FACTORS AFFECTING THE FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS’ ADAPTATION TO LEARNING ACTIVITIES: A CASE STUDY OF A PUBLIC UNIVERSITY IN VIETNAM
Pham Van Tuan
Department of Psychology, the University of Labor and Social Affairs, Vietnam.
Email: tuanpv@ldxh.edu.vn

Article History: Received on 13th April 2020, Revised on 10th August 2020, Published on 10th September 2020

Abstract

Purpose of the study: Adaptation to learning activities plays a very important role and decides the first-year students’ academic results. In order to have appropriate solutions to improve the adaptation to the learning activities of the first-year students, it is necessary to identify the affecting factors. This study investigates the factors affecting adaptation to learning activities of the first-year students of the University of Labor and Social Affairs in Vietnam, thereby finding solutions that improve the adaptation to their learning activities.

Methodology: This study used a quantitative method with primary data through questionnaires distributed to 300 samples of the first-year students of the University of Labor and Social Affairs in Vietnam. The Pearson correlation coefficient test and linear regression are also used to process the research results.

Main Findings: The results of the study indicate that adaptability of students to learning activities affected by many different factors, subjective factors such as motivation, learning methods, and skills, and that there is a great influence on students' adaptation to learning activities.

Applications of this study: The research provides a descriptive picture for the leadership of the University of Labor and Social Affairs to improve the adaptation to learning activities for first-year students.

Novelty/Originality of this study: As far as we are concerned, there is no research on adaptation to the learning activities of the first-year students of the University of Labor and Social Affairs. This work is an attempt to fill in this gap.

Keywords: Factors Affecting, Adaptation to Learning Activities, First-year Students, the University of Labor and Social Affairs, Vietnam.

INTRODUCTION

Learning activities at university are really different from those in high school. Pittman & Richmond (2008), Sotardi & Brogt (2016), Chalapatia et al., (2018) suggested that the transition from high school to university could cause many challenges for students, especially the first-year students. The first-year is a challenging transition period accompanied by major changes in the educational environment such as new learning tasks, new relationships, and highly competitive learning (Perry et al., 2001). To succeed academically, the students have to make adjustments to effectively adapt to class size, interact with faculty and classmates, curriculum, teaching and learning methods, lifestyles, and university environment (Bautista, 2016; Carragher & McGaughey, 2016; Diniz et al., 2016; Kane et al., 2014). Good adaptation creates favorable conditions, helping students to perform their learning tasks effectively (Lowe and Cook, 2003; Renties et al., 2012; Bailey and Phillips, 2016), otherwise they could meet many difficulties, hinder learning activities, make low study results, even lead to dropping out of school. (Asaduzzaman et al., 2013; van der Meer, 2012; Inspectie van het Onderwijs, 2016; Chi et al., 2018).

The University of Labor and Social Affairs is a multidisciplinary university. Most of the school's training programs are currently deployed in the form of credit. This form of training emphasizes the role of students' self-study in occupying knowledge, skills, and professional attitudes. This is a relatively new point for first-year students - a group of students just enter the university environment.

According to the statistics of the Department of Training, University of Labor and Social Affairs, we found that the learning results of the first-year students were not high (nearly 30% of the students achieved the average score, the number of students achieved good and excellent scores only about 20%). One of the reasons for this situation is that students do not adapt well to the learning activities of the university, especially students do not adapt well to self-study activities. Research results on the first-year student's adaptation to learning activities of the University of Labor and Social Affairs show that the majority of first-year students adapt to learning activities on average (75.1%), 14% of students adapt at a low level and 10.9% students adapt at a high level (Tuan, 2017). The results of this study show that the school needs to pay more attention and have appropriate solutions to enhance first-year student's adaptation to learning activities.
The research clarifies the factors affecting the adaptation to learning activities of the first-year students of the University of Labor and Social Affairs. And we must find suitable solutions to improve adaptability to learning activities that contribute to improving students' learning efficiency and improving the training quality of the school.

