PSYCHOLOGICAL CAPITAL AND ACADEMIC ADJUSTMENT AMONG FIRST-YEAR UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN MEGHALAYA, NORTH-EAST INDIA

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Abstract
The present study focused on assessing psychological capital (PsyCap) and academic adjustment of first-year university students in Meghalaya, a north-east state in India. It examined PsyCap as a contributing factor to students' adjustment in the university. In the study, a descriptive research design was used. Academic Adjustment Questionnaire (AAQ) and Psychological Capital Questionnaire (PCQ)were administered among eighty-seven students of M.A. in education (N=46) and M.Ed. program (N=41). The statistics, such as correlation, and regression equation techniques were employed for data analysis using IBM SPSS 22. The analysis revealed that the levels of academic adjustment and psychological capital among students were high. Besides, the study also evidenced a significant correlation between students' academic adjustment and their PsyCap (r=.413) at p-value 0.01 (2-tailed) and evidenced PsyCap as a significant contributing factors that predicted 16.2 percent of the variance caused in their academic adjustments.

Keywords: first-year university students; psychological capital; hope; optimism; resilience; self-efficacy; adjustments

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Introduction

Adjustment is the process of adapting to new environments. It is needed to cope with difficulties, stressful moments, and for managing problems, and challenges of everyday life. It is an important indicator for students' resilience and adaptability to university life in aspects of academic, social, personal-emotional, and institutional domains (Lee, 2016; Haktanir et al., 2018). University environment is dynamic and diverse; holding high expectations from students to maintain the standards. Adjustment to the university becomes inevitable for students' effective performance and well-being. In the present study, academic adjustment is conceptualized, and it includes four different dimensions *i.e.*, academic adjustment, social adjustment, personal-emotional adjustment and institutional adjustment (Baker & Siryk, 1986). According to Baker and Syrik (1999), academic adjustment is 'having a positive attitude toward setting academic goals, completing academic requirements, the effectiveness of the efforts to meet academic goals and being successful in the academic environment' (Al-Mseidin et al., 2017). Studies have found that students' adjustment has an effect on students' performance outcomes, social and psychological well-being, health-risk behaviors and academic burnout and even university dropout (Agak et al., 2011; Calaguas, 2011; Pathak, 2014; van Rooij et al., 2018). On the flip side, students' adjustment to university is also affected by various factors *i.e.*, individual personality styles, social and institutional supports, self-leadership skills and even the developmental state of positive psychological capital of students (Elias et al., 2010; Chemers et al., 2001; Slm & Moon, 2015).

Students' transition from colleges to university reportedly has different adjustment related problems. It was revealed that students' adjustment to university was an indicator of their future academic success, quality of university life and socio-emotional well-being (Pathak, 2014; Bailey & Phillips, 2016). Students' adjustment problems at home, educational institutions, and society had a considerable impact on their lives. It leads to the development of different psychological and behavioral complexities among students. Students with adjustment problems were at risk in terms of health risk behaviors and vulnerability to suicidal tendencies and failures. A significant relationship was found between students' adjustment and academic achievement where students with better adjustment scored higher compared to students with lesser adjustment and also students' adjustment predicts

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students' performance (Tamilselvi & Rajaguru, 2010; van Rooij et al., 2018). Failure to adjust to the institution had a direct negative impact on students' academic performance. It was found that students' poor social adjustment leads to poor academic engagement, achievement and behavioral problems (Agak et al., 2011; Calaguas, 2011; Pathak, 2014; Ayele, 2018). Studies showed a significant association of students' adjustment and academic outcomes, mental health, and well-being. Students with better adjustment with university life showed high academic performance, less experience of mental health problems and high social, psychological as well as subjective well-being as compared to students reported adjustment related problems in their first year of university life. Studies also showed that students in higher education face problems to cope up with the dynamic life of the teaching-learning process and socio-cultural environment (Elias et al., 2010; Sharma, 2012; Akpunne et al., 2018; Esmael et al., 2018).

Thus, it can be said that adjustment is crucial for a successful and quality university life. At every stage, university exposures pose different challenges for students. Studies found that the problems students face in university are many-sided which includes personal, socio-cultural, academic and institutional in nature (Mudhovozi, 2012; Akpunne et al., 2018; Belay Ababu et al., 2018; Esmael et al., 2018). As students in university have to deal with heterogeneous groups, multi-cultural contexts, and extensive academic experiences, the adjustment level of students becomes vital. Earlier studies found that students' adjustment not only influenced their academic, social, and personal lives in university, but it also predicted their academic performance. Besides, there is also a growing need for empirical evidence on the prevalence of students' adaptation to university and how their adaptation influenced by different related factors (Houghton & Neck, 2002; Luthans & Youssef, 2004; Smitley, 2011; Páramo Fernández et al., 2017; Ukaegbu & Obikoya, 2017; Liran & Miller, 2019).

