



Adjusting to the University and College Way of Life among the First Year Diploma Students in Eldoret Town Municipality, Uasin-Gishu County, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

The transition of the students from secondary school to college/university level becomes a major challenge for majority of the students in Kenya. Moreover, compounding challenges have increasingly affected the student population towards adjusting in the university level. It is therefore recommended that a strategic orientation programme especially on guidance and counselling services for the first year diploma students. Accordingly, this paper advocates for the review of student support programmes towards the adjustment of first year students in the university/college environment. Finally, there is need for the inclusion of psychologists, counselling psychologists and psychiatrists in student support services.

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Introduction

Accordingly, students joining their year of study face a variety of challenges during their very first day in the university. For a first time student, the questions lingering his or her mind include; how can I find my way around campus? Do I know anybody in campus? Do I know anybody in the College/campus? Can I succeed at university? How can I get help? Can I work and study to sustain my livelihood? and finally, Can I balance my social life and studying?

Wangeri *et al.*, (2012) in their work point out that universities provide the gateway to opportunities thus providing a platform for defining and advance careers opportunities to students. Furthermore, the overwhelming challenges faced by first time students joining universities include overwhelming and intimidating environment as compared to their former home environment/setting, the physical and social environment. Moreover, majority of students joining public universities have unexplained fears and expectations about university life and education. Furthermore, for some students with friends in secondary schools have gone different ways which makes them unfamiliar in the university community as well as schedules that adds to the anxieties. The reality is such that while some of the fears are overcome, others are confirmed with some expectations being met, while others are frustrated (Abdullah *et al.*, 2009).

Studies conducted by other authors indicate that first year students joining the university present a major challenge relating to the socio-cultural challenge. Accordingly, Talbert (2008) as cited in Wangeri *et al.*, (2012) points out that the orientation programme provides opportunity for the first year students to manage their life and make decisions that define their careers and professional growth. Furthermore, a study by Sanoff (2006) shows that that first year students are ill prepared for college life and hence need a good orientation programme to prepare them for the challenges they will encounter in all areas of life at the campus. This forms the part of the socio-cultural challenges that

the first time first year students face during their first encounter at the various colleges.

Accordingly, the need for making new friends and adjusting to socio-cultural and psychological adaptation was identified by Brisset *et al.*, (2010), thus presenting a major challenge. Another concern according to Klassen *et al.*, (2005) as cited in Wangeri *et al.*, (2012) is the lack of establishment of eatery facilities within the campus setting, which is important as it affects the performance and the quality of the students' life on campus. Furthermore, there are compounding challenges that include the transition from the high school to university which entail the sense of social insecurity, physical comfort and ability to enjoy enjoyable activities among the first year students (Bernie-Lefcovitch, 2000; Cao and Mao, 2008). Accordingly, introduced changes when transiting from high school level to university level can be stressful both socially and psychologically (Bernier, Larose and Whipple, 2005). Autonomy away from parents and known teachers in high school becomes a challenge for the first year students who must make decisions regarding daily schedules all by themselves. Therefore this study aims to further address the perceived challenges facing the first year students in their first encounter in the higher institutions of learning.

Statement of the Problem

Studies conducted in Kenya and Africa have indicated that indeed students face many challenges and difficulties after having been admitted into the institutions. These are compounded mainly by the institutional challenges and difficulties which negatively impact on the first year students' adaptability, and establishing new relationships within the university setting. Criticisms have emerged on the current state that college students have transformed due to the changing environment in the urban setting. According to Wangeri *et al.*, (2012), there have been transitional challenges facing the new students who have joined the universities. For instance, the new first year students joining the university face rural-urban

differences. Moreover, there is the general concern that students are introduced into an environment that creates an overwhelming confusion, and fear. Therefore, the questions asked in this paper include: What are the social challenges facing the first year students especially those undertaking diploma? Are there any environmental and behavioral changes that the first year diploma students face?

Objective of the Study

The main objective of this study was to investigate the social challenges encountered by the first year diploma students by looking at; the establishment of new relationship established by their peers, adaptability and conforming to the new environment though lifestyle and behavioral changes and the eventual challenges faced by the first year students. The study was carried out in Eldoret Town municipality, Uasin-Gishu County, where there is a growing number of colleges and other institutions of learning (universities).

