Personal-Emotional Adjustment, Social Adjustment, Academic Adjustment, Goal commitment/Institutional Attachment), or between parent's education level and overall student adaptation.

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## Introduction

The process of change for adjusting to the university environment has been studied by different scholars. Adjusting to a new life in a university environment is an important criterion for achieving good academic performance. Freshmen face many difficulties and challenges, including differences in teaching methods of lecturers, high requirements for students' sense of autonomy. The results of many studies have confirmed that adjustment is an important factor in determining the success of students' learning. Christie and Dinham (1991) examined the influence of external factors, such as family and friends, on the transition and adjustment of students. These authors have noted that external pressures have a strong influence on the transition. Wilcox, Winn, and Fyvie-Guald (2005) found that the support of family and friends (the social

network of students) has a positive influence on academic success of freshmen. Having more friends, sharing accommodation with other students also has a positive effect on social integration. In addition, individual and social factors as well as cognitive factors such as critical thinking and decision-making are also determined to have a direct or indirect impact on student's adjustment. Many researchers argue that individual factors also affect adjustment. Enochs and Ronald (2006), Elias, Mahyuddin, and Uli (2009) found that in gender differences in adjustment, boys were found to be better adjusted than girls. This research was conducted to identify the gender, residence and family factors that influence the adjustment process of freshmen.

## Literature Review

The process of changing to adjust to the university environment has been studied by many different scholars. Adjustment to a new life in a university setting is an important criterion for achieving good academic performance. New

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students face many difficulties and challenges, including differences in teaching methods of teachers, high requirements for students' sense of autonomy. The results of many studies have confirmed that adjustment is an important determinant of student academic success. In this section, we will briefly look at some case studies.

Tinto (1993) asserts that all students, regardless of background, go through similar transitions. His research has been developed by other researchers. Christie and Dinham (1991) examined the influence of external factors, such as family and friends, on student transition and adjustment. These authors have found that external pressure has a strong influence on the transition.

In a study of 683 freshmen from the University of Chicago, Spady (1970) concluded that college students who do not socialize with other students and do not feel integrated in the university environment may drop out of school. Bryant and Trower (1974) studied the scope and degree of difficulty in social interaction of a group of second-year students at Oxford University. About 10 percent of the study participants come from lower social class, small families and the results show that they face many difficulties in social situations. Bryant and Trower (1974) concluded that some students lack the basic social skills necessary to make friendships or interact with others.

Tinto (1987) studied the process students undergo before dropping out. Tinto (1987) stressed that the university's academic and social climate influences the decision to drop out. He believes that social adaptation and academic adaptation have increased school cohesion and led to student perseverance and graduation.

Wilcox et al. (2005) found that the support of family and friends (i.e. social networks of students) has a positive effect on the academic success of first-year students. Having many friends and sharing accommodation with other students also positively affect social integration.

In addition, personal and social factors as well as cognitive factors such as critical thinking, dynamic thinking and decision-making are also determined to have a direct or indirect effect on student's adjustment (Goleman, 1995) (Mavroveli, Petrides, Sangareau, & Furnham, 2009). Many researchers claim that individual factors also influence adaptation (Martin, Swartz-Kulstad, & Madson, 1999). Enochs and Ronald (2006), Abdullah et al. (2009) found in gender differences in adaptation, male students were thought to be better adapted than girls.

Grayson (2003) studies the relationship between academic adjustment and academic performance. He said that students who are academically adaptive tend to be more determined to pursue studies than those who have difficulty adapting. Academic adjustment is also related to motivation and learning goals. Many researchers claim that social adjustment to a new learning environment is an important factor for success in the general adjustment process. Grayson (2003) suggested that students need to integrate into university life in order to be motivated to continue their studies. Students who have a good level of integration into the social environment at their current school will have better academic performance than those who are still isolated or not integrated. Actual

freshmen face many challenges in the adaptation process. Baker and Siryk (1984) identified three major challenge groups, and this conclusion is still relevant today. The first is the challenge of increasing academic pressure at university. Basically, the ability to adapt to the challenges of the curriculum, the exercises are closely related to the ability to maintain learning and graduation. Conversely, if students are unable to adapt to the increased workload, they tend to drop out. The second is the challenge related to the social environment. Baker and Siryk (1984) affirmed that boarding students have many advantages in combining social and environmental factors with academic factors. However, there are a number of personal and environmental factors (such as the way you live, how you spend your time together, university perceptions, and others) that will significantly affect how students adapt with a new residence environment. Students who cannot adapt also tend to drop out of college. The third involves the choice of the school and the personal attachment of the student to the institution. Students who are closely attached to the university are more likely to remain and successfully graduate from the university.