Studies have explored many factors negatively associated with students' adjustment in university. Teaching quality and the nature of relationship with faculty members were reported negatively influencing the academic adjustment of students. Students' relationship with friends, participation in recreational activities, and leisure time management negatively affected their social adjustment. Individual-specific factors *i.e.*, fear of disapproval, shyness, loneliness, and homesickness; and institutional factors such as sense of identity and belongingness to university were perceived as significant factors affecting

students' adjustment (Sevinc & Gizir, 2014). Studies revealed a significant positive relationship between students' overall academic adjustment with coping skills and academic achievement. It was found throughout the academic session, students' adjustment significantly predicted by their coping strategies (Abdullah et al., 2010; Ukaegbu & Obikoya, 2017). Besides, students' self-concept, self-regulated study skills and academic or achievement motivation predicted their academic adjustment to colleges (Boulter, 2002; Elias et al., 2010; Bailey & Phillips, 2016; Haktanir et al., 2018; Van Rooij et al., 2018). Also, it was found that pre-university achievement was an important predictor for students' academic, social and institutional adjustment (Páramo Fernández et al., 2017). Students' adjustment is also affected by certain socio-demographic factors such as sex, ethnicity, age or grade, and perceived status (Obi, 2012; Sharma, 2012; Walton et al., 2016; Páramo Fernández et al., 2017; Wider et al., 2017) while few studies have rejected the association of gender, pre-university academic preparation and parental education with students' adjustment to university (Malek et al., 2011).

As evidenced from the reviews reported above, individual-specific psychological factors have strong and consistent association with students' adjustment. Factors like self-efficacy (Artino, 2012), emotional maturity or intelligence, self-esteem, and self-concept, optimism (Smitley, 2001; Chemers et al., 2001; Slm & Moon, 2015; Ukaegbu & Obikoya, 2017; Haktanir et al., 2018; Liran & Miller, 2019), self-efficacy, resilience (Smitley, 2001; Luthans, 2002), and hope thoroughly studied. Psychological capital which includes individual specific psychological factors *i.e.*, hope, self-efficacy, resilience, and optimism and was not studied in connection to students' adjustment. Therefore, psychological capital may be used as a collective predictor to explore and understand the composite and comprehensive influence on students' adjustment at university level. Psychological capital is a developmental state of individuals' positive resources characterized by hope, self-efficacy, resilience, and optimism (Luthans et al., 2007). Following figures showed the proposed model and existing path of associations of psychological capital with students' adjustment and academic success, life experience in university, and well-being (*see* Figure 1).
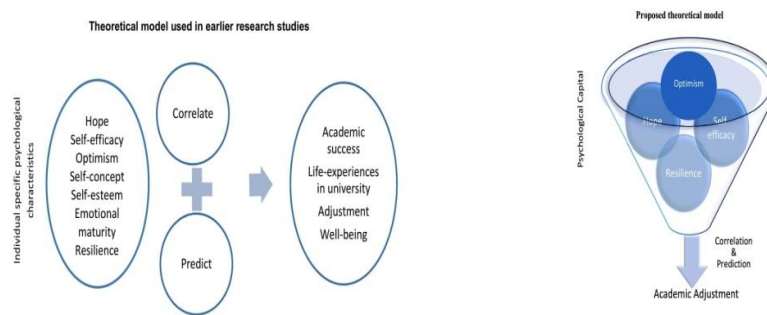
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Figure 1. Theoretical framework

Thus, in this connection, the present study was undertaken to meet the stated research needs and to provide empirical evidence on students' academic adjustment and psychological capital and understand the influence of PsyCap on students' adaptation to university in the aspects of academic, social, personal-emotional and institutional realms.

Objectives

Following objectives were formulated in the present study:

1. To study the level of academic adjustment among first-year university students.

2. To study the level of psychological capital among first-year university students.

3. To find out the relationship between students' academic adjustment and psychological capital.

4. To determine the effect of psychological capital on academic adjustment of first-year university students.

Hypotheses

Ho1. There is no significant relationship between academic adjustment and psychological capital of students.

Ho2. There is no significant effect of psychological capital on students' academic adjustment.

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Methods

The present study is descriptive in nature, wherein the analysis was completed at three stages, including status-based exploration, correlational analysis, and regression analysis. In the study, investigators have assessed students' academic adjustment and psychological capital and also examined PsyCap as a predictive factor to students' academic adjustment through a regression equation.