Significance of the Study

This study is crucial in the understanding of the challenges facing the first year students. The findings of this study could also assist student counsellors in undertaking these challenges faced, thus helping students to achieve social and personal growth and appropriate integration into the values and productive activities of the society. Moreover, utmost benefits can focus on the establishment of a comprehensive orientation programme that will be vital in introducing the first year students into the university way of life. The study will also be beneficial to the counseling psychologists and the medical psychiatrists who offer counselling and medical services.

Theoretical Framework

This paper used Vygotsky’s (1978) socio-cultural theory of human learning which describes learning as a social process and the beginning of human intelligence in society or culture. The major theme of Vygotsky’s theoretical framework is that social interaction plays a fundamental role in the development of cognition. Further, Vygotsky cites that everything is learned on two levels;

- i). Through interaction with others, and then integrated into the individual’s mental structure. Every function in the child’s cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level; first, between people (inter-psychological) and then inside the child (intra-psychological).
- ii). A second aspect of Vygotsky’s theory is the idea that the potential for cognitive development is limited to a "zone of proximal development" (ZPD). This "zone" is the area of exploration for which the student is cognitively prepared, but requires help and social interaction to fully develop.

The **Figure 1** below elaboration below clearly describes Vygotsky’s (1978) socio-cultural theory of human learning.

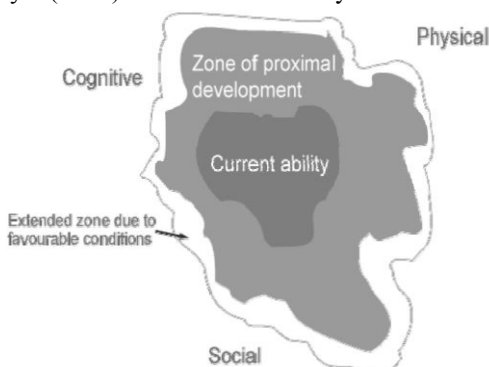


Figure 1: Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development

Study Framework

The study used the Albert Bandura’s (1978) Reciprocal Determinism framework that stipulates that human conduct results from the interplay between self-beliefs and environment. Based on certain beliefs people act in a certain way and chose to act in certain social environments. Personality is shaped through reciprocal determinism. The social environment affects our thoughts and actions; our thoughts and actions are affected by the social environment we choose; moreover, our actions influence our thoughts and social environment we choose. The **Figure 2** below clearly elaborates Reciprocal Determinism:



Figure 2: Reciprocal Determinism Model (Adopted from Albert Bandura)

Method and Materials (Methodology)

Study Area

The study was conducted in Eldoret town, Uasin-Gishu County in March 2014. Uasin Gishu County is in the North Rift Region of Rift Valley province. The County shares common borders with Trans Nzoia County to the North, Elgeyo-Marakwet County to the East, Baringo County to the South East, Kericho County to the South, Nandi County to the South West and Kakamega County to the North West the County has a total area of 3,327.8 km². The map below clearly shows the study area in **Figure 3** below.

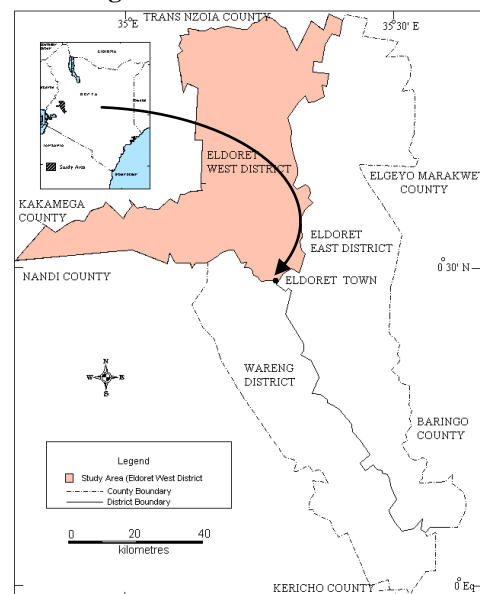


Figure 3: Map of Uasin Gishu County showing the study Area

Study Design

This paper used the exploratory research design. The basis for using of this design was due to the fact that it enabled

profound understanding of the challenges faced by the first year student during their first encounter in the colleges.

