University Readiness and University Adjustment: Lived Experience of First-generation University Students

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ABSTRACT

The study purpose is to explore the relationship between university readiness and university adjustment of first-generation students. Students enter university with dreams and motivation after entering university the first challenge is to adjust in the university environment. University readiness directly linked and influenced the university adjustment of the students. Thus, the major objectives of the research are: to know the university readiness of first-generation university students and to access how first-generation university students in step to the university life. For the purpose of data collection, a self-administered well-structured questionnaire was developed and used. The COVID-19 pandemic restricted the movement of the individuals and the academic institutions remained close that's why the method of online survey was adopted to collect data in the second half of year 2020. In total, 405 first-generation university students' responses were collected. Results show that first-generation students were less prepared to enter the university. The researcher found a significant relationship between university readiness and university adjustment. It was also found that majority of the first-generation university students were less prepared to enter the university and feel themselves miss adjustment with university environment.

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1. Introduction

A higher degree is a dire need for economic security in the era of global economy. World is rapidly shifting towards knowledge-based occupations where earning opportunities enhanced through educational attainment (Roderick *et al.*, 2009). Worldwide enrollments in higher education increased 0.8 to 4.6 from late 1970s to 2015 (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2017). After joining university or higher education the first important thing is to adjust and retain in the university environment. Adjustment is a psychological procedure of coping with, adapting to and managing the challenges, problems and demands of daily life (Chong *et al.*, 2014; Nasir & Maliha, 2011).

Students' adjustment with university environment is an imperative factor in forecasting outcomes and their future accomplishments. Students enter first time in university face problems to adjust in the university environment. They are passing through the adjustment phase in their first year of joining university. After the first semester it is the vital period in deciding retention in university (Clinciu, 2012). University readiness defined as the ability to college or high school student to succeed in the hunt graduate or higher degree. For university readiness they need to understand the process of joining university and associated things with university education like how to deal and manage with financial issues, how to see living/ residence matters, and adjust with university environment (Conley, 2020).

Students join universities for social, personal and intellectual growth. They expect it will enhance their personal and professional skills, social status, and employment opportunities; and parallel to this it will make them independent. They imagine a life free of parental control, full of joy and interest with novel activities. Although after joining the university many of their positive expectations and feelings converted into negative. In the first years of their study many challenges are in the way of their adjustment. The reality of students' university experience is stressful, harsher, than their forecasting (Bruce *et al.*, 1986).

There is no any clear definition of University readiness because the concept varies due to emphasis on contrary combination and criteria thence (Conley, 2020). According to Baker *et al.*, (2005) university readiness is the combination of three components: first is the university/College awareness (guardian/parent and students' information about the process and planning aspects of university attendance), second is eligibility (completion of coursework needed for admission in university), and the third one is Preparation (Students' aptitude to execute their awareness into accomplishment). Definition of university/college readiness may include aspirations of students', emotional and social development, social capital, navigation, study skills, and home support are important apparatuses of college readiness (Mishkind 2014; Cortez *et al.*, 2014).

2. Challenges of first-generation students in university readiness and adjustment

First-generation students faced lot of inequalities and hurdles because of their parental experience in terms of lack of motivation lack of guidance, subject selection and support. Choy (2001) describe that there is a huge gap between the continuing-generation and first-generation in relation to facing challenges. Lee *et al.*, (2004) explains that the FGS faced many challenges and disadvantages during their university education. Many studies concluded that first-generation students are less prepared academically (Martinez *et al.*, 2009). Some other studies found that first-generation students attend university part-time due to financial issues (Cushman, 2007; Thomas 2009). First-generation students feel themselves inferior from other and maintain less interaction with regular generation students (Kuh *et al.*, 2008).

Another important factor is parental support which provide students confidence to complete their studies. First-generation found less guidance and support from their parents because their parents have less knowledge, and exposure. They got less emotional, financial and educational support from their parents. FGS also face language barriers, difficulty to adjust university social environment and low academic self-esteem (Stephens *et al.*, 2014). Student who are first in their family attend university

having problems in adjustment both socially and academically. They struggle to construct their identity as Stephens *et al.* (2014) describes that first-generation students struggle more to find their way to adjust in university environment. Other studies as ASHE (2013) concluded that first-generation students have limited access towards information's, less interaction with faculty, and sense of belongingness with university social and cultural environment. The student joins university and is the first in his/her family making him/her separate from his family and showing more engagement in university culture (Boden, 2011).