Authors Thurber and Walton (2012), Abdullah, Elias, Uli, and Mahyuddin (2010) conducted freshman adaptation studies and concluded that the transition period from high school to university education is the most stressful time in life and students face many challenges. Research by Abdullah et al. (2009) reported that first-year students with low to moderate levels of adaptability were unable to continue their studies for a second year. Important factors affecting adaptability include academic, social, emotional and university services offered to students as well as the individual characteristics of students.

There have been a number of studies in literature concerned with the relationship between characteristics of students (or demographic factors) and adjustment to college. It has proven to be very interesting as there are always going to external factors which can affect the transition of a student.

## Methodology

For the current study, a quantitative research method was utilized. Specifically, a descriptive-correlational survey research design was applied. The survey was conducted at Nong Lam University, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. The population of the study comprised of freshmen enrolled in 2016. The permission letter for conducting the survey was sent to the Academic office and permission was granted.

The study complied with all regulations and confirmation that informed consent was obtained.

## Participants

A total of 801 freshmen enrolled in 2016 from various faculties at Nong Lam University participated in this study. Participants were chosen by using cluster sampling method. The researcher divided the population of 3,336 students into 55 separate groups, called clusters, based on classes. Then, a simple random sample of 16 clusters was selected from the population.

The sample size was determined by adopting Ames, Guilford, and Fruchter (1978)

formula for estimating sample size (Equation (1)):

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N \cdot (e)^2} \quad (1)$$

Where: N: Population size; n = Sample size, e = alpha = 0.05

### Data Collection

**Survey instrument:** To collect data, a Vietnamese version of the questionnaire was designed based on the questionnaire developed by Baker & Siryk (1989) called “The Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire”. The questionnaire consisted of two parts, part 1 contained information about adjustment divided into four components: Academic Adjustment (AA), Social Adjustment (SA), Personal-Emotional Adjustment (PEA), and Goal commitment/Institutional Attachment (GCIA), Part 2 contained demographic information. The scales were measured on a 9 point Likert Scale from ‘applies very closely to me’ (1) to ‘doesn’t apply to me at all’ (9).

### Data Analysis

This study utilized both descriptive and inferential statistics to analyze the data. Data were analyzed using the SPSS Version 22.0. Descriptive statistics in the form of frequencies, percentage were examined in relation to the variables of the study. Independent samples t-test and one-way between-groups analysis of variance (ANOVA) were conducted to compare the full-scale adjustment scores and subscales with gender, place of residence, permanent residence, parent’s education level, marital status of parents, etc.

To classify the degree of student adjustment, this study was based on criteria developed by Baker & Siryk (1989) as follows in Table 1.

## Results and Discussion

### Demographic Characteristics of the Sample

The sample of this study was 801 full-time students. Descriptive statistics show that there were 412 male students (51.4% of the sample) and 389 female students (48.6% of the sample) in the sample. There were 303 (37.8% of the sample) students currently living in dormitories, 440 (accounting for 55.0% of the sample) students living in boarding houses and 58 (7.2% of the sample) students living at home. With the

characteristics of the university specializing in agro-forestry, 662 students had permanent residence in rural areas (accounting for 82.8% of the sample) and 138 students had permanent residence in urban areas (accounting for 17.2% of the sample). There were 508 students who had siblings who graduated from university or college (63.4% of sample). Regarding the father’s education level, 37% of students had a father who graduated with a university degree or higher and 51 students (6.4%) whose father had only primary level education. Regarding the mother’s education level, there were 218 (27.3%) students whose mother had a university degree or higher. There were 12 students (1.5%) whose parents were separated, 20 students (2.5%) whose parents were divorced and 34 students (4, 2%) whose mother or father had died. The majority of student (733 students, accounting for 91.5%) were living with their parents (Table 2).

### Overall Assessment of Student Adjustability

In assessing the overall level of student adjustment for the four components, the score on adjustment was divided into three levels as described in the research methodology: low adjustment, moderate adjustment and high adjustment. The results of statistical analysis are presented in Table 3.

In general, the average level of adjustment of freshmen is only moderate. Specifically, 696 students had moderate adjustment level of adjustment (86.9%); only 72 students (9%) had a high level of adjustment and 33 students (4.1%) had low adjustment level.