Sample Selection Procedure

The study used the colleges among other institutions of higher learning in Uasin-Gishu County, Eldoret Town municipality. The study purposively selected respondents of both sexes (male and female) who were in module one for the KNEC (Kenya National Examination Council) students and student undertaking diploma in the institutions of higher learning (universities) in first year session. Simple random sampling was used in identifying the first year students who had began their first year of study. Furthermore, the study employed the use of snowball sampling in identifying other students within the same institutions of learning. The number of respondents selected for this study totaled 120 respondents. The grounds for using snowball sampling was that one student was used in identifying the rest of the students because of similar characteristics such as established friendships, dwelling in the same hostels and learning in the same institution.

Data Collection Procedures

The paper used the qualitative research methods of data collection that include interview schedules and focused group discussion. Interview method was suitable in that it provided in-depth information and allowed generation, validation and collaboration of information. Further, this allowed for the research to go into the depth of understanding the participant's experiences, furthermore, the challenges faced. The study used interview schedule/guides to gather information from the interviewees. Accordingly, conversational interview is a two way process where the interviewer interacts with the interviewee in a conversation. In this interaction, the interviewee shares his/her life experiences thus informing the study more on the encounters and challenges faced. The interview schedule entailed the use of both open-ended and close-ended questions that allowed for easy and flexibility for responses. Probing questions were further asked to expand on issues not adequately covered in the interview schedule or not clearly answered by respondents.

The study used focused group discussion which was considered appropriate for soliciting in-depth qualitative data. Further, focus group discussion involved group discussion on topics relating to the study, thus conversation were geared to establishing the challenges faced by the first year students.

Procedure for Data Analysis

This study utilized the use of statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) version 16.0 in the organization and analysis of quantitative data from closed-ended questions. Further, data was presented in form of frequency and percentage tables. The qualitative data from open-ended questions and further probing was classified into various themes on the basis of their central focus for the purpose of presentation and analysis.

Results and Discussion

Demographical Data

This study collected data from one hundred and twenty respondents of whom 37.5% of whom were males and 62.5% were females. Age was an important factor in determining the level of participation by the respondents, therefore more than fifty percent (66.7%) of the respondents were aged between 18-22 years, 31.7% were aged 23-27, were 28 years and above which accumulated for 1.6%. These findings show that most of the respondents were aged 18-22 (66.7%) which is the standard age for students in Kenya joining the institutions of higher learning that include the colleges and universities.

Increased Freedom and Opportunity to explore the Environment

The paper established that there was increasing exposure to the new environment thus the first year students had their first time encounter within the new environment. In an interview and the focused group discussions the following sentiments were echoed:

"...this new freedom was not there before.... In high school there was strictness, there we were watched and here we are free..." (Female respondent, aged 19 years).

"...At home my dad is a strict disciplinarian....he goes to church at when I was at home he warned me that I should come home on time and not go to the shopping centre nearby.... But with the new found freedom I can now go wherever I want and whatever I want to do with my friends...." (Male respondent, aged 21 years).

It should be noted that the university or college environment triggers different reactions among first year students. Thus, life at university for the first year can be exciting and challenging (Habibah et al., 2010). On one hand, increased personal freedom can feel wonderful and frightening. The university presents the opportunity to become more individualistic. In addition, parental control ceases and the student is confronted with the new found freedom (O'Neill, 2007).

However, the new found freedom and opportunities explored among the first year students in that the study was found to have resultant consequences. For instance some of the respondents indicated that they could 'go out' at wee hours and come back to their hostels any time they wanted. Furthermore, this new found freedom explored was found to encourage students to engage in sexual ventures that were denied in high-school.

Lifestyle and Behavioural Changes

This paper established that there was introduced lifestyle and behavioural changes among the new first year students after duration of time spent in the university/college. Furthermore, the study found out those behavioral changes, such as smoking, diet, alcohol consumption was prevalent among the youth. The study found out that half (50%) students were introduced into new dressing habits thus introduction to new fashions; more than thirty percent (33.3%) of the respondents developed new smoking and drinking habits and eventually, less than twenty percent (16.7%) perceived that they were introduced into the new form of language the as shown in **Table 4.1** below:

Furthermore, during the focused group discussion and interview the following sentiments were echoed:

"... I had never smoked before.... But I was introduced by my friends.... I just took the first puff and the rest is history... my parents do not yet know about my news smoking habit..." (Female respondent, aged 20 years).

