



Eleven Types of Adjustment Problems and Psychological Well-being among International Students

Ahmet CAN¹, Senel POYRAZLI², Yegan PILLAY³

ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Received: 30 Dec. 2019

Received in revised form: 15 Nov. 2020

Accepted: 18 Nov. 2020

DOI: 10.14689/ejer.2021.91.1

Keywords

International students, adjustment problems, psychological well-being.

ABSTRACT

Purpose: The purpose of this study was to explore the influence of adjustment problems on the level of psychological well-being of international college students in the U.S.

Research Methods: A sample of international college students ($N = 145$) aged 18 to 41 was recruited to participate in the study. The data were collected using the Michigan International Students Problem Inventory (MISPI), and the Scale of Psychological Well-Being (SPWB). Additionally, all participants were requested to complete the demographics questionnaire. To analyze the data, Pearson product-moment correlational analysis, descriptive statistics, and regression analyses were used.

Findings: According to the results of the regression analyses, adjustment problems significantly predicted psychological well-being.

Results indicated that adjustment problems negatively correlated with psychological well-being. As the students' level of adjustment problems increased, their level of psychological well-being decreased. Results also showed that the top three areas rated by international students as causing adjustment problems among the 11-adjustment problem domains were: (1) *English language problems* ($M = .81$, $SD = .53$); (2) *financial aid related problems* ($M = .77$, $SD = .50$); and (3) *admission-selection* ($M = .76$, $SD = .46$).

Implications for Research and Practice: This study aimed to better understand international students' psychological well-being and the role of various factors that are implicated. College counselors, faculty members and university personnel are pivotal to help international students adapt to the culture in the U.S., and to provide them with a more meaningful experience throughout their studies. Limitations of current study as well as future directions in light of this study and its findings are presented.

© 2021 Ani Publishing Ltd. All rights reserved

¹ Corresponding Author, Governors State University, Illinois, USA, e-mail: acan@govst.edu, ORCID: 0000-0002-5039-0209

² Penn State University, Pennsylvania, USA, e-mail: poyrazli@psu.edu, ORCID: 0000-0003-3210-8991

³ Ohio University, Ohio, USA, e-mail: pillay@ohio.edu, ORCID: 0000-0003-3864-3274

Introduction

International students are a group of people that attend college on a non-immigrant student visa. International college students are a unique, fast-growing, and diverse group representing a large number of countries, different religions, languages, age groups, and cultural backgrounds within the institutions in the United States (U.S.) (Bahurudin & Rahman, 2009). Enrollment trends over the past 10 years indicate a consistent rise in the number of international students. According to the most recent data from the Institute of International Education's *Open Doors Report*, current enrollment statistics show a total enrollment of 1,095,299 international students during the 2018-2019 academic year. As these statistics suggest, international college students are a fast-growing population within institutions in the U.S. Even though the nature of psychological well-being among people from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds both within the U.S. (e.g., Crocker et al., 1994; Iwamoto & Liu, 2010) and in other countries (e.g., Ayyah-Abodo & Sanchez-Ruiz, 2012; Bhullar, Hine, & Phillips, 2014; Sivilis-Cetinkaya, 2013) has been presented in the literature, there is a limited research related to psychological well-being among international college students as a unique population in the U.S.

In recent years, there has been a relative increase in the amount of research focused on international students who attend colleges and universities in the U.S. (Poyrazli & Graham, 2007; Rahman & Bahurudin, 2009; Zhou, Frey & Bang, 2011). This population experiences many difficulties as they integrate into a new culture, and these differences will vary in extremity based on one's culture of origin (Nilsson & Anderson, 2004). Nevertheless, all international students experience some degree of cultural difference between their culture of origin and the U.S. culture, and all must learn to manage these differences without their familiar social support system (Nilsson & Anderson, 2004; Reid & Dixon, 2012). As such, international students encounter many special and unique challenges in adjusting to academic and cultural enclosing such as "language barriers, cultural differences and racial discrimination, social interaction and personal adjustment difficulties in their life" (Reid & Dixon, 2012, p. 30). Therefore, it is important for researchers to identify and understand factors that contribute to the psychological well-being of the international student population and add to the existing body of literature pertaining to the mental health of college students. Some researchers have approached the task of adding to the existing literature by conducting cross-cultural comparisons of various factors as they relate to psychological well-being. To illustrate, Chung and Gale (2006) compared self-differentiation (the tendency to want to make oneself distinct from other people) and psychological well-being between Korean and European American (EA) students and found that self-differentiation was greater among EAs than Koreans which is in line with individualistic cultural orientation and values. Further, this self-differentiation was more predictive of psychological well-being in EA students than in Korean students. This finding implies the importance of examining predictors of psychological well-being among international students as they navigate a culture that may have different values and orientations from their own. Several factors related to psychological well-being have emerged from research conducted with international

samples. For instance, Guo, Li, and Ito (2014) stated that one important factor is acculturative stress, defined as the stress experienced when one must adjust and adapt to a new social or cultural environment. The authors found that among Chinese international students, levels of acculturative stress were positively related to loneliness and negatively related to psychological well-being. Further, Yu, Chen, Li, Liu, Jacques-Tiura and Yan (2014) indicated that acculturative stress was particularly high among individuals who were single, not prepared for the transition into a new culture, and did not belong to an organized religion which suggests that access to social support may be one way to combat acculturative stress.

In light of the research presented, perhaps the most convincing evidence of the importance of studying factors that predict psychological well-being among international students is feedback from these individuals themselves. Several researchers have conducted studies that aimed to uncover themes related to experiences of groups of individuals using qualitative research. For instance, notably, McLachlan and Justice (2003) conducted a study to illuminate the struggles international students encounter as they move to the U.S. and integrate into the culture. International students may experience several prominent 'transition shocks' including academic and social differences, and homesickness. The students identified developing a surrogate family as the primary coping strategy (e.g., developing close relationships with faculty mentors, other international students, as well as others from the American culture). This management strategy is consistent with findings from other research examining coping strategies among international students (Tseng & Newton, 2003). Based on these findings, it is evident that international students face unique barriers as they move and adjust to a new culture. The empirical and qualitative research that was reviewed points to several predictors of psychological well-being that either have not yet been addressed or need to be further addressed with a more generalizable sample.