**Research gap and objective of the study**

At the same time, issues related to first-year students’ adaptation to learning activities are needed to continue to research, especially the need to find out the factors that affect students’ adaptation to learning activities, thereby finding out suitable measures to improve the first-year students' adaptation to learning activities. This article analyzes the factors affecting adaptation to learning activities of the first-year students of the University of Labor and Social Affairs in Vietnam, to find solutions that improve the adaptation to learning activities of the first-year students of the University of Labor and Social Affairs.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

Adaptation is considered one of the most important competencies of human behavior, and at the same time, it is also a factor in human motivation and in satisfying human needs (Alizboon, 2013). Spencer (1999) saw adaptation in schools as a kind of adaption of school culture with the aim of maximizing the fit between learner characteristics and the expectations of the learning environment. A successful adaptation could only be achieved when the learner reacted appropriately to the environment and thus benefits from that environment (Kaya and Akgün, 2016). Pulakos et al. (2000) also defined adaptation as a person’s positive adjustment to their own behavior, to self-adjust to the requirements in a new environment.

For first-year students, many researchers such as Bautista (2016), Carragher & McGaughey (2016), Diniz et al. (2016), Kane et al. (2014) believe that when participating in the studying environment in college, students need to adjust psychology, effective adapt to class size, interact with faculty and classmates, curriculum, teaching and learning methods internship, lifestyle, and university environment.

Adaptation to learning activities of first-year students is considered by researchers in many aspects, many manifestations. B.P. Allen (1990) researches and evaluates the students' adaptation to a system of student skills such as personal use of time skills; academic activity skills and other qualities such as posture, choice of forms, learning content, and academic and professional behavioral habits [cited by Trinh, 2015]. Taylor et al. (2004) explored students’ adaptations to new learning environments. Volgina (2007) studied and assessed student adaptation in 1. Students' evaluation of skills acquired in school for future careers. 2. Understanding of first-year students about future careers. 3. Students' conceptions of future careers. The authors Thoan (2010) and Trinh (2015) researches on students' adaptation to credit-based training. Duc (2004) studies the adaptation of students to establishing university relationships such as relationships with friends, faculty, and departmental staff; Adaptation of everyday life to living conditions, with self-management of furniture, expenses, and to part-time jobs. Mai (2009) cared about students' adaptation to learning content. Cuong (2017, 2018) explored students 'adaptation to group learning in the form of credit expressed in students' perception, attitude, and behavior in group learning.

Some researchers were interested in factors that influence students' adaptation to learning activities. B. Barisova and M. Brusev realized that students would more easily adapt to their university study if they are motivated to choose the right career. Having the same discovery, N.I. Inavo and A.V. Cleremov thought that adaptive learning is a complex and multifaceted process of psychological life. The rate of adaptation was closely related to their learning motivation [cited by Trinh, 2015]. Piskun (2011) pointed out that difficulty in adapting students to learning activities was not only related to the emotional, emotional, or social environment, but also related to limitations in intellectual development, especially with regard to logical, spatial, and technical thinking. The learning regulations, differences in learning styles, changes in living style are also one of the factors that made it difficult for students to integrate and adapt to the new learning environment. Students who cannot adapt to the regulations and standards in a new environment and do not have changes in themselves to adapt to learning activities will have difficulty in learning. In many cases, they could lead to drop out of school. Some researchers stated that some students could integrate and are very successful at university, while some students cannot integrate.

