



Psychological Factors Influencing Social Adaptation of First-Year Students to the Conditions of University

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Abstract

In recent years, interest in the problems associated with the social adaptation of students to the conditions of university is growing in the scientific literature. The influence of some psychological factors on the success of adaptation of first-year students has been investigated. The study aims at presenting the comprehensive analysis of psychological factors influenced on the adaptability of first-year students to the conditions of university. The study was conducted in the South Ural State Humanitarian and Pedagogical University. 142 first-year students took part in it. The following methods were used: progress analysis, sociometry, the questionnaire "Adaptation of university students", the self-assessment of emotional states, the questionnaire of temperament structure, the sixteen personality factor questionnaire by R. Cattell, and the questionnaire "Adaptive behavior strategies". The main method of processing the results of the study is the multiple regression analysis. The regression model accounts for the different rates of adaptability from 41% to 59% of the variance. As a result of the study, the psychological factors that affect virtually all the indicators of adaptability have been identified. These include the level of development of conceptual thinking, the formation of educational and cognitive motives, attitudes toward parents, satisfaction with relationships with teachers. In addition, factors that influence the success of adaptation to different spheres of life of students are revealed. To adapt to the educational activity, introversion, sensitivity, high intelligence, skills of educational activity, motives of creative self-realization are more important. Extraversion, plasticity of the nervous system, expressiveness, social courage, calmness, and communicative motives are more important for adaptation to the study group. The adaptability to the internal criterion (subjective well-being) is most affected by satisfaction with living conditions.

Keywords: Adaptation, Social adaptation, Stress, Psychological factors of adaptation, Intellectual willingness to learn, Motivation of teaching

1 Introduction

In recent years, the scientific literature has become increasingly interested in the problems associated with the social adaptation of the students to the conditions of university. There are some important changes in the education systems of many countries: the process of democratization, the changes of instruction forms and methods, and the growth of academic mobility. These factors lead to the expansion of learning opportunities and social experience of students, and to the increase of incomplete education, reducing the intellectual level of students (9, 28).

The particular attention of researches is attracted by the adjustment difficulties of first-year students. Researchers

note that adaptation to university conditions is a complex, long-term process, accompanied by a high level of stress. Expressed psychophysical stress reactions taking place in the initial period of training are revealed (2). Among the problems experienced by first-year students, the researchers point out the high academic workload, inability to allocate time, organize their activities (5); decrease in the sustainability of attention, efficiency; (3); lack of school skills for the development of undergraduate material with its reasonably high requirements, increased anxiety, fear of examinations (19); difficulties of entering a new team (24).

Among the factors influencing the adaptation of students, scientists note the quality of previous school education, intellectual willingness to learn, learning motivation, personal characteristics, as well as the quality of teaching and the nature of relationships with teachers, the availability of psychological and educational assistance to first-year students (1, 8, 9, 11, 25, 28, 30). The influence of some

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individual (health status, some intellectual features, temperament, and personality) or social factors (educational status of parents, residence in the city or in the village before the academic studies) on the success of social adaptation of first-year students to university conditions has been empirically investigated (4, 6, 10-13, 15, 19, 23, 26-28). However, the research interest in this issue, the problems related to the identification of factors that determine the intensity of the adaptive stress, the course and results of adaptation process, are far from being resolved. The comprehensive assessment of the impact of various factors on the success of social adaptation of students to the conditions of university has not yet been done.

The study *aims at* presenting a comprehensive analysis of the impact of psychological factors of adaptability of first-year students to the conditions of university.

2 Methodology and methods

The study was conducted in 2017 in South Ural State Humanitarian and Pedagogical University. The study involved 142 students aged between 16 and 18. Gender composition: it involved 14 (9.9%) young men, 128 young women (90.1%). The composition of experimental group reflects the gender and age characteristics of first-year students of pedagogical university.

