

# Social Connections Strategy as a Predictive Factor of the First year Adolescent Students' Academic Adjustment in Cameroon State Universities

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## ABSTRACT

The study was carried out to investigate “social connections strategy and its influence on the first year adolescent academic adjustment in Cameroon state Universities. The researcher made use of mixed method with a concurrent nested research design. The instrument used for data collection was questionnaire. The sample was made up of 759 students proportionately selected from five state Universities (University of Bamenda, University of Buea, University of Maroua and University of Yaounde 1 and university of Betoua). Data was analysed using inferential and descriptive statistics. The descriptive statistical tools used were frequency count, percentages and multiple responses set which aimed at calculating the summary of findings. To test the hypothesis, the Spearman rho test was used because the data were not normally distributed based on the statistics of the test of normality assumption trend. In addition to the Spearman’s rho test, the Cox and Snell test was equally computed to explain the explanatory power in the hypothesis in terms of percentage to ease comprehension in readers who find it difficult to interpret the correlation coefficient value. On the other, the qualitative data derived from open ended questions were analysed using the thematic analysis approach with the aid of themes, groundings/frequency and quotations. Findings showed that social connections ( $r$ -value 0.442\*\*,  $p$ -value < 0.001) significantly influence the academic adjustment of newly admitted University students. The positivity of the influence implied that newly admitted University students are more likely to be academically adjusted when they are social connected with significant others.

**KEYWORDS:** Adolescent, academic adjustment and Social connection

## INTRODUCTION

The transition to University life is often looked upon as a positive event but the changes in university life can sometimes be stressful to the student. Stress is a physical and mental response to everyday demands, particularly those associated with change (Agolla & Ongori, 2009). Among college students, stress can be viewed as a positive or negative experience that affects their life and performances (Jogaratham & Buchanan, 2004). This is because academic work is never happened without stressful activities (Agolla & Ongori, 2009).

A positive social network can also be protective of issues arising during the transition from secondary school to the University. Peer relationships facilitate a positive transition on a range of adaptation measures (peer acceptance, friendship quality, number of friends) predicted various positive post-transition wellbeing measures including academic achievement, loneliness (or lack of), self-esteem, and school involvement (Kingery et al., 2011). Cantin and Boivin, (2004) reported the transition to secondary education was associated with an increase of perceived social acceptance, as well as an increase in supportive relationships with their school friends.

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Social connection is vital for early development, learning, and psychological wellbeing (e.g. Demaray & Malecki, 2002). Perceived social connections can be very important during adolescence where individuals experience rapid changes biologically, emotionally, and socially. In addition, a positive social support network can also be protective of issues arising during the transition to University. Parental support may buffer children from the emotional effects of the transition to the university. Close and caring relationships are undeniably linked to health and wellbeing at all stages in the lifespan. Rook (1990) contended that health and well-being are not merely the result of actual support provision, but are the consequence of participation in a meaningful social context. Receiving support gives meaning to individuals' lives by virtue of motivating them to give in return, to feel obligated, and to be attached to their ties.

Murphy et al., (2010) argued that adolescents who had recently transitioned into university and professional life, social connection was the most prominent theme related to adjustment; those who reported relational isolation also struggled with unpreparedness for new financial obligations and feeling that their expectations about life after college were left unfulfilled. Wendlandt and Rochlen (2008) argued that when social connection is lacking in the transition of adolescents into the University, counselors need to develop interventions aimed at increasing perceived support. This idea was supported in a study of college graduates who had recently relocated to a metropolitan area and were adjusting to their first year of professional life (Polach, 2004). Participants reported frustration and difficulties trying to establish new peer groups outside the college environment. They also cited the importance of a sense of belonging as the primary reason for moving to a city after graduating.

Friends providing a greater instrumental support, informational support, and emotional support provide new opportunities for victimised adolescents (Wang, Brittain, McDougall, & Vaillancourt, 2016). Related evidence provides support for child-mother attachments predicting easy adjustment and fast school transition (Maltais, Duchesne, Ratelle, & Feng, 2017). The protective power of attachment has also been argued to moderate the relationship between a social comparison learning environment in the classroom on anxiety symptoms (Maltais, Duchesne, Ratelle, & Feng, 2015). Furthermore, in a study of transitioning students, Booth-LaForce et al., (2012) reported that the growth in anxious withdrawal among those in the high-increasing group was

predicted by low parental autonomy, low time spent with the mother, both restrictive and nurturing parenting, and peer exclusion. These findings further support the links between a positive, supportive social network, and adolescents' behavioural outcomes during the transition.