Literature revealed that the U.S. academic faculty and staff have made some progress in responding to the unique and special needs of international students in the U.S. Eland (2001), for example, pointed out that international students can meet their academic and educational goals, but "their experience could be less stressful and more meaningful if institutions of higher education take into account their unique needs" (p. 99). Angelova and Riazantseva (1999) also indicated that international students struggle with specific academic and learning issues in relation to studying in a foreign country. Poyrazli and Graham (2007) found that a well-developed student-professor relationship was a key factor influencing international students' academic adjustment to different teaching styles and cross-cultural communications. Another factor potentially influencing students' persistence in their academic programs is the nature of the academic environment in which students learn, and more specifically, the degree to which these environments differ from what students are used to. Zhou, Frey and Bang (2011) sought to understand differences in academic environments and defined academic environment differences as involving unfamiliar (a) class teaching strategies and activities, (b) learning and educational materials, and (c) different assignment style and evaluation form. The authors found that academic environment

differences affect international students' learning behavior and style of study. In this study, some participants mentioned that utilization of school services (e.g., campus facilities, office resources, writing center, and library) were essential and absolutely necessary for their academic adjustment to a U.S. academic environment. As noted earlier, language barriers pose a problem for academic adjustment among international students. Poyrazli and Graham (2007) found that the majority of international students in their study experienced difficulties regarding their language ability which played a role in their success and persistence in their academic programs. Zhou, Frey and Bang (2011) found that many participants, especially those who do not speak English language in their home country, found American English a very significant obstacle in their academic lives. Reid and Dixon (2012) stated that due to language barriers, international students who did not speak fluent English suffer in classrooms during lectures, presentations, and seminar-based conversations.

Moreover, while international students are studying in the U.S., they often face difficulties pertaining to the education system, language barriers, as well as life-style and social differences. Research has revealed that due to these differences, international students experience increased mental illnesses and psychological problems such as stress, depression, homesickness, and emotional and social loneliness as they transition into a new culture (Zhou, Frey & Bang, 2011). Hyun and colleagues (2007) conducted a study on the psychological distress experienced by 551 international graduate students from different institutions. Results revealed that a substantial portion of participants reported experiencing high levels of emotional distress in relation to academic problems and social issues. Similar conclusions were drawn by Yi, Lin, and Kishimoto (2003) who found the greatest concerns of international students regarding seeking counseling services were academics, anxiety, and depression. Further, the findings of their study suggest that GPA, age, gender, and level of education (undergraduate and graduate) in their academic achievement were predictors for understanding the reasons for seeking mental health services by international students. Such studies show that obstacles experienced by international students affect their psychological well-being and acclimation to a new culture. Chief among these obstacles are the psychosocial and cultural differences international students face. Wang (2009) states that "international students who come from different cultures and circumstances face many changes in many aspects of their lives such as in geographical location, weather conditions, food, language, behaviors and values, social interactions, and educational systems" (p. 23). Kumaraswamy (2013) emphasizes that "college students frequently have more complex problems today than they had over a decade ago--common stressors in college include greater academic demands, being on your own in a new environment, changes in family relations, changes in social life, exposure to new people ideas and temptations" (p. 1). Additionally, college and graduate international students might face psychological and mental issues such as anxieties about aspects of study including exams and presentations, general stress and anxiety, depression, lack of self-confidence and low self-esteem, managing transitions, loneliness and homesickness, and suicidal thoughts (Kumaraswamy, 2013). A review of literature conducted by Kumaraswamy (2013) focused on adjustment problems among international students and compiled several adjustment

variables into a comprehensive list. The following variables were found to influence adjustment among international students: age, gender, marital status, English language proficiency, academic level (i.e., college and graduate level), sources of support, major fields of study, length of stay, region of the world and country of origin, size of school, orientation, living arrangements, previous international experience, national status, and parent's educational background.

Research on psychological well-being among college students has identified several influential variables in the development and maintenance of psychological well-being including academic adjustment, social relationships with others, and gender. Research on psychological well-being among international students paints a similar picture but emphasizes the increased difficulty that international students face when moving and assimilating into a new culture with different values, cultural orientations, and social norms. However, the research on psychological well-being among international students (a) examined undergraduates exclusively, (b) used qualitative methods of structured interviews with a small sample of individuals (it should be noted that while quantitative studies of international students' psychological well-being do exist, this research is few and far between and more balance is needed within the literature), and (c) examined the potential predictor variables of psychological well-being, but did not directly test their predictive value on psychological well-being. As mentioned previously, research on psychological well-being among international students primarily examines undergraduate student populations exclusively, uses qualitative methods, and investigates potential predictor variables but does not directly test their predictive value on psychological well-being.

Purpose of Study

The present study is significant because it addresses the above-mentioned issues based on the literature on psychological well-being among international college students. Specifically, the current study included a sample of both undergraduate and graduate international students and used quantitative methodology. Finally, this study examined specific predictors of psychological well-being and directly tested their predictive value on psychological well-being. Furthermore, this research has potential to provide a framework for mental health professionals to target methods and treatments to this population in that it provides empirical data regarding the psychological functioning of international students and identifies potential areas that can be targeted by mental health professionals to improve their psychological well-being. The research questions in this study were as follows:

- 1) What are the most prevalent adjustment problems among international college students?
- 2) How are the variables of eleven types of adjustment problems and psychological well-being are correlated among international college students?
- 3) Does the level of general adjustment problems account for a significant amount of variance in the psychological well-being of international college students?