When selecting the diagnostic techniques, it was taken into account that in social psychology among the criteria of human adaptability to the conditions of social environment, it is customary to distinguish the following factors:

- The external criterion is the success of person's functioning in the social environment,
- The internal criterion is the subjective sense of well-being in the given environment (18).

Based on the foregoing, the following diagnostic methods have been chosen to reveal the adaptability of students according to the external criteria:

- The analysis of students' achievement,
- Sociometry,
- The questionnaire "Adaptation of university students" (T. Dubovitskaya, A. Krylova),

2. To diagnose the adaptability of the students according to the internal criterion:

- Self-assessment of emotional states (A. Wessmann, D. Ricks),

3. To investigate the factors that can affect the adaptability of students:

- Self-evaluation and expert assessment of the development of training skills,
- Self-evaluation of relationships with teachers,
- Temperament questionnaire (B. Smirnov),
- Diagnostic questionnaire for identifying character accentuations (14),
- The Sixteen Personality Factor Questionnaire by R. Cattell,
- The Intelligence Structure Test – 2000 R (R. Amthauer),

- The Incomplete Sentences Technique,
- The method of "Adaptive behavioral strategies" (16).

For statistical processing of the study results, multiple regression analysis, Student's t-test, Kruskal-Wallis H test, Pearson's chi-square goodness of fit test have been used.

3 Results

The main method of processing the results of the study was the method of multiple regression analysis. The regression model was introduced for each indicator of social and psychological adaptation, which in turn acted as a dependent variable:

- Academic performance (external criteria, objective assessment);
- Sociometric status in the group (external criterion, objective assessment);
- Adaptability to educational activity (external criterion, subjective assessment, obtained by the questionnaire);
- Adaptability to the study group (external criterion, subjective assessment, obtained by the questionnaire);
- Self-assessment of emotional states (internal criterion).

The following indicators served as independent variables (factors): temperamental features: extraversion-introversion, rigidity-plasticity, emotional excitability-balance, reaction rate; personal characteristics: indicators for 11 factors from R. Cattell's questionnaire – A, B, C, E, F, G, H, I, L, M, N, O; the assessment of motivation groups of educational activities; intellectual willingness to learn as the result of the third subtest of R. Amthauer's test of intelligence structure; the formation of skills of educational activity is the average score according to expert assessments of teachers and self-assessment of the student; attitude to family is the average score based on the Incomplete Sentences Technique relating to the family evaluation; satisfaction with the relationships with teachers; satisfaction with living conditions (satisfaction with housing conditions, satisfaction with financial conditions, satisfaction with the conditions of education, satisfaction with rest and leisure conditions). The total number of independent variables (factors) was 31.

The regression model developed by the authors explains from 41% to 59% of variance of adaptation rates of students. The results of the regression model are presented in the table 1. Taking into consideration the detailed factors influencing the rate of adaptability, it is possible to present the factors that have a statistically significant impact on each indicator, in descending order of the absolute values of their standardized coefficients (Table 2). The following conclusions may be drawn based on the lists of psychological factors presented in Table 2. The first conclusion is that adaptation to university conditions is a single process, and there are psychological factors that affect the success of adaptation in almost all conditions. High development level of conceptual thinking, considering as an essential condition of learning ability, the basis of academic abilities are expected to be included into this list.

Table 1: Standardized rates of regression.

