

# Major Adjustment Problems, Help Seeking Behaviors and Coping Strategies of First Year Students in Wolaita Sodo University

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## Abstract

The main objective of the study was to assess the adjustment problems, help seeking behaviors, coping strategies, the difference between male and female students in their separation anxiety and to determine the relationship between the overall campus adjustment and academic achievement of first year students at Wolaita Sodo University. The target population was 770 first year students accepted to the university in regular program in the year 2014/15. Among these, 102 (57 male and 45 female) students were selected using multi-stage sampling technique and involved in the study. The data were collected using questionnaires and interview guidelines. The questionnaires were adapted from the already existing tools, but the interview guide was locally developed based on literature in the area. For analysis, both qualitative and quantitative methods were employed. The qualitative data depicted that the students were challenged by adjustment problems from four basic dimensions. These adjustment problem dimensions were academic, social, personal-emotional and institutional attachment dimensions. Quantitative analysis findings showed that students' overall campus adjustment was at moderate level and male students were found to be better adjusted compared to female students. According to the results of the study there was statistically significant positive relationship between students' adjustment and their academic achievement. Academic adjustment became the first predictor of the students' academic performance and followed by the personal-emotional adjustment. It was revealed that the students primary help sources were non-professional sources such as their friends and senior students instead of campus counselor and their academic advisors. Dysfunctional coping strategies (smoking, chewing, prolonged worry and regret etc) were the main mechanisms used by the students to alleviate their adjustment problems. There was a significant difference between males ( $M = 1.19$ ,  $SD = 0.92$ ) and females ( $M = 1.69$ ,  $SD = 0.95$ ) on parental over-protectiveness scores (POPS) question "My parents were very overprotective of me growing up,"  $t(104) = 2.74$ ,  $p < .05$ . Female students reported a higher frequency in over-protectiveness from parents than males did.

**Keywords:** Adjustment Problems, Help Seeking Behaviors and Coping Strategies.

## Justification

According to the many different previous studies (Gerdes, 2001, Mallinckrodt, 1994 and Jibril, 2012) that university freshmen are struggling with a number of difficulties when they join campus for the first time. Transitioning into university is very difficult for students due to the fact that many of them are leaving home as well as leaving friends behind. Taking in to account different adjustment challenges and difficulties of the freshman students, most studies (Calaguas, 2010, Mokhtar, 2010 and Salamat, 2009) agree that university academic failure is outcome of adjustment problems students' face in their freshman year rather than their low level of academic competence or performance. In Ethiopia, for example, Tamir (1997) as cited in Kabtamu (2011) assessed the causes of Bahir Dar Teachers' College and

Bahir Dar Poly Technique Institute freshman student's (current Bahir Dar University) academic failure and he indicated that adjustment problem was one of those important events that constrained their academic performance. Similarly, Boulter (2002) report that about 75 % of students who drop out of college do so within their first two years because of adjustment problems during their first year.

Poduska (1980) explained that some studies (e.g. Goh, 1996; Burk and Bender, 2005; Hargrove and Sedlack, 1995) reveal that college students rely heavily on themselves and are more likely to look to close friends, relatives, and parents to handle their adjustment problems. Some other research findings still assert that professional services are sought only after the individual's primary support system has been exhausted (Kabtamu, 2011). Instead of approach style of coping with stressors, help seeking, there are situations where the students attempt to device their own way of coping mechanisms. These coping strategies could be either functional strategies such as spending time with friends, watching movies or dysfunctional coping strategies such as social isolation, smoking, alcohol drinking and much self-condemning (David and Timothy, 2004).

Martin (1999) mentioned that different previous studies have shown that adjustment among first year undergraduates has a strong impact on their academic achievement. Studies also have indicated that gender is a significant predictor of students' adjustment in university and male students are found to be better adjusted compared to the female students (Enochs & Roland, 2006). Female students are found to demonstrate more adjustment problems such as establishing social relationships in campus compared to the male students.

The main pushing factors which motivated the researcher to conduct this study on this topic were: the research

gap in the area especially regarding to the two variables which were help seeking behavior and coping strategies of the students when they encounter adjustment problems during their freshman life period because students help seeking behavior and coping strategies during their adjustment problems has been given less attention particularly in Ethiopian context by most studies. The other motivating factor which initiated the current researcher to conduct this study on this topic was, most foreign studies and one our country researcher identified that students do not seek out psychological help which has been provided by concerned university professionals when they encounter adjustment problems and disclose their problems to their friends and senior students rather than to the concerned professionals in the campus. In addition to this the studies also identified that students use dysfunctional coping strategies(smoking, chat chewing, drinking alcohol, visiting night clubs etc) when they encounter different adjustment difficulties and challenges, so that the researcher in this study aimed to ascertain this results by assessing help seeking behaviors and coping strategies of Wolaita sodo university freshman students.