The study examine what first-generation students face in adjustment when attaining higher education for the first time, an occurrence which, without any prior preparation by them or by their institution (university), may elevate their level of anxiety and may impede in their learning capabilities (Checkoway, 2018). In Pakistan students face a similar dilemma, being first generation students pursuing higher education degrees, is a daunting task. The major objectives of the research are to know the university readiness of first-generation university students and to access how first-generation university students adjusted to university life.

3. Research Methodology

Aim of the current study is to explore the relationship between student's university readiness and university adjustment. The study intended to identify problem FGS faced to adjust in social environment of university and throughout the university period. The research methodology considered most suitable for this research is quantitative. Quantitative study seeks to collect and interpret empirical data to reach the desired objectives.

First-generation students (both male & female) studying in different public and private sector universities of Pakistan are population interviewed through a Google docs survey form for the current study. Data were collected from 405 respondent belongs to different universities of Pakistan from them 232 respondents were male and 173 respondents were female. Data were collected by using online research tool survey monkey, after making data collection form it was shared on different plat forms included social media, emails, WhatsApp groups and, other available platform. The association between university readiness and university adjustment is checked.

4. Results and Discussions

The part of the article is discussing the results of the present study. The first subsection discussion about the background information of the respondents, while the descriptive overview of university readiness, university adjustment is presented and in the end the relationship between these two variables is checked.

Table 1: Background Characteristics of the respondents (N = 405)

Sr.	Demographic determinants	Indicators	Frequency	Percentage
1	Gender	Male	232	57.3
		Female	173	42.7
2	Age	18-22	287	70.9
		23-27	86	21.2
		28-32	22	5.4
		Above 32	10	2.5
3	Residence	Rural	187	46.2
		Semi-Urban	66	16.3
		Urban	152	37.5
4	Degree Program	BS	250	61.7
		Master	111	27.4
		MS. M.Phil.	31	7.7
		PhD	13	3.2
5	Semester	1 st	52	12.8
		2 nd	12	3.0

		3 rd	167	41.2
		4 th	25	6.2
		5 th	56	13.8
		Above	93	23.0
6	Employment status	Employed	63	15.6
		Unemployed	342	84.4
7	Annual household income in (100 thousand)	Less than 200k	197	48.6
		200k-300k	63	15.6
		301k-500k	58	14.3
		501k-700k	45	11.1
		> 701k	42	10.4

Table 1 presents the results of the background characteristics of the respondents. Total 405 respondents filled the questionnaire in which 232 (57.3%) were males and 173 (42.7%) were females. Majority of the respondents 287 (70.9%) belongs to the age group of 18-22 years while the second majority of the first-generation students 86 (21.2%) lies in the age group of 23-27 years old. 22 (5.4%) respondents belongs to age group 28-32 years old and only 10 (2.5%) were above 32 years of age. According to their residential status 187 (46.2%) were residing in rural areas while 66 (16.3%) were staying in semi-urban areas. The second majority 152 (37.5%) were living in urban areas.

From the above mentioned data, a significant majority 250 (61.7%) students were enrolled in the BS program, 111 (27.4%) students were enrolled in Master's Degree program, 31 (7.7%) respondents were enrolled in MS/M.Phil. program. only 13 (3.2%) of them were enrolled in PhD program. Majority of the students were from 3rd and 5th semester. Only 15.6% of the respondents were employed while a huge majority of the respondents were unemployed and they were only student at the time of survey. The annual family income of the majority of the students 48.6% were below 200 thousand, while 15.6% respondent's annual family income was between 201 thousand to 300 thousand, 14.3% of the respondent's yearly family income was 301-500 thousand, 11.1% respondent's family annual income was between 501 - 700 thousand. Only 10.4% respondent's monthly income was more than 701 thousand annually.