4) What is the role of eleven types of adjustment problems on the level of psychological well-being?

Method

Research Design

Quantitative method, more specifically a cross-sectional, correlational design was used in this study. Correlational research allows for an assessment of statistical relations between different variables (Heiman, 2001). This type of research is common in educational research and it helps in predicting the possibility of a phenomenon occurring as a result of another factor being present (Cohen et al, 2017). A benefit of correlational research is that it allows in determining both the direction and strength of a relation between two variables.

Research Sample

The target population for this study included international students (undergraduate and graduate) who were enrolled in academic courses at a Midwestern U.S. university. The sample consisted of 145 international college students. In terms of age, participants ranged from 18 to 41 years ($M = 26$, $SD = 4.62$). With regard to gender, 47% identified as men, whereas 53% identified as women. A substantial majority identified as single (70.3%), whereas 26.2% identified as married, 2.1% as divorced, 0.7% as separated and 0.7% as widowed. In terms of academic level, the majority of the participants were graduate level students (65.5%), whereas 20% were pursuing undergraduate studies, and 14.5% identified as a student in an English language program. The most common college affiliation was the College of Art & Science (37.9%) followed by the College of Engineering (18.6%), the College of Education (16.6%), the College of Business (12.4%) and the other colleges (14.5%). In terms of the ethnic/racial composition of the participants, the majority (43.4%) of participants reported that they were Asian, 17.9% were Middle Eastern, 13.8% were Caucasian/White, 11.0% were African, 6.2% were Latino/Hispanic, 4.1% were Indian, and 3.5% were multiracial.

Research Instruments and Procedures

a. Michigan International Students Problem Inventory (MISPI).

Adjustment was measured using the MISPI. This instrument was administered in the current study for several reasons. First, the MISPI satisfies the purposes of this study such that it "is a quick and reliable way of identifying problems perceived by students on an individual campus" (Spaulding & Flack, 1976, p. 33). Second, according to the literature, MISPI is the most frequently used instrument to measure and identify adjustment problems of international students (Pedersen, 1991; Wang, 2009). This measure was developed by Porter (1966) in 1962 and was revised in 1977. The scale consists of a total of 132 items partitioned into eleven subscales that assess different adjustment problem areas encountered by international students. The subscales

(problem areas) include: (a) admission-selection, (b) orientation service, (c) academic record, (d) social-personal, (e) living-dining, (f) health service, (g) religious service, (h) English language, (i) student activity, (j) financial aid, and (k) placement service. In terms of validity, Porter (1966) tested the concurrent validity of the MISPI. Porter administered the MISPI to 108 international students and 50 native students, and applied the Mooney Problem Check List—College form (MPCL) to 46 international students and 47 American students in the U.S. In the MPCL, the mean score was 44.97 for the American students and the mean score was 21.24 for the international students, with the difference of the two mean scores significant at an alpha level of .05, indicating there was a significant difference between groups on this measure. In addition, on the MISPI, Porter (1966) found a mean score of 11.26 for American students and 15.06 for the international students, with significant mean differences at an alpha level of .05. In addition to the validity of this instrument, internal consistency reliability of the MISPI was evaluated by Porter (1966) using the Spearman-Brown split-half method and a total scale reliability estimate of .67 was achieved. He also applied the Kuder-Richardson formula which indicated an internal consistency reliability of .58 and subscale reliability ranging from .47 to .76.

b. Ryff Scales of Psychological Well-Being.

Psychological well-being was measured using the Ryff Scales of Psychological Well-Being (Ryff SPWB). This measure exists in long, medium, and short forms. For the purposes of this study, the medium form (consisting of 42 items) was used. The scale has been shown to be a very reliable and valid measure (Seifert, 2005) and it captures several aspects of psychological well-being simultaneously. The Ryff SPWB measures six aspects of psychological well-being: (a) autonomy, (b) environmental mastery, (c) personal growth, (d) positive relationships with others, (e) purpose in life, and (f) self-acceptance. The items exist on a six-point Likert scale where 1 is “strongly disagree” and 6 is “strongly agree”. Besides leading to a total scale score, the instrument also provides subscale scores. During scale development, Ryff (1989) ran reliability analyses for each of the subscales and results indicated the SPWB has high internal consistency reliability on each of the subscales (autonomy = .86, environmental mastery = .90, personal growth = .87, positive relationships = .91, purpose in life = .90 and self-acceptance = .93). Validity was also assessed by correlating the scale with pre-existing scales measuring psychological well-being. Results showed that “correlations with prior measures of positive functioning (i.e., life satisfaction, affect balance, self-esteem, internal control, and morale) are all positive and significant, with coefficients ranging from .25 to .73.

c. Demographics questionnaire.

A demographics questionnaire consisting of several items was included in the present study to assess gender, age, current relationship status, college major, academic status, country of origin, and race/ethnicity.

Data Collection Procedures

Maximum sampling method was used in order to recruit diverse international students from different countries. There were more than 1800 international college students from over 100 countries at a large Midwestern university in the U.S. The lead author contacted the international student organizations (e.g., African Languages Association, Arabic Language Student Association, Association for Cultural Exchange, Chinese Student and Scholar Association, Indian Student Association and Latino and Hispanic Student Union) to request permission to collect data during these organizations' weekly meetings. In addition, the lead author contacted instructors in the department of English Language Program (ELP) to see if he would be able to collect data from students enrolled in ELP classes. The final sample included 145 international students from 30 different countries.

Data Analysis

In the present study, descriptive analysis was utilized in order to investigate the levels of psychological well-being and adjustment problems among international college students and to answer the first research question in this study. Descriptive analyses were also used to provide information about the demographic composition of the study sample. A Pearson product-moment correlational analysis was used to determine bivariate correlations among the study variables and to answer the second research question. Finally, to answer the third and the fourth research questions, multiple linear regression analyses were utilized to determine whether or not adjustment problems explained a significant amount of variation in psychological well-being. Linear regression analyses were conducted to find out if these predictors remain significant when in the presence of the others. In sum, descriptive, correlational, and regression analyses were conducted, using a significance level of .05 for all statistical analyses (Field, 2013).

