

## College Adjustment of First Year Students: The Role of Social Anxiety

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### Abstract

This research aims to analyze the correlation between social anxiety and college adjustment. 436 undergraduate psychology students of five universities in Central Java were involved in this study. All respondents completed a questionnaire about student adjustment to college, and social anxiety scale. Canonical correlation was conducted to analyze the data. The result showed that fear of negative evaluation correlates with academic and personal-emotional adjustment, but not with social adjustment and institutional adjustment, while social avoidance and distress correlate with all of the dependent variables. This study suggests about the role of social anxiety to college adjustment. These findings investigate further discussion about appropriate intervention to address adjustment problems among college students.

**Keywords:** Academic adjustment, social adjustment, personal-emotional adjustment, institutional adjustment, social anxiety.

### Introduction

Studying in higher education exposes students to a variety of new challenges including academic demands, autonomy toward their needs and activities, and more independent in learning than the previous education (Credé & Niehorster, 2012). First year students need to master how to set up a new social environment, develop the orientation based on the institution in where they are admitted, become productive members of the community in their university, and adjust to new roles and responsibilities (Aderi, Jdaitawi, Ishak, & Jdaitawi, 2013; Credé & Niehorster, 2012; Kneipp, Kelly, & Cyphers, 2009).

#### *The problem of college student adjustment*

However, first-year students will face the challenge of adjustment. They often find that

the package of learning and teaching methods is different from those obtained from the secondary school level. Generally, learning in college has more challenge than high school. It provides more reading assignments, preparing articles and examination of articles through class presentations and quizzes to evaluate achieved competence. Lecturers expect them to do more work outside the classroom. In order to survive, they must take responsibility for their actions. This condition can lead them to emotional tension. In some cases, college students can use various kinds of assistance to solve the pressures of life and duties, such as smoking and alcohol consumption (Salami, 2011).

Successful college adjustment can be seen from their involvement in institutional activities, psychological wellbeing, and good academic performance (Julia & Veni, 2012).

The existence of new responsibilities could drive them to be doubt on their own ability in adjusting to their academic tasks and new cultures of their friends which then become pressure for them. Student adjustment will affect academic performance (Abdullah & Elias, 2009). Adjustment problems happen to them because they are at the level of adolescent development. It is a period when they feel self-identity crisis, and meet demands of other development as an effect of new challenges such as being separated from their parents (Wiley & Berman, 2013).

The adjustment process is the way in which individuals try to cope with stress, conflict, tension, and meet their needs (Julia & Veni, 2012). During this process, the individual also seeks to maintain a harmonious relationship with the environment. In addition, adjustment is also defined as someone interaction with the environment (Abdullah & Elias, 2009). Furthermore, adjustment to college demonstrates academic achievement and personal growth (Abdullah & Elias, 2009). This approach means that students are able to make adjustment by having sufficient academic performance, passing all subjects, and meeting graduation time, while those who do not adjust to college well are characterized with the contrast criteria; their achievement is not satisfactory, marginal, failure, as well as the tendency to drop out. Besides academic achievement, adjustment to college also involves an element of personal growth in non-academic such as art and music, creativity, and leadership (Abdullah & Elias, 2009).

Adjustment to college consists of four dimensions namely academic adjustment, social adjustment, adjustment of personal emotion, and institutional adjustments (Beyers & Goossens, 2002; Marmarosh & Markin, 2007; Taylor & Pastor, 2007). Academic adjustment is how well students cope with the demands of education, such as motivation to complete academic requirements, academic

effort and satisfaction with academic environment. Social adjustment includes student involvement in social activities, and satisfaction with the various aspects of lecture experience. Personal-emotional adjustment involves students prone to emotional problems, such as the manifestation of symptoms of depression. While the institutional adjustments describes students satisfaction with their lecture experience in the university where they present as a student (Salami, 2011).

#### *Social Anxiety and Adjustment to College*

Social anxiety is such a state of emotional distress characterized by fear and avoidance behavior in real social interactions (Puklek & Vidmar, 2000). Students with social anxiety problems are at risk for social and emotional problems in the first half and dropped out in his second year (Nordstrom, Goguen, & Hiester, 2014). Besides, social anxiety also triggers symptoms of depression that require intervention (Nordstrom et al., 2014).

Some of the problems that occur in the freshmen are anxiety, depression, loneliness, and withdraw from social interaction. Most first-year college students have symptoms of anxiety that affect their academic adjustment, which means that they may be vulnerable to these symptoms (Kneipp et al., 2009). During their first year, they have a challenging transition period, because it is a period of adjustment from dependence in fulfilling their needs, demands of academic and social relations towards independence (Arjanggi, 2013). Based on these problems, this study examines the effect of social anxiety on the adjustment to college student.