Social connection is clearly a major form of coping activity. A handful of studies have sought to investigate the types of interactions which are viewed as supportive and contributing to coping (Biesta, 2020). For example, studies suggest that coping is often facilitated by communication of trust, reassurance, love, empathy, and caring. There are a number of mechanisms by which communication of these types of information might have varying effects. Mulan (2010) have suggested that emotional support seems to protect individuals indirectly from the negative consequences of stress by reinforcing their sense of mastery and self-esteem. Presumably, the individual with a strong sense of self (facilitated in part by the presence of emotional support) will be better able to mobilize other coping resources than the person who must also deal with a diminished sense of self.

Furthermore, coping can be facilitated in a variety of ways by other forms of social support. In many situations, the provision of instrumental support (money, task assistance, direct intervention on behalf of the recipient) can lessen the load of coping with the stressor or alter the nature of the stressor itself (such as when the stressor involves a loss of material resources). Informational support (advice, directives, or information communicated directly or via social comparison) can facilitate coping by encouraging forms of cognitive or behavioral coping which might increase stress resistance, redirect inappropriate coping activities, and result in the ability to tolerate increased levels of stress (Sidnell, 2012).

Support from family and friends have been found to facilitate social adjustment among adolescents (Calvete and Connor-Smith, 2006). Villanova and Bownas (1984) for example found that social support could help students to cope with everyday life stressor and lighten the burden of academic workload. Without enough support from family and friends, they would be in trouble and are vulnerable to depression, stress and anxiety. This finding was supported by Dollete et al. (2004) who found that social support could act as a protective factor that could decrease psychosocial problems among adolescents such as stress. Counseling professionals who work in university settings are uniquely positioned to intervene with adolescents' clients and to foster resilience and well-being during this turbulent life

phase. If counselors are to be effective working with the many challenges that adolescents face, it is necessary to better understand factors that predict well-being during life transition. The aforementioned literature demonstrates the protective qualities of social support for adolescents in transition. Adolescents who are able to rely on positive social relationships during life transitions derive higher psychological well-being and easy adjusted with campus life (Lane, 2014).

### Methods

Mixed method with a concurrent nested research design was adopted for this study. That is because the data collected were both quantitative and qualitative at the same time or parallel within the same study. The sample size of the study consists of 759 adolescents from the five state universities who were selected using simple random sampling. A questionnaire was the instrument used to collect data from first year adolescents. Data was analysed using the descriptive and inferential statistical tools. The

descriptive statistical tools used were frequency count, percentages and multiple responses set which aimed at calculating the summary of findings. The Spearman rho test was used to test the hypothesis because the data was not normally distributed based on the statistics of the test of normality assumption trend of the data. The Cox and Snell test was equally computed to explain the explanatory between the variable in the hypothesis in terms of percentage to ease comprehension in readers who find it difficult to interpret the correlation coefficient value. On the other, the qualitative data derived from open ended questions were analysed using the thematic analysis approach with the aid of themes, groundings/frequency and quotations. Finally, findings were presented using frequency distribution and thematic tables and on charts with all inferential statistics presented at 95% level of confidence interval with alpha set at 0.05 levels, accepting 5% margin of error.