Participants

The present study targeted first-year university students from North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong, Meghalaya. The investigators had conveniently selected the Department of Education where students from M.A. in education (N=46) and M.Ed. program (N=41) participated voluntarily. A total of 87 (Male-11, Female-76) students participated in the study from both the courses, and the mean age of participants is 25.67 with a S.D. value of 6.05.

Instruments

Instruments employed to collect data were Academic Adjustment Questionnaire, (Baker & Siryk, 1986) and Psychological Capital Questionnaire (Luthans et al., 2007). A brief description of these tools is as follows:

Academic Adjustment Questionnaire (AAQ) is a nine-point scale, range from 'suits me very much' (9) to 'does not suit me at all' (1) for positive items while 'does not suit me at all' (9) to 'suits me very much' (1) for negative items. It has 28 items, out of which 14 items are positive and 14 items are negative. The scale has four dimensions, including, academic adjustment (6 items), social adjustment (8 items), personal and emotional adjustment (7 items), and institutional adjustment (7 items). The range of the scale is 28-252 where a high score indicates a high level of academic adjustment, and a low score indicates a lower level of academic adjustment. The investigators also found the overall reliability of the scale that is Cronbach's Alpha .841 (>.7) and confirmed that the scale is reliable at a satisfactory level for the present study.

Psychological Capital Questionnaire was used to assess the positive and developmental state of individuals characterized by hope, self-efficacy, resilience, and optimism. The scale is a five-point scale, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5) for positive items while strongly agree (1) to strongly disagree (5) for negative items. It consists of 24 items where 21 items

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were positive while only three question items were in negative form. The scale has four dimensions *i.e.*, hope, self-efficacy, resilience, and optimism and has 6 question items for each of these four dimensions of the scale. The range of scaled scores between 24 and 120 where high score denotes a high level of psychological capital and low score indicates a lower level of psychological capital. It was found that the overall reliability of the scale is Cronbach's Alpha .894 (>.7) and confirmed the reliability of the scale in the context of the present study.

Procedure

After obtaining the permission from the Department Research Committee (DRC, Department of Education, NEHU), data collection was done by the investigators. Standardized questionnaires were administered to the whole group of students. Respondents' consent was obtained before the administration of the questionnaires. Confidentiality concerns and data usage was explained by the investigators before data collection. Prior to administration, instructions were read to all the respondents. Ten minutes break was given to the participants before administering the next questionnaire.

Data analysis

Kolmogorov-Smirnov was used to test the normality of data. It showed p value .002 (p<.05) and .20 (p>.05) for PsyCap and academic adjustment respectively. It indicated that the distribution was normal for academic adjustment while data for PsyCap had non-normal distribution. Statistical analyses, including z-scores, frequency, percentage, mean, SD, correlation and regression were done using IBM SPSS 22.

Results

Academic adjustment

The analysis of academic adjustment was done at five levels, which included high, above average, average, below average, and low levels. The analysis showed that a significant proportion of students *i.e.*, 45.98 percent of the students had an average level of academic adjustment, followed by students with low level of academic adjustment *i.e.*, 29 percent (*see* Table 1). Around 25 percent of students had above average and high levels of academic adjustment. From the above analysis it was evident that still a considerable proportion of

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students had below average and love level of academic adjustment which was a matter of concern.

Table 1. Students' scores in academic adjustment

Levels of adjustments	z-value	Raw score	N	Percentage
Low	-2 σ to -3 σ	88.93-118.85	2	2.29
Below average	-1 σ to -2 σ	>118.85-148.76	23	26.44
Average	±1 σ	>148.76-178.68	40	45.98
Above average	1σ to 2 σ	>178.68-208.59	19	21.84
High	2σ to 3 σ	>208.59-238.51	3	3.45

Psychological capital

Table 2. Students' scores in psychological capital

Levels of PsyCap	z-value	Raw score	N	Percentage
Low	-2 σ to -3 σ	53.08-65.75	2	2.30
Below average	-1 σ to -2 σ	>65.75-78.42	19	21.84
Average	±1 σ	>78.42-91.10	49	56.32
Above average	1σ to 2 σ	>91.10-103.77	13	14.94
High	2 σ to 3 σ	>103.77-116.44	4	4.60

Further analysis of psychological capital was done at five levels, including high, above average, average, below average, and low. The analysis revealed that 56.32 percent of the students had an average psychological capital, 14.94 percent had above average and 4.60 percent of students had a high level of psychological capital. 21.84 percent and 2.30 percent students had below average and low levels of psychological capital respectively (*see* Table 2). Analyses reflect that in the present study the majority of students had an average level of psychological capital, followed by students having low level of psychological capital. Thus, from the above analysis it was evident that still a considerable proportion of students had below average and love level of psychological capital which was a matter of concern.