The reasons for the inability to integrate are cultural differences, subjective factors, regulations, and environmental factors (urbanization, social evils, unwritten laws) [cited by The, 2016]. Birzina et al. (2019) mentioned the impact of institutional factors, personal factors, and academic factors on the student's adaptation to learning activities. Cherif et al. (2013), as well as research by Goldfinch and Hughes (2007), suggested that learning failure was related to poor learning habits such as poor study skills, poor time management, and inability to define and set priorities, and inability to set laziness. Harvey et al. (2006) pointed out that students' background knowledge had a huge impact on academic success. The authors: Elgina (2010), Gnatyshina (2017), Grigorevskaya (2013), Vlasova et al. (2016), De Clercq et al. (2013, 2017) recognized that the quality of high school education, readiness to learning, learning dynamics, personal characteristics, and the quality of teaching and the nature of teacher relationships, as well as the availability of first-year psychological and educational support, have been
affecting freshman students' adaptation to academic performance. Tammy et al. (2017), Wondu (2018), Grøtan et al. (2019), Liranso & Mohan (2018), Denovan, Macaskill (2017), Dyson and Renk (2006) emphasized the psychological issues, mental health issues such as stress, depression, anxiety, etc. that students encounter as factors that negatively affected their adaptation to learning activities, to students' learning efficiency and mental health.

Lee et al. (2018) examined the relationship between recreational activities, social support, and school adaptation among Asian international students in the US. According to the authors, although social support was a significant contributor in adapting to schools, Asian international students tended to lack social support. This study supports the importance of taking seriously recreational participation in the lives of Asian international students in college adaptation. Danhui et al. (2018) cared about whether students’ academic self-concept serves as a significant variable in mediating the relationship between school adaptation and growth in student math achievement. Martin & Bolliger (2018) examined students’ engagement as the factor influencing adaptation to the online learning environment.

It can be seen that, when studying the factors affecting students' adaptation and integration with learning activities, the authors mentioned many different factors, including the subjective factors and objective factors.

In sum up, basing on the results of the above studies, the characteristics of the site and the research object, the research capacity of the group, in this study we focus on investigating the effects of the following factors on the adaptation to learning activities of first-year students at University of Labor and Social Affairs:

Subjective factors: Motivation for learning; Interested in learning; Understanding about new learning environment; Individual personality; Learning methods of students.

Objective factors: The content, teaching methods, evaluative methods in university; The psychological and educational support; The academic environment; Learning conditions and means.

**METHODOLOGY**

The study was conducted on a sample of 300 first-year students at the University of Labor and Social Affairs with the following subjects: Human Resource Management, Business Administration, Insurance, Social Work, Economic Law and 12 lecturers participating in teaching first-year students at the University of Labor and Social Affairs.

The research methods used in this study include survey methods and statistical methods. There are 3 scales used in this study, including Scale to survey the influence of subjective factors, scale to survey the influence of objective factors, scale to survey opinions of teachers and students about the solutions to improve the student's adaptation to learning activities at the University of Labor and Social Affairs. The reliability of the scales is assessed by Cronbach's alpha coefficient, the statistical results showed that the scales are guaranteed reliability with Cronbach's Alpha>0.80.

The survey results were processed by using SPSS 18.0. The statistics were used in this study include:

Descriptive statistics: used to evaluate the status of subjective and objective factors basing on student self-assessment, calculate the percentage of students and lecturers who evaluate the necessity and effectiveness of solutions to improve the adaptation to learning activities of first-year students.

Inference statistics: used to assess the correlation between subjective and objective factors and the adaptation to student learning activities (Pearson correlation) and assess the level of influence/explanation ability of subjective and objective factors on the first-year student's adaptation to learning activities (using univariate and multivariate regressions).

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

1. Influence of subjective factors

In order to have a basis for assessing the correlation and the influence of the subjective factors on students’ adaptation to learning activities, we conducted a self-assessment survey of students in the research sample about these factors. The results are shown in Figure 1.

Survey results in figure 1 show that all 5 factors are not evaluated positively by students (mean from 2.40 and below).

The factor "Learning motivation" has the highest score among the 5 factors but it is only at an average level (mean = 2.40/3.0). This means that students' motivation for learning is not really positive. The number of students who clearly define the purpose of university study is not high (mean = 2.27), many said that attending university is just a degree (mean = 2.31) and for some students attending university must be at your own discretion (mean = 2.62).