## FINDINGS

### Academic Adjustment of Students

**Table 1: Appraisal of Respondents Academic Adjustment**

Statements	Stretched				Collapsed	
	SA	A	D	SD	SA/A	D/SD
<b>I often feel nervous and tense when I am in school**</b>	175 (23.3%)	201 (26.8%)	240 (32.0%)	134 (17.9%)	376 (50.1%)	374 (49.9%)
<b>I can easily live and work with others harmoniously</b>	305 (40.7%)	346 (46.1%)	81 (10.8%)	18 (2.4%)	651 (86.8%)	99 (13.2%)
<b>I collaborate well with persons from diverse cultures</b>	317 (42.3%)	355 (47.3%)	52 (6.9%)	26 (3.5%)	672 (89.6%)	78 (10.4%)
<b>I am confident I made the right choice of university</b>	363 (48.4%)	282 (37.6%)	71 (9.5%)	34 (4.5%)	645 (86.0%)	105 (14.0%)
<b>I feel like the school environment is my home now</b>	228 (30.4%)	307 (40.9%)	152 (20.3%)	63 (8.4%)	535 (71.3%)	215 (28.7%)
<b>It has been difficult for me to meet and make new friends**</b>	192 (25.6%)	243 (32.4%)	204 (27.2%)	111 (14.8%)	435 (58.0%)	315 (42.0%)
<b>I feel happy about my studies</b>	346 (46.1%)	310 (41.3%)	67 (8.9%)	27 (3.6%)	656 (87.5%)	94 (12.5%)
<b>I always experience social anxiety**</b>	190 (25.3%)	288 (38.4%)	173 (23.1%)	99 (13.2%)	478 (63.7%)	272 (36.3%)
<b>I am independent in decision making</b>	225 (30.0%)	244 (32.5%)	180 (24.0%)	101 (13.5%)	469 (62.5%)	281 (37.5%)
<b>I can easily adapt to situations without any problem</b>	249 (33.2%)	303 (40.4%)	122 (16.3%)	76 (10.1%)	552 (73.6%)	198 (26.4%)
<b>Multiple Responses Set (MRS)</b>	2377 (31.7%)	2764 (36.9%)	1457 (19.4%)	902 (12.0%)	5141 (68.5%)	2359 (31.5%)

\*\*coding reversed during the calculation of MRS



Based on academic adjustment of first year students, in aggregate, 68.5% are academically well adjusted while 31.5% are not. Specifically, 89.6% (672) of students collaborate well with persons from diverse

cultures while 10.4% (78) are unable. 87.5% (656) feel happy about studies while 12.5% (94) are unhappy. Similarly, 86.8% (651) agreed to easily live and work with others harmoniously while 13.2% (99) disagreed. Also, 86.0% (645) of students are confident in their choice of study while 14.0% (105)

are not. 73.6% (552) agreed to easily adapt to situations without any problem while 26.4% (198) disagreed. 71.3% (535) agreed to feel like the school environment is their home while 28.7% (215) do not. Also, 63.7% (478) of students always experience social anxiety while 36.3% (272) do not. Similarly, 62.5% (469) are independent in decision making while 37.5% (281) are not. Finally, 58.0% (435) of students are face with difficulties to meet and make new friends while 42.0% (315) are not face with such.

### Dealing with social connections and the academic adjustment of first year adolescents

**Table 2: Appraisal of Respondents Social Connections**

Statements	Stretched				Collapsed	
	SA	A	D	SD	SA/A	D/SD
<b>I have a good relationship with my parents</b>	493 (65.7%)	183 (24.4%)	44 (5.9%)	30 (4.0%)	676 (90.1%)	74 (9.9%)
<b>I am always accepted by peers</b>	282 (37.6%)	316 (43.1%)	98 (13.1%)	54 (7.2%)	598 (79.7%)	152 (20.3%)
<b>I feel less troubled knowing that my parents are always there to help me out when I need them</b>	390 (52.0%)	230 (30.7%)	73 (9.7%)	57 (7.6%)	620 (82.7%)	130 (17.3%)
<b>My parents and siblings always call and ask for my wellbeing</b>	453 (60.4%)	227 (30.3%)	42 (5.6%)	28 (3.7%)	680 (90.7%)	70 (9.3%)
<b>Our teacher/lecturers are very friendly</b>	232 (30.9%)	346 (46.1%)	121 (16.1%)	51 (6.8%)	578 (77.1%)	172 (22.9%)
<b>The advice I get from my parents is enough to know that they care for me</b>	438 (58.4%)	224 (29.9%)	53 (7.1%)	35 (4.7%)	662 (88.3%)	88 (11.7%)
<b>My parents provide me with the basic school needs</b>	344 (45.9%)	264 (35.2%)	95 (12.7%)	47 (6.3%)	608 (81.1%)	142 (18.9%)
<b>The library provides me the text books I need</b>	217 (28.9%)	325 (43.3%)	131 (17.5%)	77 (10.3%)	542 (72.3%)	208 (27.7%)
<b>My friends always keep away from me all the time</b>	114 (15.2%)	136 (18.1%)	267 (35.6%)	233 (31.1%)	250 (33.3%)	500 (66.7%)
<b>I can easily overcome my stressful moments because of my friends</b>	223 (29.7%)	323 (43.1%)	126 (16.8%)	78 (10.4%)	546 (72.8%)	204 (27.2%)
<b>Multiple Responses Set (MRS)</b>	3186 (42.5%)	2574 (34.3%)	1050 (14.0%)	690 (9.2%)	5760 (76.8%)	1740 (23.2%)