### Research Hypothesis

**H1:** there is statistically significant difference between male and female students in their university Adjustment.

**H1:** there is significant relationship between students' campus adjustment and their academic adjustment.

### Objectives of the study

#### General objective

The main objective of this study was to investigate the major adjustment problems, help seeking behaviors and coping strategies of first year students of Wolaita Sodo University.

#### Specific objectives of the study

- ❖ To investigate the differences between male and female students in their university adjustment.
- ❖ To determine the relationship between students' adjustment and their academic achievement.
- ❖ To assess the students help seeking behaviors and their sources of help when they encounter adjustment difficulties.
- ❖ To assess coping strategies of the students when they encounter challenges in their university life.

### Methodology

#### Research Design

The specific research design applied in this study was a cross sectional survey with mixed methods. The purpose of cross sectional surveys, according to Ezeani (1998), is to collect detailed and factual information that describes an existing phenomenon. Therefore, survey research design was used in order to collect sufficient data and achieve the purpose of this particular study: assessing major adjustment problems, help seeking behaviors and coping strategies of freshman students at Wolaita Sodo University.

#### Samples and Sampling technique

Participants of the study were Wolaita Sodo university first year students who were enrolled in the University programs in 2014/15 academic year in four colleges and two schools of the university. These four colleges and two schools are: College of Natural and computational Science, College of Business and Economics, School of EBS, College of Engineering, school of public Health and College of Agriculture. All colleges and schools contain minimum of two and maximum of six departments under it. Under each department there are minimum of one and maximum of four sections and each section has also minimum of 42 and maximum of 70 students. To select representative respondents, multi-stage sampling technique was employed. Primarily, considering the four colleges and two schools as strata, 1 sample department was randomly selected from each college and school. From each randomly selected department the researcher determined the sample size of this research by using the stratified random sampling technique. To determine the sample size by strata from each stratum the researcher

$$n_k = \left( \frac{n}{N} \right) N_k$$

used the following formula.

Where:  $n_k$ = the sample size for  $k^{\text{th}}$  strata,  $N_k$ = the population size of the  $k^{\text{th}}$ s trata

$N$  = the total population size,  $n$  = the total sample size

***The Departments Taken from each College to Represent the Six Colleges of the University (Departments Internally)***

<b>Strata/Departments/</b>	<b>Strata size</b>	<b>Sample size by strata</b>
College of Natural science /Biology/	120= N <sub>1</sub>	16= n <sub>1</sub>
school of public Health /Health officer (HO)/	42= N <sub>2</sub>	6= n <sub>2</sub>
school of EBS /Psychology/	60= N <sub>3</sub>	8= n <sub>3</sub>
College of Engineering /Civil Engineering/	280= N <sub>4</sub>	37= n <sub>4</sub>
College of business and Economics /Economics/	113= N <sub>5</sub>	15= n <sub>5</sub>
College of Agriculture/ plant science/	155= N <sub>6</sub>	20= n <sub>6</sub>
Total	770=N	102=n

After determining the sample size of this research, the researcher got the total students of randomly selected departments from each college with their names, ID number and their first semester GPA from the registrar of the university. Finally, the researcher selected his samples according to the prior determined sample size from six departments by using simple random sampling.

**Methods of Data Analysis**

Data obtained from questionnaire was analyzed in line with the research objectives. To analyze the collected data, both descriptive and inferential statistics were used. Mean, standard deviation and Pearson product moment correlation were applied. Inferential statistics such as analysis of mean comparison (t-test,) was computed to investigate the differences between male and female students in their adjustment in this study. A multiple regression analysis was conducted to determine the amount of variance in academic achievement explained by university adjustment. Pearson product moment was conducted to determine the relationship between students' overall campus adjustment and their academic achievement.

**Result and Discussion**

**Respondents mean scores in their four adjustment dimensions**

The researcher used descriptive statistics to assess the research participants mean result in their four areas of the campus adjustment during their freshman campus life. The result obtained is presented as follow:

**Table 1. Respondents Mean Scores in their Four Adjustment Dimensions**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>
Overall Adjustment	5.84	0.75
Personal-Emotional Adjustment	4.95	1.36
Social Adjustment	6.09	0.89
Academic Adjustment	5.72	0.91
Institutional Attachment	6.35	0.75