#### *Objective and Hypotheses*

The previous research with longitudinal measurement showed that self-esteem was a mediator of social anxiety and academic college adjustment (Nordstrom et al., 2014). The longitudinal measurement could impact

internal validity. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine the role of fear of negative evaluation and social avoidance, and distress in measuring academic adjustment, social adjustment, personal and emotional adjustment and institutional adjustment. The hypothesis formulated in this study is that there is negative influence on the set I of variables covering fear of negative evaluation and social avoidance, and distress to the set II of variables including academic adjustment, social adjustment, personal-emotional adjustment, and institutional adjustment.

## Method

### *Participants*

The sample consisted of 436 college student (ranging from 18 to 19 years old). They were recruited from five universities in Central Java, Indonesia, who were registered in psychology in their first year. Only data from participants did complete all of the items of both scales. 93 of them are males while 343 are females.

### *Instruments*

Student adjustment to college questionnaire was used and adapted to collect the data (Carter, Locks, & Winkle-Wagner, 2013). Questionnaires measure student adjustment transition in college (Carter et al., 2013). This scale has been used in some previous studies (Beyers & Goossens, 2002, 2003; Feldt, Graham, & Dew, 2011; Taylor & Pastor, 2007). Student adjustment to college consisted of four subscales namely academic adjustment, social adjustment, adjustment of personal emotion, and institutional adjustments (Beyers & Goossens, 2002; Marmarosh & Markin, 2007; Taylor & Pastor, 2007). The questionnaire contains 66 items of Likert response format with 5 options. Favorable scoring item is with range 5 which is used to respond very fit and 1 for contrast, while the unfavorable is vice versa. The results

of translating and testing each subscale obtained items that are reliable and satisfactory on each subscale including: academic adjustment ( $\alpha = 0.836$ ), social adjustment ( $\alpha = 0.759$ ), personal emotion adjustment ( $\alpha = 0.719$ ), and institutional adjustment ( $\alpha = 0.693$ ).

Social anxiety scale was used to measure students' social anxiety whose scale is adapted from La Greca consisting of two subscales namely fear of negative evaluation and social avoidance, and distress (Garcia-Lopez et al., 2011; Nordstrom et al., 2014; Puklek & Vidmar, 2000; Ranta, Junntila, Laakkonen, Uhmavaara, & Greca, 2012). The scale contains 18 items with Likert-response format of 5 options. Favorable scoring item is with range 5 which is used to respond very fit and 1 for contrast. After the process of translating and analyzing the item was conducted, it was then known that the fear of negative evaluation subscale was appropriate to Cronbach Alpha coefficient ( $\alpha = 0.878$ ) and social avoidance, and distress ( $\alpha = 0.842$ ).

### *Procedure*

The participants in this study were psychology students from five universities in Central Java who were selected by random cluster depending on the number of classes where each psychology faculty was grouped. Researchers made a range between 30% -40% of the overall number of students for each psychology faculty. Having collected the data of the candidates, the researcher conducted the next stage which was distributing the scale to the respondents. The fewest respondents were from Purwokerto because the number of their students is the fewest among other cities. Among the 448 scales, the 436 scales were filled completely and analyzed.

## Result

### *Descriptive Statistics*

The results of descriptive statistical analysis showed that fear of negative evaluation mean the female subscale score (23.0583, SD=5.47958) was higher than the mean score (22.1075, SD = 5.54127). Distress subscale mean score of male (27.1505, SD=5.75580) was higher than the mean score of female (26.9650, SD=5.64433). Academic adjustment subscale mean score of female (84.3965, SD=8.51831) was higher than the mean score of male (80.3871, SD=8.73403). Social adjustment subscale mean score of male was 70.3226, with SD 6.38470, while the mean score of female was 70.5569, with SD 6.52405. Personal-emotional adjustment subscale mean score of male was 46.5484, with SD 6.14944, while the mean score of female was 46.4548, with SD 6.35984. Institutional adjustment subscale mean score of male was 26.6774, with SD 3.59093, while the mean score of female was 27.8280, with SD 3.30994. The results of descriptive statistical analysis are presented in table 1 (see appendix).

### *Hypotheses Analysis*

The data were analyzed using canonical correlation to study two sets of data with two or more dependent variables (Bordens & Abbott, 2011). Before presenting canonical correlation analysis, the results of significant multivariate were tested to see if canonical model is statistically significant or not. The author chose Wilks Lambda who tested the first canonical significance. The results showed significant multivariate test of Wilks  $\lambda=0.72387$ ,  $F(8, 862.00)=18.89498$ ,  $p<0.05$ , (table 2), so it can be concluded that the first canonical correlation is significant.