"... Majority of my friends were drinking so I joined the club and started drinking..... At first it was bitter but now I have adjusted.... This was the thing that my friends told me at first but now I am used to it now..." (Male respondent, aged 24 years).

"...My first day in campus I noticed that people were looking at me... I discovered that they were looking at me and calling me a mshamba (villager).... that is when I changed to the new college style of dressing...." (Sentiments echoed by the Majority of the respondents from both genders, aged 18 to 25 years).

"... I was used to mother tongue but now forced into speaking the 'sheng' language that is associated with the urban youth... what choice do I have.... if the majority speak it then I need to speak it... I had to disassociate from the rural language that I

had adopted...” (Sentiments echoed by the Majority of the respondents from both genders, aged 18 to 25 years).

Challenges faced by Students

Social Problems

This paper established that there were social problems faced by the new first year students after a duration of time spent in the university/college. These social challenges are compounded by the fact that through social interaction there is prone to develop social problems. The study found out that more than a third (35.7%) indicated that there were aggravation from the non-teaching staff and the lecturers. Difficulty with the room-mates was also considered as another social problem facing the first year student thus accumulated to less than quarter (25.0%). Furthermore, the study indicated that they faced adjustment problems especially in the new environment thus accounted for 21.4%, while less than fifteen percent (10.7%) faced accommodation problems. The rest indicated that they felt home-sick and lonely thus were less than ten percent (7.1%) as shown in **Table 4.2** below.

It is perceived that frustration from lecturers and non-teaching staff may be as result of them being new and naïve thus taking advantage of every opportunity they have in frustrating the students especially the female students. The female students may for instance being harassed verbally and sexually. Massanja *et al.*, (2001) found that the problem of sexual harassment of female students in African Universities is yet to be fully addressed by the university administration. Moreover, the study found out that female harassment persists because of lack of courage and more so if the case is reported nothing is done.

In the study findings in this paper, adjustment problems, difficulty problems with room-mates, accommodation problems and feeling lonely were found to be affecting the first year diploma students. Studies conducted in relation to the students adjusting to university life involve the corresponding processes of desocialization and socialization (Pascarella and Terenzini, 1991 as cited in Mudhovozi, 2012). Desocialization can be defined as the process of changing or discarding of selected values, beliefs and traits one brings to university in response to the university experience. Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) explained socialization as the process of being exposed to and taking on some of the new values, attitudes beliefs and perspectives to which one is exposed at university. Upon entry into a university, first year students are confronted with new personal and interpersonal challenges that include the need to establish new relationships, develop study skills and modify existing relationships with parents and their families (Parker *et al.*, 2004; Tinto, 1996). Furthermore, studies have shown that students coming from closely-knit families and rural settings are among those identified as prone to suffer alienation, loneliness (Khawaja and Bemsey, 2008).

Social Factors influencing the first year students' adjustment in the university/college Environment

The study further determined to identify the social factors influencing the first year students' ability to adjust in the university and college environment. This question was analyzed by using the mean to identify the rank of each statement and reasons as shown in **Table 4.3** below. Likert scale was used for answering (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = not sure, 4 = Agree, 5 = strongly agree).

In relation to the social factors influencing the first year students' ability to adjust in the university and college environment, difficulty to adjust with the new friends in colleges/universities around was ranked first (4.91) and family involvement enabled the students adjust well socially was

ranked second (4.52) on the modified Likert scale as shown in **Table 4.3** below.

In addition, peer support and peer networks are critical in a person's adjustment into university life (Tao *et al.*, 2000). The above study findings in this paper agree with Pascarel-La and Terenzini (1991) who reported that first year students who are pre-occupied with friends from home struggle to adjust. They also observed that students who maintain compatible relationships with their families are more likely to do well at university. Similarly, Winter and Yaffe's (2000) found that good relations with parents help both male and female students to adjust to the university. However, female students were more vulnerable to family problems than males. Therefore, first year students need to renegotiate existing relationships with their parents and families to adjust well into university life. Students who received social support adjusted easily in the university or colleges.