Results

Prevalence Rates

The top three areas rated by international students as causing adjustment problems among the 11-adjustment problems areas were: (i) *English language problems* ($M = .81$, $SD = .53$); (ii) *financial aid related problems* ($M = .77$, $SD = .50$); and (iii) *admission-selection problems* ($M = .76$, $SD = .46$). For a rank order of these 11 adjustment problem areas based on the averages, please see Table 1 below.

Table 1

Ranking of Adjustment Problems on the basis of Mean of Means on the Subscales of MISPI

| Subscales of MISPI | M | SD |
|------------------------------|-----|-----|
| English Language Problems | .81 | .53 |
| Financial Aid Problems | .78 | .50 |
| Admission Selection Problems | .76 | .46 |
| Placement Service | .75 | .47 |
| Academic Record Problems | .74 | .49 |
| Health Service Problems | .70 | .43 |
| Living Dining Problems | .70 | .41 |
| Orientation Service Problems | .69 | .43 |
| Social Personal Problems | .65 | .44 |
| Student Activity Problems | .62 | .45 |

Bivariate Correlations

Results of the Pearson product-moment correlational analyses (Table 2) indicated that general level of adjustment problems was significantly and negatively correlated with psychological well-being ($r = -.48, p < .01$). As the students' level of adjustment problems increased, their level of psychological well-being decreased.

Other results indicated that all subscales of adjustment problems were significantly and negatively correlated with psychological well-being. The strongest correlational relation was between social-personal adjustment problems and psychological well-being ($r = -.49, p < .01$) whereas the weakest relation was between financial aid and psychological well-being ($r = -.27, p < .01$).

Table 2*Bivariate Correlations between 11 Subscales of Adjustment Problems and Psychological Well-being*

| Predictor | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 |
|----------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|----|------|
| 1. Well-being | - | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 2. Admission | .35** | - | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 3. Orientation | .33** | .78** | - | | | | | | | | | | |
| 4. Academic | .43** | .80** | .79** | - | | | | | | | | | |
| 5. Social | .48** | .71** | .81** | .74** | - | | | | | | | | |
| 6. Living | .40** | .72** | .74** | .72** | .74** | - | | | | | | | |
| 7. Health | .39** | .70** | .74** | .77** | .77** | .75** | - | | | | | | |
| 8. Religious | .35** | .59** | .68** | .63** | .71** | .65** | .59** | - | | | | | |
| 9. English | .47** | .66** | .60** | .74** | .64** | .54** | .59** | .48** | - | | | | |
| 10. Student | .48** | .72** | .71** | .75** | .77** | .70** | .63** | .62** | .74** | - | | | |
| 11. Financial | .27** | .61** | .58** | .57** | .59** | .68** | .65** | .51** | .38** | .57** | - | | |
| 12. Placement | .36** | .72** | .64** | .63** | .62** | .62** | .64** | .57** | .49** | .64** | .79** | - | |
| 14. Adjusted | .47** | .87** | .87** | .89** | .88** | .85** | .85** | .76** | .75** | .86** | .75** | * | .80* |

Note. ** $p < .01$

Regression Analyses

For the first regression analysis that was run, we used simple regression. The predictor variable was entered as adjustment problems and the criterion variable as psychological well-being (Table 3). Simultaneous regression analyses were conducted (whereby adjustment problems entered one at a time) to find out if these predictors remain significant when in the presence of the others. Furthermore, the assumptions for multiple regression analyses were performed to ensure the fidelity of the statistical analyses. Results indicated that general adjustment problems significantly predicted and contributed 23% to the variance in psychological well-being among international students, $F(1, 143) = 41.6, p < .000, R^2 = .23$.

Table 3

Results of Regression Analyses for Adjustment Problems Predicting Psychological Well-being

| Predictor | B | SE | β | df | Sig. | t |
|---------------------|------|-----|---------|----|-------|-------|
| Adjustment Problems | -.69 | .10 | -.47 | 1 | .000* | -6.45 |

Note. $R^2 = .23, *p < .05$

A second regression analysis, multiple regression, was run to analyze the role of the eleven types of adjustment problems on psychological well-being. The model was significant and contributed 34% to the variance in the criterion variable $F(11, 133) = 6.27, p = .000, R^2 = .34$.

While the entire model was significant, only two types of adjustment problems significantly contributed to the level of psychological well-being. These were Orientation Adjustment Problems and Social-Personal Adjustment Problems.

Table 4

Results of Regression Analyses for 11 Subscales of Adjustment Problems Predicting Psychological Well-being

| Predictor | B | SE | β | Sig. | t | Zero-order | Partial | Part |
|-------------------|------|-----|---------|-------|-------|------------|---------|------|
| Admission Prob. | .20 | .17 | .16 | .246 | 1.16 | -.35 | .10 | .08 |
| Orientation Prob. | .48 | .19 | .36 | .016* | 2.45 | -.33 | .20 | .17 |
| Academic Prob. | -.15 | .18 | -.13 | .405 | -.83 | -.43 | -.07 | -.05 |
| Social-Personal | -.53 | .19 | -.41 | .008* | -2.70 | -.48 | -.22 | -.19 |
| Living-Dining | -.22 | .18 | -.16 | .236 | -1.19 | -.40 | -.10 | -.08 |
| Health Service | -.02 | .18 | -.01 | .896 | -.13 | -.39 | -.01 | -.00 |
| Religious Service | .01 | .12 | .01 | .912 | .11 | -.35 | .01 | .00 |
| English language | -.21 | .12 | -.20 | .100 | -1.65 | -.47 | -.14 | -.11 |
| Student Activity | -.16 | .17 | -.13 | .359 | -.92 | -.48 | -.08 | -.06 |
| Financial Aid | .23 | .14 | .21 | .116 | 1.58 | -.27 | .13 | .11 |
| Placement Prob. | -.30 | .16 | -.25 | .069 | -1.83 | -.36 | -.15 | -.12 |