In overall, 76.8% of newly admitted students have good social connections while 23.2% are not. Specifically, 90.7% (680) of students always received calls from parents and siblings about their wellbeing while 9.3% (70) do not. Similarly, 90.1% (676) of students have good relationship with parents while 9.9% (74) do not. 88.3% (662) of students get enough advice from parents while 11.7% (88) disagreed. Also, 82.7% (620) of students feel less troubled knowing that their parents are always there to help them out while 17.3% (130) are much troubled. 79.7% (598) of students are always accepted by peers while 20.3% (152) are not. In almost the same weight, 77.1% (578) of students agreed to have friendly lecturers while 22.9% (172) disagreed. 72.8% (546) agreed to have friends that help them to easily overcome stressful moments while 27.2% (204) disagreed. Finally, 33.3% (250) of students agreed to have friends that always keep them happy while 66.7% (500) denied.

**Table 3: Suggestions to help Newly first adolescents to Adjust to University Life**

Themes	Responses
Orientation	“Good orientation” ‘Orientation should mandatory and it should be done for each semester’ “Need for a detail orientation” “In the first year in the University, students should be orientate every month” “Better orientation before and after admission” “Orientation should be given many times to first year students” “Through orientation and education of how the school is run”
Counselling	“Counselling them on how to manage stress issues” “Counselling on how to manage stress and conflict” “Guidance counsellors be send to the University” “Make guidance and counselling a University course for all level 200 students”
Friendly relationship from teachers	“Students can easily adjust when lecturers are friendly and not rude to students” ‘Lecturers should not be rude to students’
Moral education	“Educate them on Jesus Christ” “The University should add religious studies as a course to all faculties”
Effective teachers’ communication	“Tell lecturers to respect time table and communicate the class location to students”
Good signpost	“Providing good directions to students in school campus”

Based on suggestions to help newly admitted students to adjust to university life, many of the students said they should be given orientation as depicted in their statements —*In the first year in the University, students should be orientate every month*||, —*Better orientation before and after admission*||, —*Orientation should be given many times to first year students*||. Some students also said they should be counsel —*Counselling them on how to manage stress issues*|| —*Counselling on how to manage stress and conflict*|| —*Guidance counsellors be send to the University*||. Finally, a few of the students suggest that students should have friendly relationship with lecturers, be taught on moral education, maintain effective communication with teachers and good sign post should be provided in school to help direct the students.

### Testing of Hypothesis: Social connections does not significantly influence the academic adjustment of first year adolescents in Cameroon state Universities

**Table 3: Influence of Social Connections on academic Adjustment of first year adolescents**

		Social connections	academic adjustment of first year University adolescents	Explanatory power of influence in terms of % (Cox and Snell)
Spearman's rho	r-value	1.000	.442**	.891 (89.1%)
	p-value	.	.000	
	n	750	750	

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Statistically, findings showed that social connections have a significant and positive influence on academic adjustment of first year University adolescents (r-value 0.442\*\*,  $p$ -value < 0.001). This influence was supported with a high explanatory power of 89.1% (Cox and Snell= 0.891). The positivity of the influence implied that first year University adolescents are more likely to be academically adjusted when they have good social connections.

### Discussion

#### Social connections and the academic adjustment of first year adolescents in Cameroon state Universities

Findings showed that social connections have a significant and positive influence on academic adjustment of first year University adolescent. The positivity of the influence implied that first year University adolescents are more likely to be academically adjusted when they have good social

connections. The study further ties with that of Johnson and Watson (2004) which holds that making use of opportunities to form positive social relationships with other students and with staff members is a way to better students' academic adjustment in the new environment.