Adjustment in university/college setting on the Basis of Gender

The study further determined to know whether gender plays a role in the adjustment of the respondents thus ability to adjust in the university and college environment. **Table 4.4** below shows the findings in this paper.

This paper established that a majority (81.5%) of the male respondents indicated that they were likely to adjust as compared to their female counterparts (74.4%) who disagreed with the statement. Accordingly, a study by Enochs and Renk (2006) suggests that males adjust faster than females. In addition, the study revealed that females rely on social support more than their male counterparts to adjust to the university life.

Financial Problems

The study found out that students faced financial problems linked to the conditions of economic hardships. The study notes that there were multiple responses thus the increase in percentages and frequencies. Therefore they indicated the following reasons; college/tuition fees (100%); personal up-keep finances (95.8%); accommodation fee (92.5%) and ability to buy text books and educational material (41.6%) were mentioned as relating to the financial challenges that the students faced when in colleges/universities as shown in **Table 4.5** below.

Accordingly, the study established that lack of college fees was considered as the one of the most financial challenge affecting the first year diploma students. During their studies they were for instance chased away from classes during exam time due to lack completing fees. Although the university administration requires the money for development purpose and payment for the lecturers in the institutions, it was found that in most cases this was psychologically frustrating the first year diploma students. Some of the students were stressed emotionally and thus were confused in the long term.

Personal up-keep was also established to be the second most financial problem affecting the first year diploma students. Some of the respondents indicated that the pocket money they had been given run out before the semester ended. They further indicated that they run out of funds to buy basic commodities such as cooking items among other items used for their daily needs. It was also found that the first year diploma students found it difficult to manage their finances, particularly when creating budgetary choices, thus some misappropriated the funds given by their parents by going to night out or what is commonly referred to as 'clubbing'.

Moreover, other challenges that the study established included accommodation fees and lack of money to buy textbooks and other educational materials.

Table 4.1: Lifestyle & Behavioural Changes among the First year students

Lifestyle changes	n	%
Dressing change/Introduced fashion	60	50.0
Developed smoking habits and drinking	40	33.3
Introduced form of language 'Slang' and urban 'sheng'	20	16.7

n=Frequency; %= Percentage

Table 4.2: Social Problems faced by the First Year Diploma students

Social problems	n	%
Frustration from non-teaching staff and Lecturers	100	35.7
Difficulty with room-mates	70	25.0
Adjustment problems (new environment)	60	21.4
Accommodation problems	30	10.7
Lonely and Home sick	20	7.1

n=Frequency; %= Percentage

Table 4.3: Social factors influencing student adjustment in the university/college environment

Social factors	Minimum (Strongly Disagree)	Maximum (Strongly Agree)	Mean	Standard Deviation	Rank
It is difficult to adjust with the new friends in the college/universities around	1	5	4.91	1.21	1
Family involvement enabled me as student adjust well socially in the university/college	1	5	4.52	0.65	2

n=120

Table 4.4: Ability to adjust in university setting in relation to Gender of the Respondents

		I quickly adjusted in the university/college		Total
		Strongly Disagree	Strongly Agree	
Gender	Male	15 (18.5%)	66 (81.5%)	81 (100%)
	Female	29 (74.4%)	10 (25.6%)	39 (100%)
	Total	44 (36.7%)	76 (63.3%)	120 (100%)

n=Frequency; %= Percentage

Table 4.5: Financial challenges facing the university/college students

Financial challenges	n	%
College/ Tuition fees	120	100.0
Personal up-keep finances	115	95.8
Accommodation/Hostel fees in the surrounding area	111	92.5
Ability to buy text books and other educational materials	50	41.6

n=Frequency; %= Percentage

Since majority of these students rely on commercial/private accommodation/hostel facilities, the study found out that they students faced rent increases which was difficult for them to cope with. Some of the respondents further indicated that they were harassed by the landlords and agents who owned or ran the hostels, when they did not pay on time. The respondents also complained of theft of their belongings yet the rents were very high. Furthermore, in the classroom situation, it was established that respondents lacked educational material that include textbooks. As a result, the first year diploma students had to heavily rely on the internet since the text-books were not available in the library. In the normal university/college setting students are expected to research, however, the lack of reading materials affects students thus this affects their grades.