Note: $R^2 = .34, *p < .05$

Discussion, Conclusion, and Recommendations

The main purpose of the present study was to explore the role of eleven types of adjustment problems in predicting psychological well-being of international college students studying in the U.S. The results indicated that the level of general adjustment problems significantly predicted the level of psychological well-being among international students. This suggests that international students who have fewer adjustment problems tend to experience higher levels of psychological well-being. When we examined to see which one of the eleven specific types of adjustment problems would predict psychological well-being when everything else was controlled for, our results showed that orientation problems and social-personal problems significantly contributed to the variance in psychological well-being. Orientation services problems subscale measured factors such as attitudes of some students towards foreign students, insufficiency of college orientation programs, or treatment received at orientation meeting questions. The social-personal problems subscale measured experiences such as feeling lonely and homesick, trying to make friends, not feeling at easy among people, experiencing attitudes of others towards skin color. These results indicate that college staff should strive for reducing the levels of problems international students may experience related to social-personal area social-personal area and also orientation services so that they will show a higher psychological well-being.

The top three areas rated by international students as causing adjustment problems were English language problems, financial aid related problems, and admission-selection. This finding is consistent with the findings of Poyrazli and Graham (2007) who identified that the majority of international students in their study experienced difficulties regarding their language ability which played a role in their success and persistence in their academic adjustment, and that many students in their study reported experiencing financial difficulties. This finding is also in line with Zhou et al.'s (2011) study where it was identified that many international students, especially those who do not speak English in their home country, found American English a very significant obstacle in their academic lives. As Reid and Dixon (2012) points out, however, international students who experience problems with English may suffer in classrooms during lectures, presentations, and seminar-based conversations. Students reporting financial aid related problems is normal for international students as they are not allowed to work off campus due to their visa status, are not eligible to receive financial aid in the U.S., and are required to pay the highest level of tuition at their intuitions. In relation to the admission and selection problem area, it seems like students may have experienced problems while going through the admission process. They also seem to be experiencing problems in understanding course schedules, choosing courses, and registering.

Taking all of these findings into consideration, the following vital question arises: In what way mental health professionals and university personnel should guide international students to handle the challenges and barriers and make the adjustment process easier and more successful so that this process may support these students' well-being? To this end, it is very important for counselors to be aware of this fact and

approach international students' needs and necessities and their accompanying well-being accordingly. Counselors should also take into consideration the varying nature of students' needs based on their educational attainment, in light of development psychology.

Based on the current research findings, it is evident that effective interventions are crucial in order to help international students cope with their psychological health. College counseling centers could cater to international students by creating psychoeducational groups where these students could learn skills to deal with adjustment problems that are especially related to orientation or social-personal areas. Effective use of these centers also enables international students to adapt to the American culture in their academic institutions and gain new abilities to effectively and efficiently mitigate their adjustment and cultural issues. It is thus critical for mental health professionals to determine unique and appropriate methods and assessment techniques when determining international students' needs.

Considering the fact that this study identified the most important challenge international students experience in their adjustment problems as language barriers and that Tsai and Wong (2010) pointed out that language barriers might be an important obstacle in counseling for international students' willingness to use counseling centers at university campuses, it is important to consider this information when developing programming that targets international students through counseling centers. It is also important to mention that to overcome different issues, Kumaraswamy (2013) recommended that counseling centers should provide regular workshop and seminars for these international students who suffer with related psychological (e.g., homesickness and racism), academic and adjustment problems which contribute to international students' psychological well-being based on the present study's findings. Tsai and Wong (2010) also recommended that college counselors may visit different international student organizations at campuses to provide information about how counseling can be beneficial and helpful to these students in the process of their adaptation to a new culture and life in the US. Furthermore, Yoon and Portman (2004) highlighted that mental health professionals should have more knowledge regarding international students' special needs and issues that relate to their psychological well-being at university campuses. For example, Chalungsooth and Faris (2009) demonstrated that an 8-week psychoeducational group counseling was successful and beneficial for international students who discussed and shared their thoughts and feelings for their specific issues such as loneliness, homesickness, the U.S. educational and academic system, and cross-cultural relationships. Similarly, Tsai and Wong (2010) recommended that "college counselors can conduct psychoeducational discussion groups and workshops for international student organizations on topics such as stress management and social skills" (p. 154). In addition, Dipeolu et al. (2007) suggested that support groups might be useful to provide assistance for these students who feel and experience emotional and social loneliness as they adjust to their new culture. Furthermore, Dipeolu et al., (2007) recommended that group counseling might be beneficial and useful for international student to normalize the difficulties of studying in a foreign country

rather than personalizing such experiences. Tsai and Wong (2010) stated that, social organizations can be useful for international students who may want to use these support groups to relieve their stress and anxiety that relate to their academic, social and personal issues. Accordingly, mental health professionals should be familiar with different social organizations at university campuses so that they may offer such resources to international students.

Taking into consideration other results of the current study, International Student Services' roles and responsibilities are very important for international students' adaptation to their host culture at colleges in the U.S. It can be concluded that when international students arrive on campus for the first time in the U.S., orientation programs, providing comprehensive guidance about the U.S. education system, fellowship opportunities, health services, different clubs and organizations, and other cross-cultural experiences, are useful and crucial to international students' process of transition and adjustment to their new culture and educational life. These orientation programs also assist international students' adaptation to new academic and social environments in their host universities.