The findings showed that though students do not have pre-university visit experiences as stipulated by Frazey and Frazey (2001) but have formed a sense of their own identity and act autonomously as well as they fitted in easily which may be linked to the fact that they learned quickly from the institutional "discourse" (Harvey and Drew, 2006). This is also supported by Briggs (2012) who argued that Support must be given to the students during the transition phase to enable them to adjust to university life and develop student identity and autonomy. As pointed out by Huon and Sankey (2002), on entry to university students are expected to adjust to university life and hopefully reorganize the way they think about themselves as learners and social beings as this adjustment helps them develop their identity and autonomy. As students enter university they are expected to make connections between pre-university experience and the experience at university (Perry and Allard, 2003).

Findings showed that students have a good relation with their parents that make them to easily adjust since their needs are easily provided. This finding is in line with Grohnick, and Bellas (2009) who found that families can have a strong influence on the social adjustment of students and a variety of school outcome including development and maintenance of positive motivation to learn. According to Heckman (2011), when parent's belief in children's competence and high expectation for them provide the resources that children need to feel connected to others and facilitate a sense of authority by supporting children's initiative and problems, children's motivation to learn is most likely to thrive.

Findings also revealed that students are accepted by friends making easy for them to interact and feel happy and easily adapt in the environment. This is in congruence with Connor and Davidson (2003) as they opined that peer support has been seen as a great source of adolescence resilience that is significantly and positively associated with self-esteem and pro-social behaviour. The interaction effect of peer support and resilience was significantly positively associated with self-esteem. Simple slope analysis revealed that when peer support and self-esteem are stronger the adolescent becomes resilient at a higher level than adolescents with lower levels of social support from peers. Lan and Wang (2019) state that

when adolescents are positively supported by their friends and peers, they turn to be resilient and develop a positive self-esteem leading to healthy psychosocial wellbeing. On the other hand, adolescents that do not belong to a social network that they are loved and accepted, their self-esteem is low and when faced with life challenges, it is easy for them to give up on life because they do not have a confidant to push and support them and make them know that they are able to handle the challenges life throws at them thus negatively affecting their social adjustment

Findings equally revealed that students feel less troubled knowing that their parents are always there to help them out when there is need. The findings also revealed that parents have what it takes to take care of their children and parents have good jobs that can sustain their families. This is line also with Ormrod (2006) that says when a child's physiological needs of food, air, water, sleep, clothing, shelter, clothing are met, the child will happily learn in school and develop a positive personality leading to a healthy psychosocial wellbeing of adolescents, but the absent of these physiological needs affect the child's development and wellbeing. Economic hardship has sweeping and intense consequences for parents and children, including lower levels of parental nurturance, inconsistent discipline, and adolescent distress (Ormrod, 2006).

Students revealed that their parents and siblings always call and ask for their wellbeing and their teachers are equally very friendly. Findings from the studies in this review show that parental involvement as reported by the students consistently had positive effects on students across all developmental levels of education. Higher parental involvement correlated with overall higher academic achievement in most studies. Note that research conducted from a variety of perspectives all show a positive correlation between involvement and achievement. In one study of younger children, parental involvement did not correlate with higher academic achievement, but with better social skills and fewer problem behaviours, which may later associate with higher social adjustment (Nokali, 2010).

### Conclusion

This study was out to investigate social connections strategy as predictive factor of the first year adolescent academic adjustment in Cameroon state Universities. The findings therefore concluded that social connection significantly influence the academic adjustment of first year adolescents in Cameroon state universities. Some students may experience transitional stress, psychological distress, and academic difficulties, protective factors such as their



coping styles, including social support, social connections and resilience behavior can alleviate the stress associated with the experience of living and learning in a new environment. Because of the cultural differences among first year students, it is critical to hire culturally sensitive counsellors to work with them. Mental health professionals working in university counselling centres should be cognizant of problems faced by first students in order to develop some level of comfort and expertise working with this diverse population. Providing therapeutic services that are culturally sensitive and evidenced based can make therapy more efficacious. Being culturally sensitive and recognizing the student as the expert can foster better therapeutic relationships and outcomes.

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