

Do Optimism and Self-Esteem Lead to High Academic Adjustment among First-Year College Students? Implications for Counseling and Research

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ABSTRACT. Academic adjustment is essential for first-year students to navigate the learning process smoothly. However, multiple prior studies have highlighted academic adjustment as a commonly encountered challenge. This study investigates the impact of optimism and self-esteem on the academic adjustment of novice students. Employing a quantitative survey method, 155 respondents were selected through convenience sampling. Data collection utilized the brief versions of the Personal Optimism Scale, Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale, and Academic Adjustment Scale. Linear regression was applied to test the formulated hypotheses. The outcomes indicated that both optimism and self-esteem exerted significant partial effects on academic adjustment. Concurrent testing further confirmed their combined influence on academic adjustment. These results lay a robust foundation for intervention development through guidance and counseling services aimed at enhancing optimism and self-esteem levels among first-year students to bolster their academic adjustment.

Keywords: Optimism, self-esteem, academic adjustment

ABSTRAK. Penyesuaian akademik sangat dibutuhkan oleh mahasiswa tahun pertama sehingga mereka dapat mengikuti proses pembelajaran secara lancar. Namun beberapa studi terdahulu mengungkapkan bahwa penyesuaian akademik menjadi salah satu permasalahan yang seringkali dihadapi. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis pengaruh optimisme dan self-esteem terhadap penyesuaian akademik mahasiswa baru. Peneliti menggunakan metode survei kuantitatif dengan melibatkan 155 responden yang ditentukan dengan menggunakan teknik Convenience sampling. A short version of the Personal Optimism Scale, Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale, dan Academic Adjustment Scale digunakan untuk pengumpulan data. Teknik regresi linear digunakan untuk menguji hipotesis yang dirumuskan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa optimisme dan self-esteem memberikan efek parsial yang signifikan terhadap penyesuaian akademik. Selain itu pengujian secara simultan juga memverifikasi pengaruh keduanya terhadap penyesuaian akademik. Temuan ini memberikan dasar yang kuat untuk pengembangan intervensi melalui layanan bimbingan dan konseling. Tujuan intervensi ini adalah untuk meningkatkan tingkat optimisme dan self-esteem pada mahasiswa tahun pertama guna memperbaiki penyesuaian akademik mereka.

Kata kunci: *Optimisme*, self-esteem, penyesuaian akademik

INTRODUCTION

Learning in higher education differs significantly from high school, where students are required to understand the rules, particularly those related to ethics that must be adhered to during lectures. Junaidi (2020) explains that this period presents a considerable challenge for students as they adjust to new habits amidst change. Within the lecture context, individuals are expected to

be more proactive and independent in comprehending teaching material, contrasting with their prior more passive approach. Clinciu elucidates that the first year is crucial for college adaptation due to the myriad potential adjustment difficulties that may arise (Clinciu, 2013). This stage serves as a pivotal period for students to establish the foundation or principles that will guide their campus life, thus impacting their academic performance (Igirisa & Yoenanto, 2021).

A global phenomenon demonstrates that challenges during college can lead to educational non-completion. According to the American College Testing Service in 2010, half or 50% of college students did not successfully finish their studies, encompassing first-year and second-year students (Stoklosa, 2015). From a psychological standpoint, first-year students are in a transitional stage between adolescence and adulthood, engaging in identity exploration and self-development processes (Asiyah, 2013). This transitional phase can be attributed to first-year students' struggles in adapting to the academic college environment (Moesarofah, 2021; Sujadi, 2022a). Consequently, students are mandated to navigate academic adjustments.

Academic adjustment denotes an individual's capacity to manage academic demands effectively and successfully meet them (Sabela, Fithri, & Wahyuni, 2022). According to Baker & Siryk (1984), academic adjustment encompasses four facets: motivation for learning and clear academic objectives, active engagement in academic tasks, dedication to meeting academic demands, and contentment with the academic milieu. Baker & Siryk's research indicates that students with robust academic adjustment exhibit greater certainty in their choice of study and confidence in their future career plans (1984). Students' ability to adapt to the learning environment enhances their academic performance (K. Zhao, 2006); conversely, inadequate adjustment may lead to heightened stress and depression in response to academic demands (Maulina & Sari, 2018). Students with poor academic adjustment may struggle to find contentment, exhibit dissatisfaction with their activities, engage in self-comparisons, experience disappointment in the face of failure, and encounter elevated levels of stress and depression (Clinciu, Cazan, & Ives, 2021; Vargas, Leiva, Rojas Andrade, & Scquicciarini, 2019).