The model examined in this study covered two independent variables and four dependent variables. Canonical correlation value for the first canonical function was 0.47737 (Table 3),

which showed that the amount of shared variants between the data sets of social anxiety and adjustment to college is 22.788%. The second canonical correlation indicates a maximum correlation between the two variables of canonic which was undiscovered by the first canonical function (Çetin, İlhan, & Yilmaz, 2014). The value of the second canonical function was 0.24999, indicating that the number of shared variance between two sets of data in the second function was 6.249%.

Table 4 presents the data set analysis of variables including social anxiety, and adjustment to college, including their dimensional reduction. It also shows a model of canonic consisting of the values of the cumulative of the two functions of canonic obtained from the analysis of the function (1 to 2) which was statistically significant [Wilk's  $\lambda = 0.72387$ ,  $F(8, 862.00) = 18.89498$ ,  $p 0.001$ ].

There was a significant correlation between the data sets of social anxiety and adjustment to college on their both canonic function (function 2 to 2) after the first canonic function was calculated in a way that would maximize the correlation between variables where canonic was included in the evaluation [Wilk's  $\lambda = 0.93751$ ,  $F(3, 432.00) = 9.59890$ ,  $p 0:01$ ] therefore, both of them could be analyzed further.

The measurement of canonical variants can be expressed in canonical or canonical loading weight (Table 5). From the function 1 on the dependent variables, it could be known that there was a correlation figure  $\geq 0.5$  namely personal-emotional adjustment with correlation value of 0.72948.

The function 1 of the dependent variables obtained four canonical loading number  $\geq 0.5$  namely academic adjustment which had canonical loading value of 0.54904, social adjustment to canonical loading resulting 0.73442, personal-emotional adjustment has

loading was 0.88309, and institutional adjustment to the canonical loading resulting 0.54106 (See table 6).

Based on the results of canonical or canonical weight, it is known that there was a significant correlation between the dependent variables and independent variables, it could be seen from the covariate values which resulted  $> 0.5$  on fear of negative evaluation with canonical value of -0.821, and social avoidance and distress resulted canonical value of -0.959 (see table 7). The negative signs on the fear of negative evaluation and social avoidance and distress showed the correlation direction among the two variables independent and the four dependent variables.

The next step is to see the results of regression analysis by looking at the t-value and significance values of each independent variable in controlling or affecting the dependent variables. The effect of fear of negative evaluation (X1) on academic adjustment (Y1) obtained t value = -2.47078, with significant level of 0.014 ( $p < 0.05$ ), which means that both of them had an effect on academic adjustment. The data also resulted that social avoidance and distress (X2) on academic adjustment (Y1) obtained t-value of -2.48024, with significant level of 0.014 ( $p < 0.05$ ), which means that both independent variables had an effect on academic adjustment. Fear of negative evaluation (X1) does not have an effect on social adjustment (Y2) with t-value = 0.94929, with significant level of 0.343 ( $p > 0.05$ ), while social avoidance and distress (X2) had an effect on social adjustment (Y2) which was shown from the t-value = -7.21668, with significant level of 0.000 ( $p < 0.05$ ). There was an effect of fear of negative evaluation (X1) on personal-emotional adjustment (Y3) which was shown from the t-value = -5.24548, with significant level of 0.000 ( $p < 0.05$ ). In addition, there was also an effect of social avoidance and distress (X2) on personal-emotional adjustment (Y3) which was shown from t-value = -3.43006,

with significant level of 0.001 ( $p < 0.05$ ). Furthermore, There was no effect of fear of negative evaluation (X1) on institutional adjustment (Y4) which was shown from the t-value = -0.72800, with significant level of 0.467 ( $p > 0.05$ ). All in all, there was no effect of social avoidance and distress (X2) on institutional adjustment (Y4) which was shown from the t-value = -3.89906, with significant level of 0.000 ( $p < 0.05$ ).

## Discussion

The result of this study showed that there was negative correlation among the variables of fear of negative evaluation, academic adjustment and personal-emotional adjustment. This means that the lower fear of negative evaluation, the better academic adjustment and institutional adjustment of students, while the higher fear of negative evaluation the lower academic adjustment and personal-emotional adjustment. It can be concluded that those who have high fear of negative evaluation will affect their ability in adjusting to academic demands and general psychological distress, as the previous study resulting that social anxiety has an effect on academic performance (Brook & Willoughby, 2015; Strahan, 2003) and anxiety sensitivity has an effect on psychological distress (Allan, Norr, Capron, & Schmidt, 2015) which manifests personal-emotional adjustment (Beyers & Goossens, 2003).

However, fear of negative evaluation has no correlation with social adjustment and institutional adjustment. This finding is not in line with the previous study which stated that social anxiety has an effect on all area of adjustment to college (Nordstrom et al., 2014). This finding indicated that fear of negative evaluation cannot explain its effect on student interpersonal experiences in campus life, and has no effect on their commitment to their campus.

