

# Selected Factors Influencing Social and Academic Adjustment of Undergraduate Students in Egerton University, Njoro Campus, Kenya

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## Abstract

The provision of education and training to all Kenyans is fundamental to the success of Government's overall development strategy. A successful adjustment of students to university environment enables them to complete their studies on time. However, there are indications that students' failure to adjust to the university environment is still a persistent problem facing education in Kenya manifested in form of an alarming rate of student drop-outs, course deferment, delay in graduation, drug and substance abuse among the students at Egerton University. The study was designed to investigate the influence of interpersonal relationship skills and attitude on students' social and academic adjustment in Egerton University, Njoro Campus. The study employed *ex post facto's* Causal-comparative research design. A random sample size of 357 students and purposive sample of 40 Student peer counsellors, 2 Student counsellors and the Dean of Students was selected. Data was collected using questionnaires and interview schedule. Piloting of the instrument was done to ascertain validity. The reliability of the instrument was established by using Cronbach's coefficient alpha method and a reliability coefficient of 0.75 was obtained. Descriptive statistics and inferential statistics were utilized to analyze data using SPSS. The findings of the study indicated that inter-personal relationships and the attitude of students towards university environment and academics were critical factors influencing social and academic adjustment of undergraduate students at the university. It was recommended that there is need for the university to

encourage social activities that can facilitate effective interpersonal relationships among students and the positive attitude towards university environment. There is need for the university to increase the level of publicity of guidance and counselling programme and its services in the universities so as to assist students in coping and adjusting to university life.

## Introduction

Students face many challenges while adjusting to university life. They must learn to operate in new environments, to live on their own, to work with new and unfamiliar people and to handle new stresses and new challenges. The factors influencing social and academic adjustment among university students have been a topic of interest for many years. The American College Testing programme revealed that out of 2.8 million students who enter higher level of education in the USA, over 1.6 million leave the institution prior to graduation. In a study done in USA, it was found that without a successful adjustment and transition to college, students may drop out. Moreover, statistics show that nearly 30-40% of college and/or university students in the USA drop out from university without obtaining degrees and they never complete their courses (Consolvo, 2002). Boulter (2002), reports that 75% of students in the UK who drop out of the university do so within the first two years of study. It is therefore important to understand the factors that influence social and academic adjustment of students from the time of entry to university to when they complete their programmes. Paton (2008), reports that, 14.1% of undergraduate students in the UK who enrolled for their degree programmes in 2005 /2006 failed to complete courses due to drop-out. Paton further revealed that, the latest figure of students in the UK who drop out from the university equates to 47,788.

Education and training in Kenya is governed by Education Acts of (1968), TSC, KNEC Adult Education University Acts and Charters for Universities. Since independence, the Government has addressed the challenges facing the education sector through Commissions, Committees and Taskforces (Ominde, 1964). The Koech Report (2000) recommends ways which enable the education system adapt in response to changing circumstances. Moriasi *et al.*, (2006) observed that, among the grievances leading to students' unrest and riots in Egerton University, 43.2% is purely academics. Students' failure to

adjust to university environment, may lead to students drop-out, course deferment, pregnancies and delayed graduation as shown in records in the Students' Affairs Department in Egerton University.

Social adjustment is fundamental for everyone, but particularly important for undergraduate students engaged in the process of individualization from their home. Students' social adjustment to college and/or university has been linked to students' overall adjustment (Moore, *et al.*, 1998). One way of assisting students in establishing connections is to help them become involved in social activities at the university. Social adjustment can be examined in terms of how well students function in their immediate environment, participation in social activities and their satisfaction with various social aspects of the university experience (Campas, *et al.*, 1986).

Social adjustment may be just as important as academic adjustment. Gerdes and Mallinckrodt (1994) observed that, personal adjustment and integration into social fabric of university environment play a role and is as important as academic factors throughout the students' life. Most academic activities take place in social situations and so the students' adjustment to university is an important factor in the learning process. Tao *et al.*, (2000) revealed that academic demands increase and new social relations are established when students join higher level of institution. Students are often uncertain of their abilities to meet these demands. They need to be assisted to develop coping skills, that will enable them overcome the challenges they encounter at the university (Egerton University Student Handbook, 2006 / 2007).