Although, significant results are obtained in the aforementioned sections, limitations exist in this present study. First, although the primary emphasis of this study was to focus on international student's psychological well-being, several variables were not considered (e.g., social support, relationship, religion) in this study. Therefore, in future work, these specific adjustment problems should be considered and its effects on students' psychological well-being should be further studied. Additionally, this research presents a quantitative framework in design and analysis. However, for future studies, open-ended questions might be asked to international students in order to determine their adjustment problems and psychological well-being in a more detailed way. Therefore, more meaningful results can be obtained if the quantitative findings are complemented by qualitative information in the future studies.

References

- Angelova, M., & Riazantseva, A. (1999). "If you don't tell me, how can I know?" A case study of four international students learning to write in U.S. way. *Written Communications*, 16, 491-525.
- Ayyash-Abdo, H., & Sanchez - Ruiz, M. (2012). Subjective wellbeing and its relationship with academic achievement and multilinguality among Lebanese university students. *International Journal of Psychology*, 47(3), 192-202.
- Baharudin, D. F., & Rahman, A. H. (2009). *The supervisory working alliance with international student trainees in counseling programs*. Retrieved from <http://ddms.usim.edu.my/handle/123456789/5262>.

- Bhullar, N., Hine, D. W., & Phillips, W. J. (2014). Profiles of psychological well-being in a sample of Australian university students. *International Journal of Psychology*, 49(4), 288-294.
- Chalungsooth, P., & Faris, A. S. (2009). The development and implementation of a psychoeducational support group for international students. *Human Services Today*, 6, 1-6.
- Chung, H., & Gale, J. (2006). Comparing self-differentiation and psychological well-being between Korean and European American students. *Contemporary Family Therapy*, 28, 367-381.
- Cohen, L. Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2017). *Research methods in education*. Routledge.
- Crocker, J., Luhtanen, R., Blaine, B., & Broadnax, S. (1994). Collective self-esteem and psychological well-being among White, Black, and Asian college students. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 20(5), 503-513.
- Dipeolu, A., Kang, J., & Cooper, C. (2007). Support group for international students: A counseling center's experience. *Journal of College Student Psychotherapy*, 22, 63-74.
- Eland, A. J. (2001). Intersection of academics and culture: The academic experience of international graduate students. *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 62(3-1), 99.
- Field, A. (2013). *Discovering Statistics Using IBM SPSS Statistics (4th ed.)*. Los Angeles: Sage.
- Guo, Y., Li, Y., & Ito, N. (2012). Exploring the predicted effect of social networking site use on perceived social capital and psychological well-being of Chinese international students in Japan. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, 17(1), 52-58.
- Heiman, G.W. (2001). *Understanding research methods and statistics: An integrated introduction for psychology* (2nd ed.). Houghton, Mifflin and Company.
- Hyun, J., Quinn, B., Madon, T., & Lustig, S. (2007). Mental health need, awareness, and use of counseling services among international graduate students. *Journal of American College Health*, 56(2), 109-118.
- Institute of International Education. (2020). *International students in the U.S.* Retrieved from <http://www.iie.org/Research-and-Publications/Open-Doors>.
- Iwamoto, K., & Liu, W. M. (2010). The impact of racial identity, ethnic identity, Asian values, and race-related stress on Asian Americans and Asian international college students' psychological well-being. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 57(1), 19-91.
- Kumaraswamy, N. (2013). Academic stress, anxiety and depression among college students: A brief review. *International Review of Social Sciences and Humanities*, 5(1), 135-143.

- McLachlan, D. A., & Justice, J. (2003). A grounded theory of international student well-being. *The Journal of Theory Construction & Testing*, 13(1), 27-32.
- Nilsson, J. E., & Anderson, M. Z. (2004). Supervising international students: The role of acculturation, role ambiguity, and multicultural discussions. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 35, 306-312.
- Pedersen, P. (1991). Counseling international students. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 19(1), 10-58.
- Porter, J. (1966). *The manual of Michigan International Student Problem Inventory*. Unpublished Report by Urban Education Alliance, Inc. at Ann Arbor, MI.
- Poyrazli, S., & Graham, K. M. (2007). Barriers to adjustment: Needs of international students within a semi-urban campus community. *Journal of Instructional Psychology*, 34(1), 28-45.
- Poyrazli, S., & Lopez, M.Z. (2007). An exploratory study of perceived discrimination and homesickness: A comparison of international students and American students. *The Journal of Psychology*, 141(3), 263-280.
- Reid, L. M., & Dixon, A. L. (2012). The counseling supervision needs of international students in U.S. institutions of higher education: A culturally-sensitive supervision model for counselor educators. *Journal for International Counselor Education*, 4, 29-41.
- Ryff, C. D. (1989). Happiness is everything, or is it? Explorations of the meaning of psychological well-being. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 57(6), 1069-1081.
- Sivis-Cetinkaya, R. (2013). Turkish college students' subjective wellbeing in regard to psychological strengths and demographic variables: Implications for college counseling. *International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling*, 35, 317-330.
- Spaulding, S., & Flack, M. (1976). *The world's students in the United States*. New York: Praeger Publishers.
- Tsai, P., & Wong, Y. J. (2012). Chinese and Taiwanese international college students' participation in social organizations: Implications for college counseling professionals. *Journal of College Counseling*, 15, 144-156.
- Tseng, W., & Newton, F. B. (2002). International students' strategies for well-being. *College Student Journal*, 36(4), 591- 597.
- Wang, J. (2009). A study of resiliency characteristics in the adjustment of international graduate students at American Universities. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 13(1), 22-45.
- Yi, J. K., Lin, J. C. G., & Kishimoto, Y. (2003). Utilization of counseling services by international students. *Journal of Instructional Psychology*, 30, 333-342.