For academic adjustment, 55 students (6.9%) had a low level of adjustment; 700 students (87.4%) had moderate level of adjustment and only 46 students (5.7%) had high level of adjustment. For social adjustment, 43 students (5.4%) had low levels of adjustment; 590 students (73.7%) had moderate level of adjustment, 168 students (21%) had high level of adjustment.

For Personal-emotional adjustment, there were 143 students (17.9%) with low levels of adjustment, 575 students (71.8) with moderate levels of adjustment, and 83 (10.4%) had high levels of adjustment. For goal commitment/institutional attachment, there were 25 students (3.1%) with low levels of adjustment, 477 students (59.6%) had moderate levels of adjustment, and remarkably, there were 299 students (37.3%) with high level of adjustment (Table 3). This is the most adaptive component of the four components of adjustment. This shows that students have great determination in achieving academic goals and have a strong attachment to the chosen university.

**Table 1** Grading scale of adjustment

Scale	Low adjustment	Moderate adjustment	High adjustment
General adjustment	From 67 to 260	From 261 to 454	From 455 above
Academic adjustment	From 24 to 95	From 96 to 167	From 168 above
Social adjustment	From 20 to 71	From 72 to 125	From 126 above
Personal-emotional adjustment	From 15 to 59	From 60 to 104	From 105 above
Goal commitment/Institutional Attachment	From 15 to 59	From 60 to 104	From 105 above

Source: Baker and Siryk (1989)

**Table 2** Demographic information of the sample

Variables	Grouping	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	412	51.4
	Female	389	48.6
Place of residence	Dorms	303	37.8
	Boarding houses	440	55.0
	Home	58	7.2
Permanent residence	Rural	663	82.8
	Urban	138	17.2
Siblings graduated from university	No	508	63.4
	Yes	293	36.6
Father's education level	Illiterate	3	0.4
	Primary	51	6.4
	Secondary	163	20.3
	High school	287	35.8
	University/college	219	27.3
	Higher education	78	9.7
Mother's education level	Illiterate	9	1.1
	Primary	41	5.1
	Secondary	225	28.1
	High school	308	38.5
	University/college	159	19.9
	Higher education	59	7.4
Marital status of parents	Separated	12	1.5
	Divorced	20	2.5
	In good relationship	733	91.5
	Mother/father died	34	4.2
	Parent died	2	0.2

**Table 3** Classification of freshmen adjustment

Variables	Level of adjustment	Frequency	Percentage
Overall adjustment	Low adjustment	33	4.1
	Moderate adjustment	696	86.9
	High adjustment	72	9.0
Academic adjustment	Low adjustment	55	6.9
	Moderate adjustment	700	87.4
	High adjustment	46	5.7
Social adjustment	Low adjustment	43	5.4
	Moderate adjustment	590	73.7
	High adjustment	168	21.0
Personal-emotional adjustment	Low adjustment	143	17.9
	Moderate adjustment	575	71.8
	High adjustment	83	10.4
Goal commitment/ Institutional Attachment	Low adjustment	25	3.1
	Moderate adjustment	477	59.6
	High adjustment	299	37.3
	Total	801	100.0

*Selected Variables Which Affect University Adjustment**Gender differences in student adjustment*

Independent samples *t*-test were conducted to compare the full-scale adjustment scores (as measured by the SACQ) for males and females. The result in Table 4 shows that there was no significant difference in scores of overall adjustments for male ( $M = 2.06$ ,  $SD = 0.36$ ) and female ( $M = 2.03$ ,  $SD = 0.36$ ) with  $t = 1.380$ ,  $p = .168$  (equal variances assumed).

An Independent samples *t*-test was also utilized to compare SACQ subscale scores for males and females. Again, there was no significant difference in scores for male and female on academic adjustment, social adjustment, goal commitment/institutional attachment. There was significant difference in scores for male ( $M = 1.97$ ,  $SD = 0.51$ ) and female ( $M = 1.88$ ,  $SD = 0.53$ ) on personal-emotional adjustment.

*Student adjustment and parents' marital status*

Family circumstances can affect the ability of individuals to adjust to their living environment. In this study, the ANOVA analysis showed there was no significant difference in scores for marital status of parents across overall adjustment, academic adjustment, personal-emotional adjustment, goal commitment/institutional attachment or social adjustment (Table 5).

*Student adjustment and place of residence*

ANOVA analysis results show that there is a statistically significant difference among overall adjustment, social adjustment, emotional adjustment, goal commitment/institutional Attachment with place of residence (dorms, boarding house, at home). There is no statistically significant difference between the academic adjustment and place of residence (Table 6).