Research on first-year students suggests that they often lack clear academic goals and may not optimize fulfilling academic tasks due to adaptation difficulties stemming from variances in conceptual understanding and learning methodologies between high school and college settings (Rahmadani & Mukti, 2020). A study by Tayama et al. (2015) revealed that 29% of students encountered challenges within their academic environment. Nurfitriana et al. (2017) elucidated that numerous first-year students struggle to adjust to the academic environment, leading to failures that impede their academic progression in college. Herdiansyah et al. (2021) expounded that first-year students commonly face various obstacles during lectures, such as limited interaction with college peers, challenges comprehending subject matter and acclimating to new environments., another study demonstrates that students encounter issues in self-adjustment dimensions, including a lack of emotional and behavioral maintenance, discomfort, indifference toward academic activities, and manifestation of psychological and emotional problems (Widodo, 2021). Thus, the cultivation of academic self-confidence is essential for students to succeed in meeting these demands (Adiwyaty & Fitriyah, 2015).

Academic adjustment is influenced by several factors, among which is optimism (Demirtaş, 2020; Natasya, 2023; Perera & McIlveen, 2014; Ratnawati, Setyosari, Ramli, & Atmoko, 2021). Optimism is defined as the belief in altering negative thinking when facing life's obstacles, empowering individuals to surmount challenges and attain established goals (Forgeard & Seligman, 2012). Optimism reflects an individual's positive beliefs and optimistic outlook on their future (Carver et al., 2010). Elevated levels of optimism have been linked to enhanced subjective well-being during challenging or distressing times (Carver, Scheier, & Segerstrom, 2010). Strong beliefs and expectations of success prompt individuals to tackle difficult situations actively and employ more effective problem-solving strategies (Muslimah & Satwika, 2019). Optimism correlates with goal engagement, perseverance, and better stress management, positioning

optimistic individuals to adapt more effectively to stress than their pessimistic counterparts (Solberg Nes, 2016).

Research on first-year students demonstrates the pivotal role of optimism in adapting to a new educational environment (Morton, Mergler, & Boman, 2014). Aspinwall & Taylor (1992) noted that first-year students with higher levels of optimism effectively navigated the college transition, showcasing improved adjustment and reduced psychological distress by the semester's end. Higher optimism levels, assessed at the semester's onset, were linked prospectively to lesser increases in stress and depression and greater boosts in perceived social support (Boman & Yates, 2001). Additionally, another study revealed positive correlations among optimism, cognitive flexibility, university life adjustment, and happiness (Demirtaş, 2020).

Another critical factor affecting academic adjustment is self-esteem (Devin & Loisa, 2021; Harris & Orth, 2020; Prasetyo, Purnama, & Prasetya, 2020). Self-esteem constitutes an individual's self-evaluation based on their perceived self-value and assessment as a whole, encompassing a positive or negative self-attitude (Rosenberg, 1979). Sedikides & Gregg elucidate that self-esteem reflects how individuals assess their self-worth and belief in themselves, influencing whether they view themselves positively or negatively (Sedikides & Gress, 2003). Individuals with high self-esteem typically exhibit self-care and self-appreciation, contrasting with those with low self-esteem who may harbor self-dislike (Wood & Forest, 2016). A study by Lee et al. (2018) highlighted a significant relationship between self-esteem and school adjustment. Moreover, self-esteem significantly mediates the link between parenting and adjustment (Martínez, Murgui, Garcia, & Garcia, 2021). High self-esteem also enhances student engagement in academic activities (Barragán Martín et al., 2021; Y. Zhao, Zheng, Pan, & Zhou, 2021). First-year students with robust self-esteem tend to employ effective strategies in managing academic and social challenges in the college milieu (Friedlander, Reid, Shupak, & Cribbie, 2007). Furthermore, students with elevated self-esteem often experience enhanced self-adjustment during the initial semester, facilitating their adaptation to the new environment (Devin & Loisa, 2021).