The factor "Interested in learning" is assessed with an average score = 2.24. From this result, it shows that students' interest in learning activities is not high. According to the detailed survey data, the degree of interest in the field of study that the
student is studying is quite low (mean = 2.28), the favorite level of the past subjects is very limited (mean = 1.96) and the level sticking with the field of study is not high (mean = 2.47).

![Figure 1: Level of expression of subjective factors](image)

**Source:** Data Processed

*Note: The lowest score is 1.0, the highest is 3.0; The higher the mean, the better the expression of the factor.*

"Understanding about new learning environment" is said by students that it is not really complete (mean = 2.19). The level of understanding about the changes in university environment compared to high schools is still low (mean = 2.25), students are not really familiar with the teaching method and evaluation of lecturers in universities (mean = 2.12), the ownership of relationships with friends in the classroom is not high (mean = 2.07), a part of students are not used to living away from home, living independently (mean = 2.32).

Regarding "Individual personality", students rated themselves not really confident and dynamic (mean = 1.92). Many students said they were not active, active in relationships as well as participating in activities (mean = 1.93).

The factor "Learning methods" is rated by students as low/most restrictive among 5 subjective factors (mean = 1.62). Assessment of students about their study skills is very limited (mean = 1.48), very few students said that they have found suitable learning methods in university (mean = 1.56).

a. The correlation between subjective factors and the first-year students’ adaptation to learning activities

![Figure 2: The correlation between subjective factors and the adaptation to student learning activities (r **, with p <0.01)](image)

**Source:** Data Processed
The results of correlation analysis in figure 2 show that subjective factors are positively correlated with the students' adaptation to learning activities. Among the 5 factors, the "Learning method" factor has the strongest correlation ($r=0.48$, $p<0.01$). This means that a change in subjective factors will lead to a change in the adaptation to learning activities of the first-year students in the same direction of increase or decrease.

b. The degree of influence of the subjective factors to the first-year students’ adaptation to learning activities

In order to evaluate the influence of the subjective factors to the adaptation to learning activities of students, we used univariate and multivariate regressions, the results are as follows:

![Figure 3: Influence level of subjective factors ($R^2$, $p<0.001$)](image)

**Source:** Data Processed

From figure 3, it can be seen that subjective factors can explain the change in students' adaptation to learning activities, at the level of 11-23% ($R^2 = 0.11$ to 0.23, $p<0.001$). Among 5 factors, the factor "Method of learning" can be explained at the highest level (23%). All 5 factors were more explainable than individual factors, 26% ($R^2 = 0.26$, $p<0.001$). This result shows that all 5 subjective factors under consideration influence the students' adaptation to learning activities but to different degrees. In particular, the factor "Method of learning" has the strongest influence.

2. Influence of objective factors

Surveying students' perceptions of 4 factors, we obtained the following data:

![Figure 4: Level of expression of objective factors](image)

**Source:** Data Processed
*Note: The lowest score is 1.0, the highest is 3.0; The higher the mean, the stronger the expression of the factor*

The factor "Content, learning methods, assessment methods in university" is considered by students to be very new to them (mean = 2.74). The majority of students said that the teaching method and evaluation of lecturers are much different from the teaching method in high school (mean = 2.78), the content of university courses has a rich amount of new knowledge, more complicated in general (mean = 2.71).

"The psychological and educational support" is considered not high (mean = 2.21). Attention-oriented interest in the field of study and the requirements of university-based learning activities for students of the university, of the faculty that is assessed by students are still limited (mean = 2.04), students also underestimate the teacher's interest in the students' academic duties (mean = 2.17), many students said that the school and teachers have not strictly controlled the implementation of student's learning tasks and not really encourage students to perform learning tasks, especially self-study tasks at home (mean = 2.32).

Through the students' judgment, the factor "Academic environment" is not really positive (mean = 2.04). Clubs, academic activities for first-year students in the school are not really abundant (mean = 2.16), the movement of learning and self-study of students in the school are still limited (mean = 1.79).