Furthermore, the study found out that in order for the first year to cope with the financial challenges respondents indicated that they resulted to working on part-time basis to make ends-meal. During the interview the following sentiments were echoed: "... I have to work part-time by selling food stuffs in the food stand at least to raise money for my school fees and my accommodation..." (Female respondent, aged 20 years).

"... Since my up-keep money is not enough I assist my uncle to repair radio and other electronics.... I have the skills so there is need for me to utilize the skills so that I can make an income out of it...." (Male respondent, aged 19 years).

Moreover, respondents indicated that they in some cases resulted to engaging in promiscuous activities that included part-time prostitution and sexual adventures. During a focused group discussion the following sentiments were echoed:

"... I have to sell myself in order to make money... The money that my parents give me is not enough.... I get attracted to a mjungu (white man) and so he offers me money and in turn I offer myself..." (Female respondent, aged 21 years).

"... A sugar mummy offered herself to me and told me that in order to get her money I had to have sex Since I had no other finances except for the small money that my mum gives me.... I have no choice but to offer myself..." (Male respondent, aged 22 years).

Conclusion and Recommendations

In relation to the social challenge faced by the first year students during their first year of study, the study established that;

a) Increasing exposure to the new environment led to new found freedom among the first year diploma students. Therefore, they could do whatever they wanted. However, this new found freedom explored was found to encourage students to engage in sexual ventures that were denied in high-school level.

b) There was introduced lifestyle and behavioural change among the new first year students after duration of time spent in the university. Furthermore, the study found out those behavioural factors such as smoking, diet, alcohol consumption was prevalent among the first year diploma students in the colleges and universities. They were introduced into the new form of language.

c) The study further concludes that frustration from non-teaching staff and lecturers, adjustment problems, difficulty with room-mates, accommodation problems and loneliness were among the perceived social problems encountered by the first year students.

d) The study further concludes that gender plays a role in the adjustment of the respondents thus ability to adjust in the university and college environment. The male respondents indicated that they were likely to adjust as compared to their female counterpart. The study revealed that females rely on social support more than their male counterparts to adjust to the university life.

e) In relation to the financial problems faced by the new first year students, the study concludes that these financial challenges include; college/tuition fees; personal up-keep finances; accommodation fee and ability to buy text books among other educational materials. The study found out that in order for the first year to cope with the financial challenges resulted to working on part-time basis to make ends-meal. However, it was further found out that in order for the first year to cope with the financial challenges they were involved in part-time jobs and in some cases resulted to engaging in promiscuous activities that included part-time prostitution and sexual adventures.

Recommendations

Based on the study findings, it is recommended that strategic orientation programme be established to facilitate the introduced adjustment of the first year students in the colleges and universities. Furthermore, there should be adequate mentoring of the first year students on how to cope and at the same time adjust in the social environment.

The paper has identified the social challenges encountered by the first year students in their day to day interaction in the university and colleges. It is therefore recommended that guidance and counselling services should be availed to the students, thus they should be freely allowed to access such services at any time. Studies have further pointed out that such services can be decentralized to other departments and structures as mentioned by Brent *et al.*, (2010) as cited in Wangeri *et al.*, (2012).

Urban Colleges and institutions of higher learning in the surrounding Eldoret Town municipality should regularly review and strengthen the student support programmes that targets students towards the ability to adjust smoothly and quickly in the university environment. This will ensure that adequate and professional staffs are availed towards guiding and informing students on how appropriate to adjust in the introduced university/college life.

There is need for the inclusion of psychologists, counselling psychologists and psychiatrists in the student support services. This will create the understanding of the first year student in the university/college setting hence this will enable the psychiatrists and psychologists create solutions towards social problems faced with regard to the medical and social sciences fields.

There is need for the universities/colleges to create a kitty to cater for the needy students especially those who come from poor background. There should also be waiving of fees and establish/expand accommodation/hostel facilities as this has been a major concern for students.

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