This study aims to investigate the partial effects of optimism and self-esteem on the academic adjustment of new students, alongside conducting simultaneous testing. To the best of the author's knowledge, investigations into the simultaneous impacts of optimism and self-esteem on academic adjustment among first-year students remain scarce within the Indonesian higher education context. This study presents innovative research concentrating on first-year students, a critical juncture in transitioning to a novel academic environment. The findings of this study may offer valuable insights for higher education leaders to assist first-year students in surmounting academic hurdles and enhancing their learning experience quality.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Academic adjustment refers to an individual's ability to effectively manage academic demands and requirements to succeed (Sabela et al., 2022). It encompasses various aspects such as learning ability, motivation, goal-setting, strategies for success, satisfaction with the educational environment, and more (Baker & Siryk, 1984). This construct comprises four domains reflecting student performance across multiple dimensions. The first domain academic achievement, focuses on students' drive to learn, the appropriateness of their learning methods for specific academic tasks, and their ability to attain satisfactory grades. The second domain, social adjustment, pertains to students' engagement within the academic environment and their capacity to form social connections. The third domain, personal-emotional adjustment, evaluates students' mental and physical well-being, reflecting their self-perception and resilience in handling educational challenges that induce stress and anxiety. The fourth domain, institutional adjustment, underscores the broader interaction between students and their educational institution and academic milieu (Baker & Siryk, 1984).

Academic adjustment is a multidimensional concept that mirrors students' ability to navigate and excel in the academic realm by effectively managing educational demands, coping with challenges, and integrating into the university setting. Baker & Siryk's study demonstrates that students with strong academic adjustment exhibit greater certainty in their choice of study and enhanced confidence in future career plans (Baker & Siryk, 1984). The capacity of students to adapt to the learning environment enhances their academic performance (K. Zhao, 2006); conversely, students who struggle to adjust may experience significant stress and depression in response to academic demands (Maulina & Sari, 2018).

Several factors influence academic adjustment, including self-esteem. Self-esteem reflects an individual's self-evaluation based on their perceived value and assessment of themselves as a whole, encompassing positive or negative self-attitudes (Rosenberg, 1979). It encompasses individuals' perceptions and judgments about their self-worth competence, and personal success, indicating their level of belief and confidence in their abilities and self-worth as individuals (Sujadi, Meditamar, & Ahmad, 2022). Individuals with high self-esteem tend to care for and value themselves, while those with low self-esteem may have lower self-regard (Wood & Forest, 2016). Students with high self-esteem tend to experience enhanced self-adjustment during the initial semester, aiding in their adaptation to the new environment (Devin & Loisa, 2021).

Another factor impacting academic adjustment is optimism. Optimism entails the belief in altering negative thinking when facing life's obstacles, enabling individuals to surmount challenges and achieve set goals (Forgeard & Seligman, 2012). It signifies a positive mindset or attitude characterized by hope and faith in future success, involving the expectation of favorable outcomes and maintaining a positive outlook even in challenging circumstances. Optimism is linked to resilience, heightened motivation, improved coping strategies, and overall well-being (Sujadi, 2021). Research by Carver et al. (2010) reveals that optimistic individuals often experience lower stress levels and employ more effective coping mechanisms compared to pessimistic counterparts. Rand et al. (2011) demonstrate that optimism correlates positively with grade expectations and academic accomplishments. Optimistic students typically set higher academic goals and exert greater effort to achieve them.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Respondents

The research design employed in this study is a survey. The survey method is a quantitative research approach utilized to gather data on beliefs, opinions, characteristics, behaviors, relationships between variables, and to test hypotheses from samples drawn from a specific population, encompassing both historical and current data. Data collection took place over a 3-week period in April 2024. Through the Convenience sampling technique, 155 new students from the first-year of the Institut Agama Islam Negeri Kerinci participated in completing the research scale. Details regarding respondent characteristics are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Characteristics of Research Respondents