Academic adjustment (how well students deal with educational demands) includes; students motivation to complete academic work, success in meeting academic requirements, academic effort and satisfaction with academic environment (Baker & Siryk, 1989). The pursuit of academic goals is the primary purpose of being admitted to the university (Egerton University Student Handbook, 2008). Russell and Petrie (1992) in their study on academic adjustment of colleges and/or university student concluded that many students who succeed academically in high school do not show similar patterns of success in the university.

The structure and meaning of interpersonal behaviour has been an important component in a social set up. Interpersonal relationship forms the core of human daily activity. Holmbeck and Leake (1999) assert that, individuals who

are able to succeed handling their independence and newfound freedoms are able to make new relationship while maintaining old relationships. Studies have shown that living arrangement have impacted the social adjustment of colleges and / or university students. Adams *et al.*, (2000) remarked that, the environment in which students live has had a direct impact on the student's overall adjustment.

Students who lived in environment that are conducive to learning and provided ample study space and opportunities for growth and interaction tend to have an easier time adjusting than students who live in other environment (Dinger, 1999). Residence hall climates have been associated with families in terms of rules boundaries and atmosphere of care and concern for other members. Students are expected to develop care and concern to other in the residential halls.

The social climate has also been deemed important is assisting students to adjustment at the university. The university students belong to the category between late adolescence and early adulthood. This stage of life is characterized by periods of instability considerable conflicts, anxiety and tension (Hall, 1904). Socially, adolescence is period of building a stable identity, many young people experience role confusion and blurred self-image. Student may need to be assisted to develop skills of solving these difficulties and uncertainties. One way of assisting students to develop the interactive skills may be through timely and adequate orientation. Moser (1963) posits that new students should be assisted to adjust to the new environment. He asserts that orientation of new students should be done in conjunction with continuing students. Interpersonal relationship has an effect on students self-esteem which indeed affects the students overall adjustment at the university.

Human beings throughout their lifespan are exposed to a number of experiences as they interact with other people and the environment in which they live. As a result they may develop attitude about others or the environment. Bogardus (1931) defines attitude as a tendency to act towards or against something in the environment which becomes thereby a positive or negative value. However, the attitude that people form through their own direct experiences are stronger than those they acquire vicariously and are more resistant to change. Once formed, attitudes tend to strengthen when we associate with others who share those (Samuel, Ellen & Denise, 2008).

Attitude greatly influence how one behaves, therefore are among the issues that may be responsible for people's action in different situations. Attitudes are important aspects of social function since they summarize past experiences and predict or direct future actions. Ratcliff (1991) posits that, students attitudes about entry to university, values sense of purpose and sense of independence have a direct influence on academic achievement.

The students' perception of university environment has a great influence on social and academic adjustment at the university. Hogg and Vaughan (1995) purport that, the learning of attitudes is an integral part of the socialization process, which may occur through direct experiences and/or interaction with others or as a product of the cognitive process. Thus attitudes formed by students eventually influence both their social and academic adjustment at the university.

### Research Methodology

The study utilized the *ex post facto's* causal-comparative research design. According to Kerlinger (2000), this research design is a systematic empirical inquiry in which a researcher has no ability to control the independent variables because their manifestations have already occurred and therefore cannot be manipulated by the research. It is primarily concerned with investigating the possibility of causal relationship between variables which in this study constituted the selected factors as the independent variables and the students' social and academic adjustment as the dependent variables (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2000). This design was considered appropriate because it is suitable in social, educational and psychological contexts where independent variables lie outside the researchers' control. The study was conducted at Egerton University, Njoro Campus, in Nakuru County. The County is located in Rift Valley region of Kenya. The study sample was selected using the stratified random sampling to obtain the required sample of the students in each year of study. The study sample was purposively selected to include students' peer counsellors, university student counsellors and the Dean of Student.

Data of the study was collected using the University Students' Questionnaires (USQ) and conducted interviews. The development of research instruments was done by examining the research objectives and hypotheses, related literature consulting research experts and lecturers, for the purposes of framing items and critical examination of variables. The data was analyzed using both

descriptive and inferential statistics. Pearson correlation was used in analyzing the relationship between interpersonal relationships skill and student attitude, and social and academic adjustment.

