

RELIGIOUS SERVICES ATTENDANCE AND COLLEGE ADJUSTMENT OF DIPLOMA IN COMPUTER SCIENCE UTM STUDENTS

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Abstract

This study intends to investigate the relationship between the frequency of religious services attendance (RSA) and college adjustment of Diploma in Computer Science (DDC) UTM, KL students in terms of gender and achievement. The subjects of this study consist of sixty-nine DDC UTM students. The Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ) by Baker and Siryk (1999) and a personal demographic data sheet were used in this study to gather data. The results indicate that: (1) the relationship between college adjustment and frequency of RSA are non-significant and that neither RSA nor gender and GPA scores predict college adjustment of DDC students; (2) there is a significant difference between academic adjustment and frequency of RSA; (3) male DDC students seem to attend religious services more frequently than the female students; and (4) a higher number of high and average achievers seem to frequently attend religious services.

Keywords: College Adjustment, Religious Services Attendance

Introduction

Of late, there has been a lot of concern about the too active involvement of university students in political and religious activities so much so that it may affect their studies (Najib, 2000; Yong, 2000). Nevertheless, empirical research has shown that involvement in religious practices, activities, and services attendance is a way of coping with the adjustment problems in college for some students (Salim, 1984). On one end, participation in religious activities is shown to be of a negative influence and on the other, it is considered a valuable resource in college adjustment.

These divergent views are best explained by Schorr (2002) who says that optimists tend to develop better coping skills and a more supportive social network than those with a darker outlook, which may shelter them from stress and depression. This researcher conducted a survey of 89 college undergraduate students near the beginning of the semester, when they had yet to develop a network of friends, and again at the semester's conclusion. The students' self-reported optimism as well as their levels of perceived stress and depressed mood were measured. As expected, it was found that optimists immediately developed a larger group of friends and maintained a superior state of mental health throughout the semester, compared with their pessimistic peers. It was concluded that the two potential reasons for the optimists' lower levels of stress are strong friendships and superior coping skills. How is then optimism related to religion?

People who are heavily involved in their religion, to the point of being fundamentalists, appear to be more optimistic than people who are less devout, says Sethi-Iyengar (cited in Sleek (1998). In her research, Sethi-Iyengar and colleagues divided religious affiliation into three categories—fundamentalist, moderate and liberal. She found that fundamentalists—those who spend more time being involved in prayer and other religious activities—are more optimistic than moderates, who are more optimistic than liberals. Fundamentalists may develop a sort of immunity to depressive symptoms because they are less likely to blame themselves for misfortunes in their lives, she posited. Also, optimists are more likely to detect potential problems, make more accurate appraisals, according to Apinwall (cited in Sleek, 1998). Thus, frequent religious services attendance could be a way of coping with the demands of the college experience thus, may for some, aid in their adjustment in college and vice versa.

Others such as Low and Handall (1995) investigated the relationship between religion and adjustment in college at three universities and found that there was an overall significant relationship between the two variables for students in transition (freshmen). However, religion relates differently to college adjustment by sex and high school education. Halpern (2000) found that teens with high intelligence reported higher religious attendance as compared to those with average intelligence. In addition, frequency of religious services attendance (rarely or never attending services) was strongly related to dropout rate (Coleman, 1988).

However, Salim's (1984) findings suggest that frequent religious services attendance may not be a positive coping skill after all. In his study of the adjustment problems of Malaysian students at Western Michigan University, young Malaysian students were found to be having adjustment problems in college. Students who interact less frequently with American students but more frequently with Malaysian students, attend religious services two or more times a week and have low TOEFL scores, had more adjustment problems. Plante, Saucedo, and Rice (2001) found that religious faith is not associated with successful coping with daily stress of undergraduates and staff of a Catholic Liberal Arts university. Finally, no significant associations were reported between a greater frequency of church attendance and happiness score among Irish undergraduates (Lewin, 2002).

In view of the findings above, the relationship between religion and college adjustment appear mixed and multifaceted. It would be of interest to discover the dynamics of religion (religious services attendance) and college adjustment of UTM, KL diploma students. To what extent is the frequency of the religious services attendance is associated with the adjustment of DDC students in college, is the aim of this study.

Operational Definitions Of The Terms

Adjustment is defined as, the state of being when a college student is successfully working to adapt to the internal and external demands of their college experience. Thus, adjustment refers to the extent to which a college student is able to cope and adjust to the changes in the environment and the demands of the college. It also refers to his or her ability to reconcile with and master the changes that take place within and around him in college. When a college student is able to meet the college's demands with minimum number of adjustment problems/stress, as well fit into the college environment and experience, he is considered as having adjusted well. On the other hand, failure to adjust to the demands and the environment at college would mean maladjustment. The extent to which college students are adjusting to college is measured by the *Students Adjustment to College Questionnaire* (SACQ) (Baker and Siryk, 1999).

Achievement refers to: (1) High-achievers are those students who have GPA scores of more than 3.5; (2) Average-achievers are those with GPA scores between 3.5 and 2.00; and (3) Low-achievers are those with GPA scores between 1.7 and 2.00.

Religious Services Attendance (hereafter referred to as RSA) refers to: (1) frequently attends religious services (more than 3 times in a week); (2) less frequently attends religious services (less than 3 times in a week); and (3) never attends religious services (0).

Methodology

This is a quantitative study and as such the dependent and independent variables are analysed using the SPSS 9.0. The dependent variables are the five subscales in the SACQ: (1) Full Scale; (2) Academic Adjustment; (3) Social Adjustment; (4) Personal-Emotional Adjustment; and (5) Attachment Scales. The independent variable is frequency of RSA of DDC students.

The sample of this survey is the DDC first-year students enrolled in semester two of academic year of 2000/2001. These students were identified for convenience and ease of manageability. A short, self-report inventory was developed for the purpose of this investigation that provides demographic information of each participant such as age, sex, race, entry qualifications, and GPA score and frequency of RSA. The Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ: Baker & Siryk, 1999) is a self-report measure, Likert-type scale of adjustment to college. It consists of 67 items pertaining to various experience of adjusting to college specifically: academic, personal-emotional, and social adjustment, and attachment to institution.

Baker and Siryk (1986) have reported coefficient alphas from earlier studies (Baker & Siryk, 1984; Baker, McNeil & Siryk, 1985), ranging between 0.84 and 0.88 for the academic adjustment subscale, between 0.90 and 0.91 for the social adjustment subscale, between 0.81 and 0.85 for the personal-emotional adjustment subscale, between 0.90 and 0.91 for the attachment subscale, and between 0.93 and 0.95 for the full scale. Other researchers have reported coefficient alphas ranging from 0.73 to 0.89 (Rice, 1992), 0.84 to 0.94 (Mooney, *et al.*, 1991) and 0.73 to 0.87 (Lapsley, Rice, and FitzGerald, 1990) for the SACQ subscales. Sufficient evidence of validity is provided in studies by Baker & Siryk (1984), