Predicting Student Adaptation to College by Learning and Study Strategies

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Abstract

This study highlights the relationships between learning and study strategies with student adaptation to college. Postsecondary students \((n = 146)\) completed a demographic questionnaire, the Learning and Study Strategies Inventory (LASSI), and the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ). Students were trifurcated into low, average, and high achieving groups by GPA. Data was analyzed using multiple regression and correlational techniques. LASSI subscales significantly predicted adaptation to college as measured by the SACQ for average and high achieving students, but did not significantly predict adaptation to college for low achieving students. The unique contributions of the LASSI subtests varied in the two significant predictions. Anxiety and attitude significantly contributed to the prediction of adaptation to college for average achieving students. Anxiety was the only significant contributor for high achieving students. Upon further exploration, anxiety was found to influence distinct facets of student adaptation to college depending on level of student achievement. Anxiety correlated significantly with personal-emotional adjustment for average achieving students. For high achieving students, anxiety significantly correlated with all four dimensions of student adaptation (i.e., academic, social, and personal-emotional adjustment, and institutional attachment).

*Keywords*: student adaptation, adjustment, anxiety, study strategies, retention
The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between influential learning strategies and student adaptation to college for low, average, and high achieving students. Research supports a variety of factors contributing to postsecondary success including high academic aptitude, effective study skills, and a positive attitude (Proctor, Prevatt, Adams, Hurst, & Petscher, 2006; Reaser, Prevatt, Petscher, & Proctor, 2007). Additionally, learning processes such as motivation, time management, information processing, self-regulated strategy use, and general study skills have been identified as important covariates in postsecondary success (Reaser et al., 2007). Students demonstrating weak entry level strategies may be under-prepared for post-secondary education and thus more likely to encounter difficulties.

Student adaptation to college is another important factor in academic success and has been shown to be highly predictive of college grades and retention (Crede & Nichorster, 2012). Student adaptation to college is a multi-dimensional construct describing the degree to which students are able to use a variety of coping responses to adapt to intense academic work, novel social experiences, stressful psychological and physical feelings, and the demands of the general transition experience (Baker & Siryk, 1999). Numerous variables have been investigated as potentially influential in the college adjustment process including a variety of individual traits, coping skills, level of social support, and prior achievement (Crede & Nichorster, 2012). The goal of this study was to explore the relationship between identified learning strategies and student adaptation to college to better understanding the processes that contribute to postsecondary success in hopes of meeting the needs of incoming college students.

Participants in the study were post-secondary students (n = 146, consisting of 35 males, 111 females) from a southeastern regional university. Of the participants, 54.1% (n = 79) were
Freshman and 45.9% ($n = 67$) were Sophomores. Students ranged in age from 18–22 years ($M = 18.97, SD = .81$). Student cumulative grade point average (GPA) ranged from 0-4 ($M = 2.7, SD = .95$). Students completed three survey measures. A demographic questionnaire was used to assess age, gender, ethnicity, advanced placement or honors status, academic probation and/or suspension, cumulative hours completed, and grade point average. The Learning and Study Skills Inventory (LASSI; Winstein & Palmer, 2002) was used to assess students’ awareness about and use of learning and study strategies, including thoughts, behaviors, attitudes, motivations and beliefs, that relate to successful learning in post-secondary settings. The LASSI yields 10 subscales including anxiety, attitude, concentration, information processing, motivation, selecting main ideas, self-testing, study aids, test strategies, and time management. Student adjustment to college was measured using the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ; Baker & Siryk, 1999). The SACQ yields a Full-Scale score as a summed index of overall adjustment to university as well as four specific aspects of adjustment to college or university including academic adjustment, social adjustment, personal-emotional adjustment, and institutional attachment.

Students were trifurcated into low ($M = 1.6, SD = .52$), average ($M = 2.8, SD = .31$), and high ($M = 3.7, SD = .23$) achieving groups by cumulative GPA and data were analyzed using multiple regression and correlational techniques. The LASSI subscales significantly predicted adaptation to college as measured by the SACQ for average and high achieving students, but did not significantly predict adaptation to college for low achieving students. The unique contributions of the LASSI subtests varied in the two significant predictions. Anxiety and attitude significantly contributed to the prediction of adaptation to college for average achieving students. Anxiety was the only significant contributor for high achieving students.
While there was not a significant difference in the level of anxiety between the average and high achieving groups, results indicated that anxiety influenced distinct facets of student adaptation to college depending on the respective level of student achievement. Anxiety correlated significantly with personal-emotional adjustment for average achieving students. For high achieving students, anxiety significantly correlated with all four dimensions of student adaptation (i.e., academic, social, and personal-emotional adjustment, and institutional attachment).

Students, parents, post-secondary institutions and numerous other stakeholders are concerned with identifying predictors of student success and college retention (Proctor et al., 2006). Research supports both learning and study strategies (Proctor et al., 2006) and student adaptation to college (Crede & Nichorster, 2012) as influential aspects of postsecondary success. Understanding the relationships between these influential factors may offer additional utility for educational researchers and orientation/retention programs aimed at identifying and meeting the needs of entry level at risk students.

References


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