**Notes:** M=Mean; SD=Standard Deviation N=102

The collected data was analyzed and interpreted to compare students' adjustment in four dimensions of university adjustment. According to the presented data in the table 3, Wolaita sodo freshman students are achieved highest level of adjustment in institutional adjustment (M= 6.35, SD= 0.75). Students achieved second highest adjustment level in social adjustment dimension (M= 6.09, SD= 0.89) next to institutional adjustment, academic adjustment (M=5.72, SD=0.91) and personal-emotional adjustment (M= 4.95, SD= 1.36). According to the presented data in table 3, students are not well adjusted /achieved least adjustment/ in personal-emotional dimension among other three dimensions of adjustment. Personal-emotional dimension of adjustment involves 14 items among the whole 50 items of adjustment questionnaire. Among these 14 items the specific problems in this dimension were identified based on the 14 items under this dimension. The most influencing personal-emotional problems among 14 items were: worry a lot about college expenses (M =3.45), Have trouble coping with university stress (M =3.67), Feel tired a lot lately (M = 3.72). There were also other items in which students scored lower than "3" among 9 likert scales. Do not use study times efficiently, Have trouble concentrating when studying and Do not function well during exams" for the academic adjustment dimension and Have difficulty feeling at ease with others at university, I am lonesome for home and Feel lonely a lot for social adjustment. Particularly, respondents of this study experienced most of the time the following adjustment problems: I am-not sleeping well, Feel tired a lot lately, and could not think clearly (physical and emotional adjustment dimension), Do not use study time efficiently, Do not do well academically considering effort (academic adjustment dimension), and Feel different from others in undesirable ways. Financial problems in coping with college expenses were also another major adjustment problem experienced by the university student.

**Gender and adjustment problems among respondents**

**Table 2. Male and Female Students Overall Adjustment**

Variable(Gender)	N	M	SD	t-value(2-tailed)	Sig.(p-value)	$\eta^2$
Male	175	6.12	0.75	-2.567	0.007	0.031
Female	75	5.88	0.68			

**Notes:** Levene test indicates that the  $p$  value of equal variances assumed was used;  $M$ =Mean;  $SD$ =Standard Deviation; Sig. =Significant;  $\eta^2$ =eta-squared at alpha level 0.05.

The researcher conducted a preliminary testing to check for normality and equality of variance between the two groups with no serious violation noted. The result presented in the table 4 above shows that there was significant difference between male and female students in their mean overall adjustment score. The result of an independent t-test showed that mean of overall adjustment for male ( $M= 6.12$ ,  $SD= 0.75$ ) and female students ( $M= 5.88$ ,  $SD=0.68$ ),  $t_{(248)} = -2.567$ ,  $P=0.031$ . As the result, the two means showed that male students scored better in their overall adjustment compared to their counter female points. Comparing the eta-squared value obtained ( $\eta^2 = 0.031$ ) to Cohen's (1988) criteria (1988, 0.01 = small effect, 0.06 = moderate effect, and 0.14 = large effect), it was noted that the effect size of 0.031 obtained was considered to be small. A small effect suggested that the mean difference of the overall adjustment score for the male and female students was rather small. The difference between male and female students in their university adjustment may be due to the difference between male and female students in their coping strategies when they encounter adjustment problems /stress and depression period only/. Male students most of the time use coping mechanisms such as; suppress depression rather than escape and isolating themselves from different types of social relationships, social experiences and activities but female students use coping strategies such as; in crying, self- blame and isolating themselves from social relationships (Arthur, 1998). Research hypothesis accepted.

The researcher used Pearson product-moment correlations to determine the relationship between students' overall adjustment scores and their GPA's obtained at the end of their first semester of their freshman courses. The result obtained is presented in table below.

**Table 3. Estimates of Coefficients for the Academic Achievement Model**

Independent Variables	Beta(Standardized Coefficients)	t	p-value
Constant		12.543	0.0001
Social Adjustment	-0.171	-1.863	0.065
Personal-Emotional Adjustment	0.182	3.065	0.0021
Academic Adjustment	0.532	8.485	0.0001
Institutional Adjustment	-0.024	-0.652	0.523

**Note:**  $R=0.768$ ;  $R^2=0.59\%$ ;  $Adj.R^2= 0.5789$ ,  $F = 29.124$ ,  $p = 0.0001$

**Correlation matrix**

Variable	M	SD	Academic Achievement
Overall Adjustment	5.84	0.75	0.49*

**Source: Own Computation**

**Note:**  $r=0.49$ ,  $r^2=0.24$

Determining the relationship between students' academic achievement and their adjustment was the third objective of this study. To address this objective, the researcher used Pearson product-moment correlations to determine the relationship between students' overall adjustment scores and their GPA's obtained at the end of their first semester of their freshman courses. The result presented in the table 5 shows that there were statistically significant positive relationship between students' overall adjustment ( $r=0.49$ )  $r^2=0.24$ ,  $p= 0.01$  and their academic achievement (GPA's). It indicates that when students better adjusted themselves to their campus new environment, they would have higher academic achievement in terms of GPA's. Findings also indicated that as there is significant and positive relationship between students' academic achievement and academic adjustment ( $r= 0.56$ ,  $p= 0.01$ ) as well as personal-emotional adjustment ( $r= 0.41$ )  $r^2=17\%$ ,  $p=0.01$ ). Research hypothesis accepted.