Effect of psychological capital on students' academic adjustment

Table 3. Relationship between students' academic adjustment and PsyCap

Variable	N	r	p
Academic Adjustment	87	.413	.01
Psychological Capital	87		

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It was shown in table 3 that the coefficient of correlation value of academic adjustment and psychological capital .413 which was significant at .01 level. So, from the analysis, it can be said that there is a statistically significant and positive relationship between academic adjustment and psychological capital of students.

Table 4. ANOVA analysis - Effect of PsyCap on academic adjustment

	Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
1	Regression	9137.985	1	9137.985		
	Residual	44331.395	85	521.546	17.521	.001
	Total	53469.379	86			

To examine whether an independent variable that is psychological capital makes any significant contribution to the dependent variable that is academic adjustment, regression ANOVA was performed. It showed an F-value of 8.702 which was found to be significant at a p-value of .001 level (p<.05). Thus, it can be said that the psychological capital of students made a significant positive contribution to students' academic adjustment (*see* Table 4).

Table 5. ANOVA analysis - Predicting students' adjustment through PsyCap

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.413	.172	.162	22.84

Further, to estimate the contribution of the psychological capital of students, an ANOVA test was performed. It showed an adjusted R Square value of .162 (*see* Table 5). Thus, the analysis evidenced that the psychological capital of students can predict 16.2 percent of the variation caused in their level of academic adjustment. Besides, the standardized coefficient beta was found .413 which was significant at p<.001 and thus, it supported PsyCap statistically as a significant contributor to academic adjustment.

Discussions

The analysis showed that 45.98 percent of the students had an average level of academic adjustment, followed by students with a low level of academic adjustment *i.e.*, 29 percent. Around 25 percent of students had above average and high levels of academic adjustment. From the analysis, it was evident that still a considerable proportion of students had below average and love level of

academic adjustment which was a matter of concern. This finding of the present study was in line with the findings of earlier studies which evidenced the prevailing state of adjustment problems among students in academic, personal, social and emotional in realms (Elias et al., 2010; Mudhovozi, 2012; Sharma, 2012; Akpunne et al., 2018; Belay Ababu et al., 2018; Esmael et al., 2018). However, the investigators have also come across contradictory findings in earlier studies which supported a high level of academic adjustment among students (Obi, 2012; Jyothis et al., 2017). It was also reported that students experienced high academic adjustment problems followed by personal and social adjustment problems (Esmael et al., 2018).

Analyses regarding psychological capital of students revealed that in the present study most of the students had an average level of psychological capital, followed by students having low level of psychological capital. Only 19 percent of students had above average and high levels of psychological capital. This finding of the present study contradicts the findings of earlier studies which revealed high level of psychological capital among students (Chemers et al., 2001; Elias et al., 2010; Siu et al., 2014; Ukaegbu & Obikoya, 2017; Yadak, 2017; Haktanir et al., 2018; Liran & Miller, 2019; Carmona-Halty et al., 2019).

The study revealed a positive correlation between students' academic adjustment and their psychological capital. This finding is supported by the findings of earlier research, which reported a positive relationship between academic well-adjustment and psychological capital or its components (Elias et al., 2010; Chemers et al., 2001; Slm & Moon, 2015; Yadak, 2017). Earlier studies also revealed that students with a high level of academic self-efficacy and optimism have reported better adjustment in the institution (Chemers et al., 2001; Slm & Moon, 2015). Furthermore, the present study found that psychological capital had a significant effect on students' academic adjustment. The similar finding was also reported in earlier studies where it was reported that psychological capital and its components positively affect students' academic adjustment and evidence psychological capital as an antecedent of students' successful adaptation to educational institutions (Ukaegbu & Obikoya, 2017; Haktanir et al., 2018; Liran & Miller, 2019).

Delimitations

The present study was delimited to the sample of first-year post-graduate university students of the Department of Education, North-Eastern Hill

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University, Shillong, Meghalaya. A non-probability sampling technique was used to select the participants (N=87) in the study. So, a study may be conducted to cover a larger sample size and it can be expanded to undergraduate levels.

Conclusion

The present study explored the level of adjustment and psychological capital among first-year university students. Psychological capital was studied as a predictor in the present study. Findings of the study revealed that first-year university students had high levels of academic adjustment and psychological capital. However, a significant percentage of the students were found having below average and low levels of academic adjustment and psychological capital. Moderate and positive correlation was observed between academic adjustment and psychological capital. The regression analysis evidenced that the psychological capital of students can predict a significant percentage of the variation caused in their level of academic adjustment to the university. Overall, it can be concluded that since the psychological capital of students is a potential predictor of their academic adjustment and it helps students in better adjustment to the university, it necessitates the need for deeper understanding of PsyCap. Besides, teachers and concerned stakeholders are required to cultivate and foster psychological capital among students for their better adaptation to university.

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