### Results and Discussion

**Table 1: Levels of Interpersonal Relationships among University Students**

Levels of interpersonal relationship	Frequency	Percent
Poor	5	1.4
Moderate	123	34.6
Good	228	64.0
Total	356	100.0

Table 1 indicates that majority (98.6%) of the students had at least moderate interpersonal relationship in the university. Out of 98.6 percent, 34.6 percent of them had moderate interpersonal relationship while 64.0 percent had good interpersonal relationship in the university. This suggests that the students had good interpersonal relationship with their peers, lecturers and other significant persons in the university. This was likely to enable them to effectively adjust socially and academically in the university. This is supported by previous studies by Adams *et al.*, (2000) who observed that, effective interpersonal relationships will create an enabling environment for the student to adapt to the university. Dinger (1999) add that students who lived in environment that are conducive to learning and provided ample study space and opportunities for growth and interaction tend to have an easier time adjusting than students who lived in environments.

To establish the influence of interpersonal relationship on social and academic adjustment, Pearson's correlation coefficient was used. Correlation analysis was used to determine the strength and the direction of the relationship between the two variables (social and academic adjustment index scores and interpersonal relationships index score). In this case, social and academic adjustment index scores were treated as the independent variables while interpersonal relationships index score was the dependent variable. Table 2

shows a correlation coefficient matrix of social and academic adjustment and interpersonal relationships.

**Table 2: Correlation of Social and Academic Adjustment and Interpersonal Relationship**

		Interpersonal skills	Social adjustment	Academic adjustment
Interpersonal skills	Pearson Correlation	1	.429(**)	.554(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	0	0
Social adjustment	Pearson Correlation	.429(**)	1	.418(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0	.	0
Academic adjustment	Pearson Correlation	.554(**)	.418(**)	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0	0	.

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed (n=356).

From Table 2, there was a moderate and positive significant correlation between the level of interpersonal relationship and social adjustment ( $r = .429$ ,  $p \{0.000\} < 0.01$ ) and academic adjustment of students in the university ( $r = .554$ ,  $p \{0.000\} < 0.01$ ). This suggests that there was a positive relationship between the level of interpersonal relationship and students' social and academic adjustment in the university. Therefore, the more positive the interpersonal relationship of a student, the higher was the likelihood of more social and academic adjustment, and vice versa. This could be attributed to the fact that a better interpersonal relationship makes it easier for the student to adjust socially and academically in school by developing positive relationships with lecturers and other students. However, it should be noted that the impact of interpersonal relationship on social and academic adjustment will also depend on simultaneous interaction and influence of other factors.

These findings support previous studies which suggested that relationships and making meaningful connections are important for students to adjust to the college environment. Students who have been able to establish bonds in their new environment adjusted better than students who were isolated and not as successful in establishing new friendships and relationships. The theory of attachment has been used to explain the importance of emotional bonds and healthy adjustment. Healthy individuals tend to have secure attachments to parents, guardians, and significant others in their lives. Individuals with secure

attachments tend to have an easier time transitioning to college than individuals who do not have secure attachments (Rice, FitzGerald, Whaley & Gibbs, 1995). Relationships with parents may change when students go to college, which can be a difficult transition for all involved, and cause additional stress and pressure on the students as they move through the developmental process and become adults (Mudore, 1999). The process of adjustment can be frustrating and overwhelming for many students, leading to emotional maladjustment and depression (Wintre & Yaffe, 2000), which may, in turn, negatively affect college performance.

**Table 3: Assessment of the Aspects of University Environment**

Statement	Response (%)					Means
	SD	D	U	A	SA	
I feel lonely in this university	30.1	33.4	12.9	13.8	9.8	3.60
I am satisfied with my academic performance.	5.6	16.6	15.2	46.3	16.3	3.51
If I had the opportunity I would transfer to another university.	21.9	19.9	11.2	17.4	29.5	3.13
I would recommend this university to others.	22.5	12.6	18.0	25.0	21.9	3.11
I am satisfied with quality of teaching-learning in this campus.	16.9	27.2	19.4	27.5	9.0	2.85
I like this university's' students code of conduct.	18.8	25.0	16.9	31.7	7.6	2.84
The security in this campus is adequate.	26.1	31.7	16.6	20.5	5.1	2.47
I think academic facilities and learning resources are adequate in this university.	32.9	35.1	10.7	16.6	4.8	2.25
I like the accommodation facilities offered in this university.	45.2	29.5	7.3	14.9	3.1	2.01
I like the food / meals available in campus.	58.4	25.6	7.9	6.7	1.4	1.67

n = 356

Table 3 indicates that the respondents generally disagreed with majority of the aspects of the university environment and academic programmes. This was demonstrated by them rating six out of ten statements below the average score (3.00). The students were less satisfied with quality of teaching-learning, students' code of conduct, adequacy of security, adequacy of the academic facilities and learning resources, accommodation facilities, and the food /

meals available in the university. However, the students were at least satisfied with their company, academic performance, opportunity to transfer to another university, and would recommend others to the university. This suggests that the students considered their university environment and academic programme as not adequate.