	Independent variables	The rates of adaptability				
		Academic performance	Social status	Adaptability to the learning conditions	Adaptability to the study group	Self-assessment of emotional states
1	Extroversion	-0.086*	0.225*	-0.093*	0.311*	0.194*
2	Rigidity	-0.099*	-0.119*	-0.105*	-0.139*	-0.122*
3	Emotional excitability	0.034	-0.238*	-0.052	-0.175	-0.231*
4	Response rate	0.052	-0.091	0.023	-0.097	-0.015
5	A	0.171*	0.200*	0.116*	0.297*	0.070
6	B	0.062	0.001	0.117*	0.025	0.003
7	C	0.049	0.077	0.039	0.044	0.067
8	E	-0.015	0.074	-0.112*	-0.028	0.031
9	F	0.054	0.165*	-0.085	0.269*	-0.081
10	G	0.289*	0.141*	0.140*	0.124*	0.109
11	H	0.058	0.114*	-0.002	0.165*	0.059
12	I	0.152*	-0.071	0.164*	0.056	0.058
13	L	-0.015	-0.013	-0.012	-0.125*	-0.056
14	M	0.009	0.040	0.044	0.089	-0.115*
15	N	0.060	0.006	0.009	0.077	0.053
16	O	0.174*	-0.142*	-0.134*	-0.190*	-0.151*
17	Intellectual willingness to learn	0.452*	0.134*	0.318*	0.099*	0.049
18	The formation of training activities skills	0.283*	0.071	0.251*	0.128	0.237*
19	Communicative motives	0.067	0.222*	0.072	0.231*	0.077
20	Educational and cognitive motives	0.182*	0.099*	0.187*	0.095*	0.118*
21	Professional motives	0.036	0.027	0.165	-0.056	0.064
22	Motives of creative self-realization	0.151*	0.093	0.218*	0.017	0.092*
23	Social motives	-0.027	0.286*	0.005	0.012	0.061
24	Avoidance motives	-0.136*	0.084	-0.177*	-0.062	-0.214*
25	Prestige motives	-0.091	-0.013	-0.067	0.121	-0.069
26	Attitude to the family	0.172*	0.111*	0.074	0.132*	0.157*
27	Satisfaction with housing conditions	0.132*	0.022	0.065	0.049	0.461*
28	Satisfaction with financial conditions	0.054	-0.051	-0.022	0.038	0.254*
29	Satisfaction with educational conditions	0.058	0.086	0.020	0.024	0.063
30	Satisfaction with rest and leisure conditions	0.076*	-0.078	0.053	0.025	0.242*
31	Satisfaction with relations with teachers	0.160*	- 0.055	0.237*	0.173*	0.296*

*Statistically significant rates

This factor largely determines student's success in mastering his main educational activity in the university, it allows him to successfully master skills of working with scientific literature, with large amounts of data, and master the conceptual foundations of the studied science. Successful development of learning skills leads to the formation of positive relationships with teachers and respect from the group, and to high subjective satisfaction. Another factor influencing all indicators of adaptation is the formation of educational and cognitive motives. As the authors of the

article believe, this is quite understandable. The main activity of the student is educational; through the prism of communication with it the student perceives all aspects of his life. With high educational and cognitive motivation, even not a very bright student is capable of achieving success in educational, as noted above, it contributes to effective adaptation to all spheres of student's life.

The next factor influencing the adaptation indicators is the attitude to the family and parents. Theoretical ideas about the role of parents and family in the formation of human life

have been expressed by representatives of various directions in psychology – psychoanalysis, behaviorism, humanistic psychology; they have repeatedly expressed their views in Russian psychological science. This study confirms the findings in the literature. Family relations act as the basis for the formation of strong personality, as a model of positive relationships with people, and as a source of social experience. Students with the positive attitude to the family have the most important psychological resource required in adapting to the new living conditions and overcoming difficulties.

Another important factor affecting the adaptation indicators is satisfaction with the relationships with teachers. Student's educational activity are formed in constant interaction with the teachers, including explanation, control, evaluation, and personal communication. The success of the student's main activity depends on his interactions with teachers.

The authors of the article conducted a survey of students, during which they had to rank the features of teacher's interaction with students, which are the most important for them. The lowest average ranks were revealed in such features as: the respect for students, the ability to support the student in cases of failures, sociability. Thus, the professionalism of the teacher, manifested in his pedagogical tact, goodwill and respect for students contributes to the successful social adaptation of the students.