Demographic Variables	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	106	68.4
	Female	49	31.6
Cumulative Grade Point Average (GPA)	> 3.5	73	47.09
	< 3.5	82	52.90

Table 1 illustrates that the majority of survey participants were male, with 106 individuals accounting for 68.4%, followed by females with 49 individuals making up 31.6%. Regarding the

Cumulative Grade Point Average (GPA) obtained from 155 respondents, 73 individuals, or 47.09%, had a GPA > 3.5, while 82 individuals had a GPA < 3.5, representing 52.90%.

Data Collection

A short version of the Personal Optimism Scale

The measure of freshmen optimism utilized a modified version of the Personal Optimism Scale, a 9-item scale adapted from Gavrilov, Jovanovic, Zuljevic & Brdaric in 2014 (Gavrilov-Jerković et al., 2014). The scale was adjusted to align with students' experiences in academic adjustment. The adaptation process involved translation into Indonesian, internal consistency checks, concurrent and convergent validity assessments, and field testing (Beaton et al., 2000). Internal consistency testing using Cronbach's Alpha yielded personal optimism scores ranging from 0.59 to 0.76.

Rosenberg Self-esteem scale

The Rosenberg self-esteem scale was adapted by the researcher (Rosenberg, 1979). This scale, comprising 10 statement items rated on a four-point Likert-type scale (1= strongly agree - 4= strongly disagree), assessed students' self-esteem. The scale demonstrated excellent internal consistency with a Guttman scale reproducibility coefficient of 0.92. Retest reliability over a 2-week period showed correlations of 0.85 and 0.88.

Academic Adjustment Scale

The measure for assessing academic adjustment among first-year students was adapted from the Academic Adjustment Scale developed by Anderson, Guan, & Koc in 2016 (Anderson et al., 2016). This scale includes nine statements across three subscales: 1) academic lifestyle, 2) academic achievement, and 3) academic motivation. Each subscale requires respondents to rate statements using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1= rarely applies to me to 5= always applies to me. The scale demonstrates good consistency.

Statistical Analysis

In this study, the researcher utilized descriptive statistical methods, such as (percentage, standard deviation, and mean), to evaluate the data collected from respondents on each variable. Furthermore, the hypotheses were tested through multiple regression. Regression is used to identify the relationship between one variable and another, with the independent variable used to predict the average value of the dependent variable. Requirements for regression analysis included tests of normality, linearity, multicollinearity, and heteroscedasticity, all of which were evaluated using SPSS software version 25.00.

RESULTS

Data processing in this study began with descriptive analysis, which aimed to evaluate the achievements on each variable. Table 2 reflects the results of the descriptive analysis. For the Optimism variable, the mean value is 31.05 with a standard deviation of 5.26, which indicates a level of optimism categorized as moderate. The majority of respondents were in the moderate category, followed by high, low, and very high, indicating that there are still students with low levels of optimism. Meanwhile, for the self-esteem variable, respondents tend to have a moderate level, with an average of 28.34. Furthermore, on the academic adjustment variable, most respondents were also categorized as moderate, although the frequency distribution showed that there were students with low and very low academic adjustment.

Table 2. Descriptive Analysis of Optimism, Self-esteem, and Academic Adjustment

Variabel	Mean (SD)	Category				
		Very Low	Low	Moderate	High	Very High
Optimism	31,05 (5,26)	0 (0,00)	11 (7,09)	72 (46,45)	63 (40,64)	9 (5,80)
Self-esteem	28,34 (2,83)	0 (0,00)	57 (36,77)	96 (61,93)	2 (1,29)	0 (0,00)
Academic Adjustment	28,36 (6,98)	1 (0,64)	55 (35,48)	49 (31,61)	45 (29,03)	5 (3,22)

Table 3 illustrates the results of testing the classical assumption requirements. In normality testing, the significance value of the optimism variable is 0.150, self-esteem is 0.125, and academic adjustment is 0.108, which means that all data are normally distributed. In multicollinearity testing, the VIF value of $1.010 < 10$ was obtained so that there was no multicollinearity between variables. Furthermore, heteroscedasticity testing on the optimism variable resulted in a significance of 0.156 and on the self-esteem variable of 0.118, so it was concluded that no heteroscedasticity occurred.