The Post Hoc analysis showed that students at dormitories had better social adjustment level than students at home ( $p = .024$ ). Students at home had a better Personal-emotional adjustment than students in dormitories and boarding houses (Table 7).

*Permanent residence (Urban/rural) and student adjustment*

The results of *t*-test showed a statistically significant difference in the degree of adjustment (social and emotional) between students in urban areas and students in the rural areas. In particular, students in rural areas have better social adjustment than urban students. The mean of social adjustment of urban students was 105.9, and in rural areas it was 110.2. Urban students have better emotional adjustment than rural students. The mean of the emotional adjustment of urban students was 81.6667, and in rural areas it was 77.5 (Table 8).

*Parent's education level and student adjustment*

The ANOVA analysis showed there were no significant differences in scores for parent's education level across overall adjustment, academic adjustment, personal-emotional adjustment, goal commitment/institutional attachment or social adjustment (Table 9 and Table 10).

## Conclusion and Recommendation

Adjusting well to social, emotional and academic challenges in a university environment is a prerequisite for success in learning, and for later success in life. University students face many challenges in their adjustment to university life. Students must learn to work in a new environment, live independently, work with new people, with new tensions and challenges. The results of this study show that the first-year students had a moderate level of adjustment despite some difficulties. There are many factors, such as the place of permanent

residence (rural or urban), the place of residence (homestay, dormitory, home) which affect the adjustability of freshmen.

## Conflict of Interest

There was no conflict of interest.

## Acknowledgments

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**Table 4** *t*-test of the mean, grouping by gender

Variables Equal variances		<i>t</i> -test for Equality of Means						
		<i>t</i>	df	<i>p</i> (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
							Lower	Upper
Overall adjustment	Equal variances assumed	1.380	799	.168	5.91667	4.28894	-2.50226	14.33560
	Equal variances not assumed	1.378	790.421	.169	5.91667	4.29471	-2.51372	14.34706
Academic adjustment	Equal variances assumed	.080	799	.936	.13543	1.69625	-3.19420	3.46506
	Equal variances not assumed	.080	797.402	.936	.13543	1.69563	-3.19299	3.46385
Social adjustment	Equal variances assumed	.899	799	.369	1.37029	1.52419	-1.62159	4.36217
	Equal variances not assumed	.897	782.109	.370	1.37029	1.52812	-1.62942	4.36999
Personal-emotional adjustment	Equal variances assumed	2.664	799	.008	3.78289	1.42006	.99540	6.57038
	Equal variances not assumed	2.661	791.467	.008	3.78289	1.42170	.99215	6.57363
Goal commitment/ Institutional Attachment	Equal variances assumed	.246	799	.805	.30136	1.22328	-2.09987	2.70259
	Equal variances not assumed	.246	793.746	.806	.30136	1.22412	-2.10154	2.70426

**Table 5** Result of ANOVA between student adjustment and parents' marital status

Variables	Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Overall adjustment	Between Groups	12841.072	4	3210.268	.871	.481
	Within Groups	2934937.934	796	3687.108		
	Total	2947779.006	800			
Academic adjustment	Between Groups	1199.345	4	299.836	.520	.721
	Within Groups	458785.531	796	576.364		
	Total	459984.876	800			
Social adjustment	Between Groups	916.639	4	229.160	.492	.742
	Within Groups	370854.524	796	465.898		
	Total	371771.164	800			
Personal-emotional adjustment	Between Groups	3734.613	4	933.653	2.312	.056
	Within Groups	321513.140	796	403.911		
	Total	325247.753	800			
Goal commitment/ Institutional Attachment	Between Groups	254.726	4	63.681	.212	.932
	Within Groups	238993.314	796	300.243		
	Total	239248.040	800			

**Table 6** Result of ANOVA between place of residence and student adjustment

Variables	Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Overall adjustment	Between Groups	43238.904	2	21619.452	5.940	.003
	Within Groups	2904540.103	798	3639.775		
	Total	2947779.006	800			
Academic adjustment	Between Groups	2863.694	2	1431.847	2.500	.083
	Within Groups	457121.183	798	572.834		
	Total	459984.876	800			
Social adjustment	Between Groups	12158.675	2	6079.337	13.490	.000
	Within Groups	359612.489	798	450.642		
	Total	371771.164	800			
Personal-emotional adjustment	Between Groups	5357.441	2	2678.721	6.682	.001
	Within Groups	319890.312	798	400.865		
	Total	325247.753	800			
Goal commitment/ Institutional Attachment	Between Groups	6002.500	2	3001.250	10.268	.000
	Within Groups	233245.540	798	292.288		
	Total	239248.040	800			