- Yoon, E., & Jepsen, D. A. (2008). Expectations of and attitudes toward counseling: A comparison of Asian international and U.S. graduate students. *International Journal for the Advancement of Counseling*, 30, 116-127.
- Yu, B., Chen, X., Li, S., Liu, Y., Jacques-Tiura, A. J., & Yan, H. (2014). Acculturative stress and influential factors among international students in China: A structural dynamic perceptive. *PLUS ONE*, 9(4), 1-8. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0096322.
- Zhou, Y., Frey, C., & Bang, H. (2011). Understanding of international graduate students' academic adaptation to a U.S. graduate school. *International Education*, 41(1), 76-94.

Uluslararası Öğrencilerin Psikolojik İyi Oluşlarını Etkileyen Belirlenmiş 11 Uyum Süreci Faktörlerinin İncelenmesi

Atıf:

- Can, A., Poyrazli, S., & Pillay, Y. (2021). Eleven types of adjustment problems and psychological well-being among international students. *Eurasian Journal of Educational Research* 91, 1-20, DOI: 10.14689/ejer.2021.91.1

Özet

Problem Durumu: Uluslararası Eğitim Enstitüsü'nün (IIE) istatistiklerine göre, 2018-2019 akademik yılı içerisinde Amerika Birleşik Devletleri'nde (ABD) eğitim gören toplam uluslararası öğrenci sayısı 1 milyon 95 bin 299 olarak belirlenmiştir. ABD'de öğrenim gören uluslararası öğrencilerin artış hızında son on yıl içerisinde önemli derecede bir artış gözlemlenmiştir. ABD'ye eğitim ve öğretim faaliyetlerini yürütmek için gelen uluslararası öğrenciler geldikleri ülkeler, din, dil, ırk ve yaş gibi özellikleri bakımından birbirlerinden farklılık gösterebilmektedir. Her ne kadar Amerikan eğitim sistemi, uluslararası öğrencilere farklı ve zengin eğitim imkanları sağlasa da, bu farklılıklar göz önüne alındığında, uluslararası öğrencilerin eğitim ve öğrenim faaliyetleri boyunca ihtiyaç ve beklentileri ulusal öğrencilere göre oldukça farklılaşabilmektedir. Yine, uluslararası öğrenciler kültürel geçmişlerine dayalı olarak, ABD'de aldıkları eğitimleri boyunca farklı problem alanlarıyla başa çıkmak zorunda kalabilmektedirler. Uluslararası öğrencilerin yaşadıkları problem alanları şu şekilde sıralanmaktadır: 1. Dil'e dayalı problemler, 2. Finansal nedenli sorunlar, 3. Üniversitelere ve programlarına başvuru süresince yaşanan zorluklar, 4. Üniversitelere ve programlarına kabul edilme sürecinde yaşanan zorluklar, 5. Akademik ve okula dayalı karşılaşılan sorunlar, 6. Gerek fiziksel gerekse de ruh sağlığı hizmetlerinden yararlanmada yaşanan sorun ve engeller, 7. Öğrencilerin genel yaşamında karşılaştığı problemler, 8. Öğrencilere verilen bilgilendirme ve oryantasyon servisi boyunca karşılaştıkları sorunlar, 9. Öğrencilerin kişisel ve sosyal yaşamlarındaki uyuma dayalı sorunlar, 10. Öğrencilerin kampüste sunulan

aktivitelere katılımında yaşanan engeller ve 11. Öğrencilerin dinsel veya manevi ihtiyaçlarını gidermede karşılaştıkları engeller. Yukarıda bahsedilen uyum problem alanları göz önüne alındığında, uluslararası öğrencilerin karşılaştıkları sorunları belirleyip onların ihtiyaçlarını anlamak ve de bu öğrencilere eğitim ve öğrenim faaliyetleri boyunca başarılı olabilmeleri açısından daha da önemli bir hal kazanmaktadır.

Bu araştırmada ise uluslararası öğrencilerin bu uyum süreçleri içerisinde oluşan ihtiyaçlarını belirlemek ve bu ihtiyaçların öğrencilerin psikolojik iyi oluşlarını yordamaya ve açıklamaya çalışmak amaçlanmıştır. Araştırmanın problemleri ise şunlardır:

1-Uluslararası öğrencilerin farklı uyum problemleri ve gereksinimleri nelerdir?

2-Uluslararası öğrencilerin karşılaşılabileceği 11 uyum problem alanı ile psikolojik iyi oluşları arasında bir ilişki var mıdır?

3-Uluslararası öğrencilerin yaşadıkları uyum problem alanları ve ihtiyaçları, öğrencilerin psikolojik iyi oluş durumunu ne kadar düzeyde açıklayabilmektedir?

4-Belirlenen 11 uyum ve problem alanlarının uluslararası öğrencilerin psikolojik iyi oluşlarını belirlemedeki rolü nedir?

Araştırmanın Amacı: Bu araştırma, hem lisans hem de yüksek lisans düzeyinde ABD’de eğitim gören uluslararası öğrencilerin yaşadıkları uyum problemleri alanlarını belirlemek ve bu öğrencilerin yaşadıkları adaptasyon süreçlerini etkileyen faktörlerin öğrencilerin psikolojik iyi oluşları üzerinde nasıl bir etkide bulunduğunu anlamaya çalışmak amacıyla yapılmıştır. Ayrıca, bu araştırma potansiyel olarak, üniversite kampüslerinde çalışan profesyonel psikolojik danışmanlara ve öğretim elemanlarına bu öğrencilere daha iyi bir eğitim ve hizmet sunmaları için önemli bilgi ve tavsiyeler sunmaktadır.