Table 3. Classical Assumption Testing

Classical Assumption	Sig.	Decision
Normality testing Optimism	0.200 > 0.05	Normal
Normality testing Self-esteem	0.125 > 0.05	Normal
Normality testing Optimism academic adjustment	0.108 > 0.05	Normal
Multicollinearity	1.010*	No multicollinearity occurs
Heteroscedasticity testing on Optimism variable	0.156 **	No heteroscedasticity occurs
Heteroscedasticity testing on the Self-esteem variable	0.118 **	No heteroscedasticity occurs

* VIF

** *Glejser*

Following the completion of all analytical procedures, researchers proceeded with hypothesis testing using simple regression to assess the partial impact of optimism and self-esteem on academic adjustment among first-year students. Table 4 displays the results, showing a calculated F value of 13.748, signifying a significant influence of optimism on academic adjustment.

Table 4. Simple Regression Analysis of Optimism on Academic Adjustment in First-Year Students

Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	624.283	1	624.283	13.748	.000 ^b
Residual	6947.484	153	45.408		
Total	7571.768	154			

The second hypothesis examined in this study is the impact of self-esteem on academic adjustment among first-year students, assessed through a simple regression test. Table 5 reveals an F value of 10.984 with a significance level of 0.001, indicating a significant influence of self-esteem on academic adjustment in first-year students.

Table 5. Simple Regression Analysis of Self-esteem on Academic Adjustment in First-Year

Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	507.159	1	507.159	10.984	.001 ^b
Residual	7064.608	153	46.174		
Total	7571.768	154			

To assess the combined impact of optimism and self-esteem on academic adjustment in first-year students, a multiple regression analysis was conducted. As per Table 6, the computed F value is 11.970 with a significance level of 0.000. Consequently, the alternative hypothesis (H_a) is accepted, signifying the significance of the regression coefficient. Therefore, it is inferred that both optimism and self-esteem significantly influence academic adjustment in first-year students.

Table 6. Multiple Regression Analysis Results of Optimism and Self-esteem on Academic Adjustment in First-Year Students

Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	1030.290	2	515.145	11.970	.000 ^b
Residual	6541.478	152	43.036		
Total	7571.768	154			

DISCUSSION

Academic adjustment significantly impacts first-year students by facilitating their success in further education and future careers, enhancing their confidence and motivation (Dwinanda & Nugraha, 2023). Van Rooij et al. (2018) underscored that students with strong abilities are more motivated, confident, value their college experience, and effectively navigate the demands of academic life. Exposure to diverse coping resources is essential for students to swiftly and seamlessly adapt to their new college environment (Ali, Ahmad, & Khan, 2018). Individuals are more likely to experience satisfaction in life when actively pursuing meaningful goals, perceiving a supportive environment that aids in goal achievement (Sanderson & Cantor, 1999).

Research findings indicated that academic adjustment among first-year students fell within the moderate category, a common challenge for many students due to diverse academic demands (Widodo, 2021). However, not all students face difficulties in adjustment. For instance, some studies revealed above-average levels of adjustment among participants, indicating strong academic adjustment (Valdo & Chris, 2022). Other studies reported high levels of college adjustment, with a majority exhibiting academic, social, and campus attachment adjustments (Herdiansyah et al., 2021). Further research by Iflah & Listyasari (2013) demonstrated high adjustment levels for most respondents, emphasizing the importance of effective adaptation.

Hypothesis testing confirmed the significant impact of optimism on academic adjustment. Optimistic students exhibit better adaptation to new stressors during transitional phases, such as financial burdens and academic challenges (Mutharah, Riddhi, & Nagarwal, 2023). Studies with large respondent pools have established a correlation between optimism and academic adjustment (Usán, Salavera, & Quílez-Robres, 2022). High levels of optimism and low levels of depression enhance students' adaptation during the high school to college transition (Ghufron, 2018; Morton et al., 2014). Further, optimism measured at the semester's start independently predicted life satisfaction by its end among first-year college students (Rand et al., 2011). Optimism and hope predict overall life satisfaction in college students and adults (Bailey, Eng, Frisch, & Snyder, 2011).