**Table 7** Post Hoc analysis results

Dependent Variable	Place of residence (I)	Place of residence (J)	Mean Difference (I-J)	SE	<i>p</i>	95% Confidence Interval	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Overall adjustment	Dorms	Home	-3.38073	8.64680	.840	-21.8150	15.0536
	Boarding houses	Home	-17.50862	8.42775	.057	-35.4759	.4587
Academic adjustment	Dorms	Home	-3.71663	3.43030	.372	-11.0298	3.5965
	Boarding houses	Home	-6.44365	3.34340	.080	-13.5715	.6842
Social adjustment	Dorms	Home	7.36594*	3.04253	.024	.8795	13.8524
	Boarding houses	Home	-.74530	2.96545	.927	-7.0674	5.5768
Personal-emotional adjustment	Dorms	Home	-6.27973*	2.86957	.044	-12.3974	-.1620
	Boarding houses	Home	-9.43440*	2.79688	.001	-15.3971	-3.4717
Goal Commitment/Institutional Attachment	Dorms	Home	4.36673	2.45032	.109	-.8572	9.5906
	Boarding houses	Home	-1.39334	2.38825	.700	-6.4849	3.6982

Note: a. Dunnett t-tests treat one group as a control, and compare all other groups against it.

\**p* < .05.

**Table 8** *t*-test of the mean, grouping by place of permanent residence (Urban / rural)

Variables	Equal variances	<i>t</i> -test for Equality of Means						
		T	df	<i>p</i> (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	SE Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
							Lower	Upper
Overall adjustment	Equal variances assumed	.060	799	.952	.34110	5.68320	-10.81466	11.49687
	Equal variances not assumed	.062	206.034	.950	.34110	5.47516	-10.45341	11.13562
Academic adjustment	Equal variances assumed	.003	799	.997	.00728	2.24501	-4.39954	4.41409
	Equal variances not assumed	.003	214.180	.997	.00728	2.08999	-4.11231	4.12687
Social adjustment	Equal variances assumed	2.157	799	.031	4.34160	2.01244	.39130	8.29189
	Equal variances not assumed	2.330	215.605	.021	4.34160	1.86305	.66947	8.01372
Personal-emotional adjustment	Equal variances assumed	-2.180	799	.030	-4.10407	1.88220	-7.79871	-.40943
	Equal variances not assumed	-2.175	197.672	.031	-4.10407	1.88717	-7.82564	-.38250
Goal commitment/ Institutional Attachment	Equal variances assumed	1.529	799	.127	2.47262	1.61672	-.70091	5.64615
	Equal variances not assumed	1.624	211.302	.106	2.47262	1.52271	-.52903	5.47428



**Table 9** Result of ANOVA between student adjustment and father's education level

Variables	Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
Overall adjustment	Between Groups	7068.249	5	1413.650	.382	.861
	Within Groups	2940710.758	795	3699.007		
	Total	2947779.006	800			
Academic adjustment	Between Groups	986.316	5	197.263	.342	.888
	Within Groups	458998.561	795	577.357		
	Total	459984.876	800			
Social adjustment	Between Groups	808.897	5	161.779	.347	.884
	Within Groups	370962.266	795	466.619		
	Total	371771.164	800			
Personal-emotional adjustment	Between Groups	958.429	5	191.686	.470	.799
	Within Groups	324289.323	795	407.911		
	Total	325247.753	800			
Goal commitment /Institutional Attachment	Between Groups	2326.084	5	465.217	1.561	.169
	Within Groups	236921.956	795	298.015		
	Total	239248.040	800			

**Table 10** Result of ANOVA between student adjustment and mother's education level

Variables	Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
Overall adjustment	Between Groups	4848.226	5	969.645	.262	.934
	Within Groups	2942930.780	795	3701.800		
	Total	2947779.006	800			
Academic adjustment	Between Groups	983.861	5	196.772	.341	.888
	Within Groups	459001.015	795	577.360		
	Total	459984.876	800			
Social adjustment	Between Groups	952.086	5	190.417	.408	.843
	Within Groups	370819.077	795	466.439		
	Total	371771.164	800			
Personal-emotional adjustment	Between Groups	2089.581	5	417.916	1.028	.400
	Within Groups	323158.172	795	406.488		
	Total	325247.753	800			
Goal commitment/ Institutional Attachment	Between Groups	2009.886	5	401.977	1.347	.242
	Within Groups	237238.154	795	298.413		
	Total	239248.040	800			

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