Multiple regression analysis was conducted to determine the amount of variance in academic achievement explicated by university adjustment. As the finding in the table above showed that students' academic achievement is better explained by their academic adjustment ( $Beta=0.532$ ,  $t= 8.485$ ,  $p= 0.0001$ ) followed by personal-emotional adjustment ( $B= 0.182$ ,  $t= 3.065$ ,  $p=0.0021$ ). Both the academic adjustment and personal-emotional adjustment dimensions were commented to explain 59 % ( $r^2= 0.589$ ) of the variance in students' academic achievement. According to the result of this study, there was no statistically significant relationship found between academic achievement of students and students' social adjustment and attachment to their university.

### **Students help seeking behaviors and their sources of help**

Descriptive statistics was conducted to assess the students help seeking behaviors and their source of help when they encounter adjustment problems. Help seeking tendency of the students is detailed normal coping strategy to adjustment problems of the freshman university life. The result presented in the table above shows that the help seeking tendencies or intention of Wolaita Sodo freshman university students is moderate. Most of the students do not disclose their personal problems to professionals who provide counseling service to students who encounter different adjustment problems. Rather than consulting professionals students prefer to disclose their problems to their friends and senior students. As the data in table above 51 % of participants believe that telling personal problems to advisors is uncommon, 52.5 % of the students also believe that personal problems should be solved by one's own personal effort rather than telling to someone else, 77.5 % of the respondents prefer sharing their personal problems to their friends and senior students than professionals. Data collected by the interview also indicated that most of the respondents prefer either solving their own personal problems by their own effort or share with their senior students and friends rather than disclose to the professionals who are assigned to provide professional support for students who encounter different adjustment problems. Therefore based on the data the help seeking tendency of the participants was under moderate level.

### **Coping strategies of the students when they encounter adjustment challenges**

There was a significant difference between males ( $M = 1.19$ ,  $SD = 0.92$ ) and females ( $M = 1.69$ ,  $SD = 0.95$ ) on parental over-protectiveness scores (POPS) question "My parents were very overprotective of me growing up,"  $t(104) = 2.74$ ,  $p < .05$ . Female students reported a higher frequency in over-protectiveness from parents than males did. In addition, there was not a significant difference between males ( $M = 0.35$ ,  $SD = 0.60$ ) and females ( $M = 0.26$ ,  $SD = 0.52$ ) on POPS question "Being away from my parents at college has given me anxiety,"  $t(101) = -0.77$ . Also, there was not a significant difference between freshmen ( $M = 0.21$ ,  $SD = 0.44$ ), sophomores ( $M = 0.50$ ,  $SD = 0.72$ ), juniors ( $M = 0.60$ ,  $SD = 0.89$ ), and seniors ( $M = 0.50$ ,  $SD = 0.71$ ) on POPS question "Being away from my parents at college has given me anxiety,"  $F(3, 99)$ . Research hypothesis accepted.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of the study, the following suggestions are given:

- ❖ The university should give critical emphasis to the fresh students' campus adjustment issues and should prepare all inclusive orientation programs and assign a certain body who provide information to the new comers when they first come to the campus. Great emphasis should be given on the social life, academic activities, personal-emotional adjustment, institutional attachment and adaptation means to the new environment.
- ❖ Counseling based interventions and academic interventions should be prepared in assisting students who have identified low adjustment level in academic dimensions.
- ❖ It would be very important, if all staff members including counseling professionals participate in orientation programs which are prepared for freshmen students to provide necessary guidance and help to enhance students' adjustment skills and abilities.
- ❖ Senior students should be given training on how to help new comers as university mates which would have great importance for students' social adjustment and attachment.
- ❖ Since this study showed that students faced personal-emotional problems while on campus, the university should widen health service provided to the students when they encounter health related problems during their freshman year.
- ❖ The relationship between the instructors and their students should be open and friendly and the instructors should play vital role in allowing the students to know that instructors are open and ready to help students at anytime.
- ❖ The university should enhance students' awareness through different programs and mechanisms on how dysfunctional coping strategies can affect and hurt their overall university adjustment, academic achievement and physical health. Students should be given information about the benefit of functional coping strategies including seeking help from university counselors, advisors and instructors when they encounter different types of adjustment problems.
- ❖ Different recreational centers/DSTV hall, table tennis service, pool house etc/should be organized by the University for the Students to spend their free times rather than go to dysfunctional coping areas.

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