2007), with greater optimism at the semester's beginning associated with increased perceived social support (Brissette, Scheier, & Carver, 2002).

Optimism's impact on academic adjustment in first-year college students relates to how a positive outlook influences their ability to adapt and excel academically. Higher optimism levels correlate with improved academic adjustment, effective coping mechanisms, resilience in challenges, and a positive academic approach (Sujadi, 2022b; Watson & Watson, 2016). Longitudinal studies have shown that optimism influences students' test anxiety, academic performance, and study persistence throughout an academic year (Ruthig, Perry, Hall, & Hladkyj, 2004). Understanding these dynamics offers insights into how optimism contributes to successful academic transitions and performance among first-year college students (Demirtaş, 2020).

Moreover, testing additional hypotheses unveiled a positive relationship between self-esteem and academic adjustment in first-year students. Previous research has shown that academic adjustment correlates positively with self, life satisfaction, and academic achievement (Lew, 2013). Elements of self-esteem play a significant role in shaping academic adjustment (Pasha & Munaf, 2013). In the college setting, students with high self-esteem exhibit self-confidence, believing in their capabilities to attain desired goals, self-motivating, and inspiring themselves and others towards achievement (Kusuma, 2022). Self-esteem stands out as a key factor driving effective action, characterized by earnestness and perseverance (Laursen & Mooney, 2008), and can be viewed as a protective factor (Hibar et al., 2015).

The impact of self-esteem on academic adjustment in first-year college students pertains to how an individual's self-perception and self-worth influence their capacity to adapt, excel, and succeed academically during their initial college year. Higher levels of self-esteem often correspond to enhanced academic adjustment, including attributes like confidence, motivation, and resilience in the face of challenges (Lee, 2016). Research also underscores self-esteem as a pivotal factor influencing students' academic performance and adjustment during their first year in college (Luo, Gao, & Liu, 2022). Friedlander et al.'s research has highlighted the relationship between self-esteem, academic self-efficacy, and students' adaptability to academic challenges (Friedlander et al., 2007).

Several limitations are present in this study. The research sample was confined to first-year students from a single college with 155 respondents, suggesting the necessity to augment the respondent pool for future investigations. Additionally, the study's analysis may not be universally applicable to broader populations or diverse contexts. Extending the scope of respondents in future studies is crucial for gaining a more comprehensive understanding. Furthermore, the measurement of variables should encompass more than mere self-assessment, emphasizing a deeper examination of respondents with low levels of optimism, self-esteem, and academic adjustment to mitigate potential research biases.

CONCLUSION

Academic adjustment plays a crucial role in helping first-year students navigate the challenges of a new academic environment, encompassing academic requirements, course structures, and differing educational systems. Descriptive results indicate that the academic adjustment, optimism, and self-esteem levels of new students fall within the moderate range. Moreover, multiple regression analysis revealed a significant impact of optimism and self-esteem on academic adjustment. These findings hold substantial implications for addressing the academic self-adjustment challenges faced by new students. They can guide universities in formulating comprehensive support strategies tailored to first-year students, with a specific focus on enhancing optimism, self-esteem, and academic adjustment. The study's outcomes can serve as a foundation for designing interventions, particularly through guidance and counseling services,

aimed at boosting optimism and self-esteem among first-year students to enhance their academic adaptation. It is crucial for counseling programs in higher education to incorporate components that bolster optimism and self-esteem as integral elements of their holistic approach to aiding students' academic adjustment.

The implications of this study underscore the necessity for longitudinal studies that track students' progress over time. This approach will facilitate the evaluation of how optimism and self-esteem evolve and their enduring influence on academic adjustment. Furthermore, the results lay the groundwork for creating and evaluating counseling interventions designed to enhance college students' optimism and self-esteem. Researchers can investigate efficient intervention strategies targeting these aspects to enhance academic adjustment.

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