Especially, "Conditions and means of learning for first-year students" are not really comfortable and meet the requirements (mean = 1.82). Students underestimate the status of classrooms, libraries, self-study areas, ... for students of the school (mean = 1.54). Besides, many students said that they had difficult economic conditions (mean = 1.82), they had to work part-time so their time for studying was not high (mean = 2.11).

a. The correlation between objective factors and the adaptation to student learning activities

![Figure 5: Correlation between objective factors and the students' adaptation to learning activities (r **, with p<0.01)](https://giapjournals.com/hssr/index)

Source: Data Processed

The results of correlation analysis in figure 5 show that 4 objective factors are positively correlated with the students' adaptation to learning activities (r=0.22 to 0.33, p<0.01), in which, the factors "The psychological and educational support" have the strongest correlation (r=0.33). This also means that changing the objective factors in a positive direction will lead to a positive change in the adaptation of students to learning activities, especially increasing the psychological and educational support for first-year students.

b. Influence level of the objective factors to the students' adaptation to learning activities

Based on figure 6, all 4 objective factors are considered to affect the adaptation to the learning activities of the first-year students. Each factor has the ability to explain from 12% to 20% of the change in adaptability to the learning activities of students.

Among the four factors, the most influential factor in the students' adaptation to learning activities is "The psychological and educational support". This factor can explain at the highest level (20%) the change in adaptability to student's learning activities. The factor "Conditions and means of learning" has the least impact, this factor only explains 12% of the change in adaptability to the learning activities of students.
The combination of all four factors is able to explain 23% of the change in the student's adaptive to learning activities. Thus, the combination of all 4 factors is more explanatory than for each individual factor.

![Figure 6: Influence level of objective factors ($R^2**$, $p<0.001$)](https://giapjournals.com/hssr/index)

Source: Data Processed

Although the level of explanation of the objective factors is not high, it is necessary to find appropriate measures to limit the impact of these factors and be of great importance in improving the adaptation to learning activities of the first-year students of the University of Labor and Social Affairs.

3. The results of testing the necessity and effectiveness of the solutions to improve the adaptability of students to learning activities

To assess the necessity and effectiveness of the solutions to improve the adaptability of students to learning activities, we conducted an evaluation test of 12 lecturers who have been and are currently teaching the first-year students at the University of Labor - Social Affairs subjects: The principles of Marxism - Leninism; The methodology of scientific research, advanced mathematics, ... and the evaluation of 30 first-year students, through processing, we obtained the following results:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Solutions</th>
<th>Level of need (%)</th>
<th>Effectiveness (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Unnecessary</td>
<td>Yes also, not necessary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Career orientation and orientation of university activities for students upon enrollment.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>The teaching method of learning, learning skills for first-year students</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Develop academic clubs, academic activities for first-year students in the school</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Innovating teaching methods towards positive learners and strengthening management, encouraging the implementation of students' learning tasks</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Strengthening facilities, equipment for learning activities of freshman students</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>08</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1: The correlation between students' adaptation to learning activities and factors influencing adaptation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>15</th>
<th>85</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>27</th>
<th>73</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Set up a department that specializes in consulting and supporting students in the school</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Data Processed

The data in Table 1 show that the majority of lecturers and students think that the six proposed solutions are necessary and effective in improving the adaptability to learning activities of first-year students. The highest-rated solution is "Instruction of learning methods, study skills for first-year students", followed by "Career orientation and orientation of learning activities at university for students right after starting school". This result initially confirms that the solutions we offer are right and need to be implemented.

The survey data obtained from this study confirms the first-year student's adaptation to the learning activities of the University of Labor and Social Affairs is affected by subjective factors, namely: learning motivation, interest in learning, understanding about new learning environments, personal characteristics, learning skills, and methods. This result is consistent with the findings of recent studies of Carragher & McGaughey (2016), Goldfinch and Hughes (2007) that learning failure is related to poor learning habits such as poor study skills, poor time management, and inability to define and set priorities, as well as laziness. Similarly, Elena et al. (2020), Elgina (2010), Gnatyshina (2017), Grigorevskaya (2013), Vlasova et al. (2016), De Clercq et al. (2013, 2017) also found that readiness, motivation, and personal characteristics influenced first-year students' adaptation to learning. In their recent studies, The (2016) and Cuong (2017) reveals that the students' adaptation to learning activities is influenced by learning motivation, interest in learning, learning skills, and their learning methods.