Social avoidance and distress have negative correlation with academic adjustment, social adjustment, personal-emotional adjustment and institutional adjustment. This means that the lower the level of social avoidance and distress the better the level of academic adjustment, social adjustment, personal-emotional adjustment and institutional adjustment. This finding is in line with the previous study which claimed that all of social anxiety affects adjustment to college (Nordstrom et al., 2014).

Social avoidance and distress are avoidance towards social situation and meeting new friends that will lead to social distress and uncomfortable feeling in someone's life (Beyers & Goossens, 2002). Those who are indicated to have social avoidance and distress will get difficult in adjusting to academic tasks, because they are difficult in networking in order to get information about campus life (Beyers & Goossens, 2003). Those with low social anxiety will be close to their colleague where this leads to the improvement of adjustment (Marmarosh & Markin, 2007). This is because that it will increase sense of security during their first year adjustment process (Marmarosh & Markin, 2007).

The adjustment to campus life requires skill to interact with new friends and situation of their previous education. It is an indication of high social anxiety that they avoid extra or intra-curricular activities in campus, and this indicates low social adjustment (Beyers & Goossens, 2002). In addition, high social anxiety can also be indicated from task-misinterpretation given by their lecturers, that indicates academic adjustment (Beyers & Goossens, 2002), caused by lack of

information network which includes the indicator of social adjustment (Beyers & Goossens, 2002).

### **Conclusion**

Student ability in adjustment to college is affected by social anxiety. The result shows that an appropriate intervention is necessary to tackle student distress during their first year. This study provides recommendations to institutions of higher education in order to prepare for their student during the orientation of campus life, academic tasks, and how to get along with faculty and fellow college student. Through proper orientation, their process of adjustment to college will be accelerated.

Fear of negative evaluation has an effect on academic adjustment and emotional-personal adjustment, but has not social adjustment and institutional adjustment. Social avoidance and distress have an effect on academic adjustment, social adjustment, social adjustment, personal-emotional adjustment and institutional adjustment.

All in all, it is hoped to conduct further research to examine several variables that are not included in this study such as a pattern of ethnic identification, a source of social support, psychologically self-reliance, gender, and parenting.

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**Apenddix**

Table 1  
*Descriptive Statistics*

Variables	Sex	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Fear of negative evaluation	Male	93	8	39	22.1075	5.54127
	Female	343	8	40	23.0583	5.47958
Social avoidance and distress	Male	93	10	37	27.1505	5.75580
	Female	343	12	48	26.9650	5.64433
Academic adjustment	Male	93	64	103	80.3871	8.73403
	Female	343	59	111	84.3965	8.51831
Social adjustment	Male	93	52	84	70.3226	6.38470
	Female	343	52	88	70.5569	6.52405
Personal-emotional adjustment	Male	93	29	62	46.5484	6.14944
	Female	343	26	64	46.4548	6.35984
Institutional adjustment	Male	93	15	35	26.6774	3.59093
	Female	343	14	35	27.8280	3.30994

Table 2  
*Multivariate Test of Significant*

Test name	Value	Approx. F	Hypoth. DF	Error DF	Sig. of F
Pillais	0.29037	18.34345	8.00	864.00	0.000
Hotellings	0.36180	19.44655	8.00	860.00	0.000
Wilks	0.72387	18.89498	8.00	862.00	0.000
Roys	0.22788				

Table 3  
*Eigenvalues and Canonical Correlation*

Root No.	Eigenvalue	Percentage	Cumulative percentage	Canonical correlation	Squared Canonical correlation
1	0.29514	81.57554	81.57554	0.47737	0.22788
2	0.06666	18.42446	100.00000	0.24999	0.06249

Table 4  
*Dimensionality Reduction Analysis*

Roots	Wilk's L.	F	Hypothesis DF	Error DF	Significance Value of F
1 to 2	0.72387	18.89498	8.00	862.00	0.000
2 to 2	0.93751	9.59890	3.00	432.00	0.000

Table 5  
*Standardized Canonical Coefficientsof Dependent Variables*

Subscale	Function No.	
	1	2
Academic adjustment	-0.14391	0.50318
Social adjustment	0.47617	-1.05879
Personal-emotional adjustment	0.72948	0.62106
Institutional adjustment	0.15728	-0.08709

Table 6  
*The Correlation between Dependent and Canonical Variables*

Subscale	Function No.	
	1	2
Academic adjustment	0.54904	0.16983
Social adjustment	0.73442	-0.58599
Personal-emotional adjustment	0.88309	0.45088
Institutional adjustment	0.54106	-0.16170

Table 7  
*Correlation between Covariates and Canonical Variables*

Subscale	Canonical Variables	
	1	2
Fear of negative evaluation	-0.82100	-0.57093
Social avoidance and distress	-0.95977	0.28080