The responses to each constituent aspect of the university environment and academic programme were scored on a scale of 1, indicating least level of attitude, to 5, indicating highest level of attitude towards the university environment and academic programme. The individual statement scores were summed up to form an attitude index score for each respondent. The index score varied between 10, indicating the least level of attitude, and 50, indicating the highest level of attitude towards the university environment and academic programme. The higher the score, the higher was the level of attitude towards the university environment and academic programme, and vice versa. The index score had a mean score of 27.44 (Std deviation = 5.255) and was later collapsed into three ordinal categories in order to differentiate between the levels of attitude among the sampled respondents. This included a score of 10-23 (negative attitude), a score of 24-36 (moderate attitude) and a score of 37-50 (positive attitude). Table 4 summarizes the levels of attitude towards the university environment and academic programmes.

**Table 4: Attitude towards the University Environment and Academic Programme**

Levels of attitude	Frequency	Percent
Negative	103	28.9
Moderate	241	67.7
Positive	12	3.4
Total	356	100.0

Table 4 indicates that 67.7 percent of the respondents recorded a moderate attitude towards the university environment and academic programme. The remaining 28.9 percent and 3.4 percent recorded a negative and positive attitude towards the university environment and academic programme, respectively. This suggests that on the overall, majority of the students were not very satisfied with the university environment and academic programmes. The students reported that in comparison with the situation in other public universities, they considered their university environment and academic

programme as inadequate. This was attributed to their adequate exposure and awareness of the environment and academic programme of their university.

To establish the influence of students' attitude towards university environment and academic programme on students' social and academic adjustment, Pearson's correlation coefficient was used. Correlation analysis was used to determine the strength and the direction of the relationship between the two variables, that is, social and academic adjustment index scores and attitude index score. In this case, social and academic adjustment index scores were treated as the independent variables while attitude index score was the dependent variable. Table 5 shows a correlation coefficient matrix of social and academic adjustment and attitude towards university environment and academic programmes.

**Table 5: Pearson Correlation of Social and Academic Adjustment and Students' Attitude**

		Students' attitude	Social adjustment	Academic adjustment
Students' attitude	Pearson Correlation	1	.373(**)	.332(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	0	0
Social adjustment	Pearson Correlation	.373(**)	1	.418(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0	.	0
Academic adjustment	Pearson Correlation	.332(**)	.418(**)	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0	0	.

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed) (n=356).

From Table 5, there was a weak positive and significant correlation between the level of attitude of students towards university environment and academic programme and social adjustment ( $r = .373, p \{0.000\} < 0.01$ ) and academic adjustment of students in the university ( $r = .332, p \{0.000\} < 0.01$ ). This suggests that there was a direct relationship between the level of students' attitude towards university environment and academic programme and their social and academic adjustment in the university. Therefore, the more positive the attitude of a student, the higher was the level of social and academic

adjustment, and vice versa. This could be attributed to the fact that a positive attitude assists a student to positively evaluate the social and academic aspects of the university. However, it should be noted that the impact of student attitude on social and academic adjustment also depend on simultaneous interaction and influence of other factors.

These findings support previous studies such as Ratcliff (1991) who observed that student's attitudes about entry to university, values sense of purpose and sense of independence have a direct influence on social and academic adjustment at the university. Hogg and Vaughan (1995) add that learning of attitudes is an integral part of socialization process, which may occur through direct experiences and/or interaction with others or as a product of the cognitive process. Thus attitude formed by students eventually influence both their social and academic adjustment at the university. When students attitude towards university environment, they tend to adjust socially which is reflected in their academic performance.

### Conclusion and Recommendation

It was concluded that Interpersonal relationships and attitude of students towards university environment were critical factors influencing social adjustment and academic adjustment of undergraduate students in the university. It was therefore recommended the university should encourage social activities that can facilitate effective interpersonal relationships among students and the positive attitude towards university environment.

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