From the previous results discussed and the current research results of interest in forming positive learning motivation, fostering interest in learning, providing insights into new learning environments, equipping skills and learning methods in university learning for students implies that there is a need to enhance the first-year students' adaptation to learning activities. This suggestion was also made by Sotardi and Friesen (2017) that students' perceptions of the learning environment as clear and organized, interesting, and personally relevant, and supportive of building a peer-based learning network were linked to positive changes in their learning and study activities.

The results of the current study also showed that the objective factors have a significant relationship and have a certain impact on the first-year student's adaptation to learning activities in the following order: the content, learning methods, evaluation methods. The novelty of the environment, content, learning methods, and assessment methods in the university more or less causes difficulties for students to adapt, requiring certain adjustments (Carragher & McLaughey, 2016; Diniz et al., 2016; Kane et al., 2014). The school, faculty, and lecturers 'interest in students' learning activities have also been identified as a factor influencing student adaptation. From the beginning and the university environment, if fresh students are given full attention and support by the school, faculty, and lecturers, they will adapt quickly and effectively to learning activities. The idea of psychological and pedagogical support for students was reflected in works of Badania (2007), Zeer (2006) and proven by Zeleeva et al. (2016) that psychological and pedagogical support will help the student quickly adapt to the learning activity. In addition, the academic environment, conditions, and means of learning for first-year students also affect students' adaptation to learning activities. Birzina et al. (2019) in their recent study confirmed that institutional factors, academic factors have an influence on the student's adaptation to learning activities.

Survey results of lecturers and students showed solutions: Career orientation and orientation of learning activities in university for students right after starting school; guide first-year learning methods, learning skills, development of academic clubs, academic activities for first-year students, the innovation of teaching methods teaching in the direction of activating learners and strengthening management, encouraging the implementation of students' learning tasks, enhancing facilities and equipment for students' learning activities. First-year students, the establishment of a division specializing in counseling and student support in the university should be done to improve adaptation to first-year students' learning activities at the University of Labor and Social Affairs.

CONCLUSION

Adapting to learning is important for students' learning processes and outcomes, especially for first-year students. In order to improve their learning efficiency as well as to improve the quality of university training, higher education institutions need to take appropriate measures to enhance the student's adaptation to learning activities. The results of the current study indicate that adaptability of students to learning activities affected by many different factors, subjective factors such as motivation, learning methods, and skills, and that there is a great influence on students' adaptation to learning activities.

Program to improve the adaptation of students to learning activities should be implemented in a diversified and synchronous manner, focusing on important solutions such as career orientation and learning activities for students. immediately after admission; Guide methods and study skills in university for students; Developing an academic environment for first-year
students; Strengthen the management and encourage students to perform self-study tasks; Strengthening facilities and learning facilities for students, Establishing a consulting and learning support unit for students.

LIMITATION AND STUDY FORWARD

The study results show that the factors surveyed only forecast 23% to 26% of the first-year student's adaptation to learning activities. This means that there should be further studies conducted to find out other factors that may affect first-year students' adaptation to learning activities, from which there are appropriate solutions to improve the adaptation to learning activities of first-year students of the University of Labor and Social Affairs.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We would like to thank the Board of Directors of the University of Labor and Social Affairs, the co-teachers, and students for their enthusiastic support and information sharing to complete this study.

REFERENCES


50. Tuan, P. V. (2017). The ability to adapt to the learning activities of first-year students of the University of Labor and Social Affairs. The scientific research project of the University of Labor and Social Affairs.