5. University readiness

Our one imperative variable was university readiness. University readiness is the combination of three components: first is the university/College awareness, second is eligibility, and the third one is preparation university readiness may also include aspirations of students', emotional and social development, social capital, navigation, study skills, and home support are important apparatuses of university readiness. The research inquires the university readiness on five-point Likert scale with the help of ten indicators. The descriptive results of this variable are given below:

Table 2 University readiness of the respondents (N = 405)

University Readiness	S. disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	S. Agree	Mean	Std
I was mentally ready to join university	180 (44.4%)	141 (34.8%)	38 (9.4%)	23 (5.7%)	23 (5.7%)	1.93	1.13
I was well aware about necessary information before joining university	96 (23.7%)	150 (37.0%)	83 (20.5%)	51 (12.6%)	25 (6.2%)	2.40	1.16
My previous academic record helped me in getting admission in university	179 (44.2%)	140 (34.6%)	42 (10.4%)	26 (6.4%)	18 (4.4%)	1.92	1.10
I am well aware about my purpose to join university and what I want out of it	131 (32.3%)	169 (41.7%)	64 (15.8%)	27 (6.7%)	14 (3.5%)	2.07	1.03
I feel confident that I will be able to deal in a satisfactory manner with challenges here at University.	94 (23.2%)	174 (43.0%)	93 (23.0%)	32 (7.9%)	12 (3.0%)	2.24	1.00
I am well aware about my academic goals	106 (26.2%)	189 (46.7%)	76 (18.8%)	26 (6.8%)	8 (2.0%)	2.11	0.90

I prepared my-self to face all the challenges before joining university	95 (23.45%)	115 (28.39%)	99 (24.46%)	51 (12.59%)	45 (11.11%)	2.59	0.84
My expectations were too high about university education.	145 (35.8%)	137 (33.8%)	69 (17.0%)	34 (8.4%)	20 (4.9%)	2.13	1.14
I feel myself enough skilled to fit in university environment	82 (20.2%)	181 (44.7%)	93 (23.0%)	35 (8.6%)	14 (3.5%)	2.30	1.00
I don't have much motivation for study lately	43 (10.6%)	108 (26.7%)	116 (28.6%)	105 (25.9%)	33 (8.1%)	2.94	1.13

Table 2 reveals the university readiness of first-generation students. Total 10 questions were asked to check the university readiness. Frequency and percentages carried out for description and then mean and standard deviation calculated to check the central tendency and variance. Low standard deviation designates data points are very close to the means and high deviation reveals that data points are scattered. The measurement of table data describes that majority of the university students were not mentally ready to join university ($M = 1.93$, $SD = 1.13$), while majority of them don't have enough awareness and necessary information before joining the university ($M = 2.40$, $SD = 1.16$). The average response of previous academic record helped me in getting admission in university 1.92 ($SD = 1.10$). Majority of the respondents were disagreed with the statement that they were well aware about their purpose to join university ($M = 2.07$, $SD = 1.03$). Similarly, more than half were not confident with their skills to deal with challenges in a satisfactory manner in the university with the average value of 2.24 ($SD = 1.00$). The response remained in disagreement regarding their awareness about their academic goals with $M = 2.11$, $SD = 0.90$. The mean value of 2.59 with the standard deviation of (0.84) shows that the first generation students were not fully prepared to face challenges of university life before joining university. Majority of the students were not expecting very high from the university ($M = 2.13$, $SD = 1.14$). Almost 65% of the respondents clearly stated that they were not enough skilled to adjust in university environment ($M = 2.30$, $SD = 1.00$). While, the response for the question that "I don't have much motivation for study lately" remained unclear in its response as 27.6% of the respondents were disagreed, 28.6% remained neutral, and almost 26% agreed ($M = 2.94$, $SD = 1.13$). Many studies found that as Arnold *et al.* (2012) describe that most of the first-generation students were mentally unprepared for the joining university and having less knowledge about the procedures of applying for admission and university selection as well. As Crozier, Reay & Clayton, (2008) described that first-generation students had low academic grades and limited knowledge about subject selection and finding opportunities related to their subject lemmatized their academic performance and opportunities to succeed. Gamez *et al.* (2013) described that first-generation students having less university readiness resultantly faced issues in university selection, subject selection, adjust in university environment as compare to regular students. Johnson, S.E *et al.*, (2011) found that students feel trouble to find their place in the university environment.