Araştırmanın Yöntemi: Bu çalışmada çalışmanın amacı doğrultusunda belirlenen araştırma sorularına cevap aramak için nicel araştırma yöntemi ve istatistik methodları kullanılmıştır. Bu çalışmaya ABD’nin orta-batı kısmındaki bir üniversiteden farklı eğitim seviyelerinden (lisans ve lisans üstü), ülke, cinsiyet, ırk, ve de çeşitli akademik program ve fakültelerden toplamda 145 uluslararası öğrenci katılmıştır. Nicel verilerin toplanmasında, Porter (1966) tarafından geliştirilen uluslararası öğrencilerin yaşadıkları uyum sorunlarını ortaya koyan bir ölçek (MISPI) ve de bu öğrencilerin psikolojik iyi oluşlarını belirleyebilmek için Ryff’s (1989) Psikolojik İyi Oluş ölçekleri kullanılmıştır. Toplanan nicel verilerin analizinde SPSS 20 programı kullanılmıştır. Nicel verilerin analizinde ise betimleyici istatistiksel analizinin yanı sıra Pearson’s korelasyon ve doğrusal regresyon analizleri de uygulanmıştır.

Araştırmanın Bulguları: Bu araştırmanın nicel verileri sonuçlarına göre, uluslararası öğrencilerin karşılaştıkları en önemli üç problem alanı şu şekilde sıralanmaktadır: 1- Dil’e dayalı problemler, 2- Finansal kaynaklı sorunlar, ve de 3- Üniversitelere ve programlarına başvuru süreci ve kabul aşamasında yaşanan zorluklardır. Pearson

korelasyon analizi sonuçları göstermektedir ki, uluslararası öğrencilerin yaşadıkları farklı uyum problem alanları, bu öğrencilerin psikolojik iyi oluş durumları üzerinde önemli bir rol oynamaktadır. Özellikle de, bu öğrencilere sunulan oryantasyon hizmetleri, onların psikolojik iyi oluşları üzerinde önemli derece katkı yapmaktadır. Yine bu araştırma sonuçlarına baktığımızda, öğrencilerin kişisel ve sosyal alandaki yüksek uyum düzeylerinin onların psikolojik iyi oluşları üzerinde önemli bir değişken olarak belirlenmiştir.

Araştırmanın Sonuçları ve Öneriler: Bu araştırmanın amacı, ABD’de eğitim alan uluslararası öğrencilerin psikolojik iyi oluş hallerini belirlenmiş olan 11 uyum problem alanına göre açıklamaya çalışmaktır. Bu araştırmanın sonuçları göstermektedir ki, uluslararası öğrencilerin karşılaştıkları farklı uyum problem alanlarının bu öğrencilerin psikolojik iyi olma durumlarını önemli derecede yordayıp açıklamaktadır. Yani, uluslararası öğrenciler, eğitim ve öğrenimleri boyunca, ne kadar az uyum ve adaptasyon problemi yaşarsa, psikolojik iyi oluşları pozitif yönde etkilenecektir. Yine bu araştırma sonuçlarına dayalı olarak, uluslararası öğrencilere öğrenimlerine başlamadan ve de öğrenimleri boyunca sağlanacak oryantasyon servis çalışmaları çok önemli hale gelmektedir. Bu öğrencilere sunulacak oryantasyon servisleri içinde, akademik yaşamla ilgili gerekli bilgiler (okul ve eğitim sistemi), öğrencilerin öğrenimleri boyunca hem kampüs hem de kampüs dışında yararlanabileceği kişisel, sosyal ve eğitimsel olanaklar hakkında bilgilendirme yapılması öğrencilerin uyum ve hazırbulunuşlukları üzerinde önemli bir katkı sunmaktadır. Yine, bu araştırmanın nicel sonuçları göstermektedir ki, öğrencilere sunulan bu destek hizmetlerin ve yardımların bu öğrencilerin kişisel ve sosyal uyum düzeyleri üzerinde önemli bir değişken olarak ortaya çıkmaktadır. Uluslararası öğrenciler, öğrenimleri boyunca gerek akademik ve okul temelli problemlerle karşılaşabilirken bunun yanı sıra, örneğin, yalnızlık, kaygı, depresyon gibi ruh sağlığı problemleri de yaşayabilmektedirler. Yine bu öğrenciler, öğrenimleri boyunca, ev ve ülke özlemi, arkadaş bulma ve ayrımcılık gibi kişisel ve sosyal bir takım önemli derece sorunlarla da başa çıkmak zorunda kalabilmektedirler. Bu durumda, üniversite kampüslerinde çalışan ve bu öğrencilere hizmet sunan psikolojik danışmanların uluslararası öğrencilerin ihtiyaçlarını anlayıp ve onlara yardım hizmeti sağlaması çok önemli bir hal kazanmaktadır. Bu öğrencilere, öğrenimleri boyunca kişisel, sosyal ve akademik yaşamlarında yararlanabilecekleri kampüs hizmetlerinin neler olduğu (örneğin; kütüphane, öğrenci organizasyonları, psikolojik danışma merkezi) ve bu hizmetlerden nasıl yararlanabilecekleri ile ilgili oryantasyon servis hizmetleri oldukça önemlidir. Bu öğrencilere, kampüste bulunan psikolojik danışma merkezlerinde sunulacak psikolojik servis hizmetlerinin (örneğin, bireysel ve/veya grupta psikolojik danışma, destek grupları) öğrencilerin uyum problemlerini kolaylaştırıp, karşılaştıkları zorluklarla başa çıkmada yardım ve destek sağlayarak, bu öğrencilerin psikolojik iyi oluşları üzerinde önemli bir katkı sağlayacaktır. İlerideki yapılacak araştırmaların içinde, uluslararası öğrencilerin uyum problemlerini daha iyi anlamak ve yordamak için, nicel araştırma teknik ve yöntemlerinin yanında, sorulacak açık-uçlu sorularla bu öğrencilerin spesifik ihtiyaç ve uyum alanları hakkında daha betimleyici sonuçlara ulaşmak araştırmanın sonuçlarına önemli katkılar sağlayacaktır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Uluslararası öğrenciler, uyum süreci problemleri, psikolojik iyi oluş hali.