The second conclusion based on the data obtained is that adaptation to university conditions is, although a single, but complex process of adaptation to the different spheres of life and activities of the student, and there are qualities affecting the success of adaptation to different areas. If external criteria of adaptability (success of functioning in the social environment) are discussed, then it is possible to distinguish two areas of adaptation – adaptation to educational activity and adaptation to the group.

The analysis of factors influencing the adaptability to educational activity (indicators: academic performance, subjective assessment obtained by the questionnaire) are to be mentioned. However, common factors, which have been considered above – high intellectual willingness to learn, satisfaction with relationships with teachers, educational and

cognitive motives are now excluded from consideration. Then the following factors remain: learning skills, low evidence of avoidance motives, motives of creative self-realization, I + (sensitivity), G + (high super-ego), A + (sociability), B + (high intelligence), plasticity of nervous system, introversion.

Most of the factors are quite expected, they create motivation, systematic and arbitrary regulation of learning activities (G +), cognitive willingness to learn (B +), necessary communication level (A +), flexible reorganization of existing behavior patterns (plasticity of nervous processes). Regarding the sensitivity factor (I +), it should be noted that pedagogical profession requires a high level of sensitivity, empathy, and understanding; these qualities are an important component of teacher's perceptual abilities. When teaching a number of disciplines, the development of these qualities is considered as an important task ("Psychology", "Pedagogy"). It is not surprising that the students, having this quality, are more easily adaptable to the educational activity at the pedagogical university.

The controversial data on the factor O (calmness-anxiety) are especially worth mentioning. This factor makes a positive contribution to the assessment of "Academic performance" indicator, and a negative contribution to the assessment of "Adaptability to educational activity". In other words, high-anxiety students learn better than the students who are not characterized by high anxiety. But for the subjective assessment, they are adapted worse; they are more concerned about possible failures. In general, this is consistent with the available data in literature that sensitive individuals achieve external adaptability at the cost of excessively great efforts (16).

The contribution of temperamental variables to the indicators of adaptability to educational activity is statistically significant, but small in absolute terms. This seems quite understandable. On the one hand, temperament is an important factor in responding to stress, adapting to changing living conditions (7, 17, 20). On the other hand, motivational factors and personal characteristics play the most important role in adaptation to educational activity; they are primarily related to the arbitrary regulation of activities, so the contribution of temperamental factors is low.

Table 2: Factors affecting the rates of adaptability.

Adaptability indicators	Factors
Academic performance	High intellectual willingness to learn, G +, skills of learning activities, educational and cognitive motives, O+, positive attitude to the family, A +, satisfaction with relationships with teachers, motives for creative self-realization, I +, low intensity of avoidance motives, satisfaction with housing conditions, plasticity, introversion, low level of avoidance motives, satisfaction with rest conditions
Sociometric status	Social motives, emotional balance, communicative motives, extraversion, A +, F +, O-, G +, high intellectual willingness to learn, plasticity, H +, positive attitude to the family
Adaptability to educational activity	High intellectual willingness to learn, skills of educational activity, satisfaction with relationships with teachers, motives for creative self-realization, educational and cognitive motives, low intensity of avoidance motives, I +, G +, A +, B +, E-, O-, plasticity, introversion
Adaptability to the study group	Extroversion, A +, F +, communicative motives, H +, O-, satisfaction with relationships with teachers, L-, plasticity, positive attitude to the family, G +, high intellectual willingness to learn
Self-assessment of emotional states	Satisfaction with housing conditions, satisfaction with relationships with teachers, satisfaction with financial conditions, satisfaction with rest and leisure conditions, skills of educational activity, emotional balance, low intensity of avoidance motives, extraversion, positive attitude to the family, O-, educational and cognitive motives, plasticity, M-, emotional balance

The general factors affecting the adaptability to the study group (the indicators are sociometric status, subjective assessment obtained by the questionnaire) are the following: extraversion, A+ (sociability), F+ (expressiveness), H+ (social courage), O- (calmness), G+ (high normativity of behavior), plasticity of nervous system, communicative motives.