6. Adjustment with the curriculum and the extra-curricular activities

The research inquires the adjustment of the first-generation students with the curriculum and extra-curricular activities on five-point Likert scale with the help of eight indicators. The descriptive results with frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation of this variable are given below:

Table 3: Adjustment of respondents with curriculum and extra-curricular activities

Adjustment with curriculum extra curriculum activities	S. disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	S. Agree	Mean	Std.
University education is difficult for me	38 (9.4%)	78 (19.3%)	90 (22.2%)	119 (29.4%)	80 (19.8%)	3.31	1.24
I found myself in trouble while doing my academic work	48 (11.9%)	123 (30.4%)	117 (28.9%)	89 (22.0%)	28 (6.9%)	2.84	1.10
I always found myself involved in the social activities in university	59 (14.6%)	112 (27.7%)	112 (27.7%)	87 (21.5%)	35 (8.6%)	2.82	1.18

I enjoy completing academic assignments	95 (23.5%)	150 (37.0%)	100 (24.7%)	39 (9.6%)	21 (5.2%)	2.36	1.09
Course/Syllabus easy to understand for me	79 (19.5%)	163 (40.2%)	104 (25.7%)	46 (11.4%)	13 (3.2%)	2.39	1.02
I am satisfied with my participation in social activities at university	83 (20.5%)	125 (30.9%)	108 (26.7%)	75 (18.5%)	14 (3.5%)	2.54	1.11
I am satisfied with the course contents of my degree	115 (28.4%)	161 (39.8%)	80 (19.8%)	26 (6.4%)	23 (5.7%)	2.21	1.10
I am satisfied with the academic system and other service (Mess, Hostel, Scholarship, Career counseling etc.) at university.	59 (14.6%)	141 (34.8%)	108 (26.7%)	57 (14.1%)	40 (9.9%)	2.41	1.02

Table 3 is about the adjustment with curriculum and extra curriculum activities. Total 08 questions were asked to check the adjustment with curriculum and extra curriculum activities. Frequency and percentages carried out for description and then mean and standard deviation calculated to check the central tendency and variance. Low standard deviation designates data points are very close to the means and high deviation reveals that data points are scattered. Majority (Mean= 3.31, SD= 1.24) of the first-generation students agreed that university education is difficult for them, while (Mean= 2.84, SD= 1.10) found themselves in trouble while doing their academic tasks. The involvement in social activities at university level found high among first first-generation students with mean value 2.82 and SD= 1.18. While fewer less than half (Mean= 2.36, SD=1.09) didn't enjoy completing academic assignments. While course/slybus understanding is another basic and most important thing to feel adjust in university. Research data found that less than half (Mean= 2.39, SD= 1.02) agreed that course/slybus is easy to understand for them. A slightly more than half (Mean= 2.54, SD= 1.1) were satisfied with their participation in social activities at university level, while only (Mean= 2.21, SD= 1.10) found satisfied with the course content of their degree program. Satisfaction with academic and other services also recorded low (Mean= 2.41, SD= 1.02) among students.

7. Conclusion

Results show that first-generation students were less prepared and not ready to enter in the university. Data shows that there is a significant relationship between university readiness and university adjustment. It was also found that majority of the first-generation university students were less prepared to enter the university and they feel them less adjusted with university curriculum and extra-curricular activities. . First-generation students were not satisfied with the services provided by university and the course contents as well. It was difficult for them to evaluate this situation of maladjustment.

8. Recommendations

In the light of the present study, it is recommended that student's facilitation center should be established at central and department or at least faculty level to guide and facilitate the students' in admission and after admission throughout the degree completion. The psychologists or psychiatrists should appoint in the university so that the students can visit and discuss their issues that are actually not serious ones but the students failed to cope with the situation. These specialists can help them in adjustment and minimize the effects of these challenges on their academic achievements. As it is the first research in Pakistan on first-generation university students. There is a need to conduct more researches on first-generation students to understand the problems and challenges of first-generation students that will not only help to collect statistics regarding first-generation students and their challenges as well as will help in policy making.

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