The significant contribution of temperamental variables, primarily extraversion, to the indicators related to the adaptation to the study group should be noted. Communication in the new social environment, in the new social status is accompanied by a pronounced stress, a challenge to the communicative abilities of the person. It is necessary to build social contacts, fight for the place in the role structure of the group, and develop new standards of behavior. Extroverts with high plasticity of nervous system are good at doing it.

As for personal qualities, a statistically significant contribution of such variables as sociability, expressiveness, social courage, calmness as well as the formation of communicative and social motives seems to be quite expected. Thus, introversion, I+ (sensitivity), B+ (high intelligence), skills of educational activity, low intensity of avoidance motives and motives for creative self-realization are more important for adaptation to educational activity. Extraversion, plasticity of nervous system, F+ (expressiveness), H+ (social courage), O- (calmness), communicative motives are more important for adaptation to the study group.

Factors affecting the indicator of adaptability according to internal criterion are further analyzed. These factors are the subjective well-being of the individual in the given social environment (the indicator is the self-assessment of emotional states). It is mainly affected by the satisfaction with various aspects of life – housing conditions, financial conditions, rest and leisure conditions, relationships with teachers, as well as the features of temperament and personal characteristics. In general, it is an expected consequence. Emotions are the psychological experience of phenomena and situations to the actual needs. Therefore, satisfaction of basic needs makes the greatest contribution to the indicator of self-assessment of emotional states. It is particularly noteworthy that the highest coefficient among all the factors affecting the self-assessment of emotional states has the factor of satisfaction with housing conditions.

The authors of the article have carried out an additional survey among the students living in the hostel. This survey has revealed that good relations with roommates, the quality of communication systems, the quality of rooms and hall ways, the politeness of the staff, and the adherence to the hostel rules are the most important living conditions in the hostel.

The results of the study demonstrate that the self-assessment of emotional states is also affected by temperament (extraversion, plasticity of nervous processes) and features of personal and intellectual regulation of emotions (factors M, O), which is consistent with the data available in the literature (20, 21).

Some factors are not included in the regression model, because it is impossible to measure them in the metric scale. These factors are gender identity, the presence or absence of character accentuation, the peculiarities of student's place of residence before entering the university, the educational level of parents, and the strategies of adaptive behavior.

Gender has traditionally been recognized as a factor helping to cope with stress and social adaptation. Women have a higher level of perceived stress; the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder are expressed in cases of extreme situations (22, 27, 29). However, the social adaptation of women is often easier, due to their qualities such as sensitivity, flexibility, the ability to use social support. In this study the significant differences between boys and girls (t-test, $p < 0.05$) have been found in such indicators as academic performance and adaptation to educational activity. Young men are less adapted than the girls in relation to educational activity both in terms of objective indicators (academic performance) and subjective assessment. The results obtained are consistent with the data on the number of expelled students during the first two years of study. Thus, at the faculty of foreign languages, 20% of the expelled students in 2016-2017 academic years were young men, while their number at the beginning of the academic year was 7.4%. This can be explained by several reasons. Firstly, the profession of education specialist has recently been considered to be predominantly female in the public consciousness. Young men often enter the pedagogical university rather for other reasons (the desire to obtain higher education in the humanities, the difficulties of entering universities, the reluctance to join the army) than to strive for pedagogical profession. Secondly, getting into the group where girls make up a vast majority, young men often feel uncomfortable. Finally, the male gender stereotype is often incompatible with the role of the diligent student, and many young men still choose the role of "capable but lazy" at school, considering the zeal in learning as a behavior characteristic of girls. All these reasons lead to the fact that young men adapt to the conditions of university in a more difficult way than girls. This does not deny the fact that among the most talented students and registered fellows there are many young men who have entered the pedagogical university by vocation and show high commitment to studying.

Another factor that can affect the adaptability of students is the presence of character accentuation. Twenty-four students with character accentuations were identified in the course of psychological diagnostics. 75% of accentuated students had the pronounced problems of adaptation. This amount of students is significantly greater than the amount of students who did not have the accentuation of character (Pearson's chi-square goodness of fit test, $p < 0.05$). The problems of adaptation of accentuated students differed depending on the accentuation type. Thus, the students with hysterical (demonstrative) type of accentuation had the problems with discipline; they did not follow the requirements of the teachers; they demanded the increased attention to themselves; they demonstrated the excessive active and emotional behavior.

Table 3: The number and proportion of subjects with different preferred strategies of adaptive behavior

	Strategy name	The number of subjects (people)	Proportion (%)
1	Active environment change	56	39.4
2	Active change of personality	67	47.2
3	Leaving the environment and finding a new one	2	1.4
4	Avoidance of contact with the environment	1	0.7
5	Passive representation of personality	3	2.1
6	Passive submission to environmental conditions	13	9.2
7	Passive waiting for changes	0	0

Students with psychasthenic (anxious) type of accentuation were not confident of themselves; they felt overworked; and in some cases they were increasingly suspicious; they had sleep disturbance and somatic complaints. The peculiarities of student's place of residence before entering the university and its influence were investigated by comparing the indicators of adaptation of students from the cities and from rural areas (t-test, $p = 0.05$). Students from rural areas proved to be less adapted to university conditions than students from the cities, but only on subjective basis. As for objective assessment (academic performance and sociometric status), the differences do not reach the level of statistical significance. The analysis of the educational level of parents and its influence on the adaptability demonstrated that the students from families in which parents do not have higher education are less adapted to educational activity. However, this is manifested only by subjective assessment. According to objective assessment (academic performance), no statistically significant differences were found.

Another factor that can affect the social and psychological adaptation of students is their adaptation strategies. The number of students with different preferred strategies is presented in Table 3. The data presented in the table 3 demonstrate that most of the surveyed students prefer active strategies. The most common are the strategies of active personal changes and the changes in environment. The strategies of passive waiting of the changes were not identified as preferred. For a comparative study of the success of the adaptation process, the subjects were divided into the groups in accordance with the preferred strategies: the first group is an active environmental change, the second group is an active change of personality, and the third group is the passive strategies. The statistical analysis (Cruskal-Wallis H-test, $p < 0.05$) revealed that the use of different strategies of adaptive behavior is an important factor influencing social and psychological adaptation of the students. Students who prefer passive strategies have significantly lower values in terms of adaptability – academic performance, achievement, adaptability to the group.

4 Conclusion

The research results demonstrate that the social adaptation to the conditions of the university is a single, but complex process of adaptation to various spheres of life and activities of the student. There are such psychological factors that affect almost all indicators of adaptability. These include the level of development of conceptual thinking, acting as the basis of intellectual readiness for higher education; the

formation of educational and cognitive motives, attitudes to the parents, satisfaction with the relationships with teachers.

However, there are qualities that affect adaptability to various spheres of student's life. Taking into account the external criterion of adaptability (the success of functioning in the social environment), it is possible to distinguish two areas of adaptation – adaptation to educational activity and adaptation to the study group. Introversion, sensitivity, high intelligence, skills of educational activity, low intensity of avoidance motives, motives for creative self-realization are more important for successful adaptation to educational activity. Extraversion, plasticity of the nervous system, expressiveness, social courage, calmness, and communicative motives are more important for successful adaptation to the study group. Satisfaction with living conditions is important for adaptability by the internal criterion (subjective satisfaction, emotional well-being).

The study revealed the influence of different factors on the adaptability of the students. These are such factors as gender (young women adapt better than men); the presence or absence of character accentuation (the students with character accentuation are more likely to have adaptation problems); the strategies of adaptive behavior (the students using active strategies adapt better than those who use passive strategies). As for such factors as the peculiarities of the student's place of residence before entering the university, the educational level of parents, they affect the subjective assessment of success of the student, but not the objective indicators of his success in social adaptation to the university.

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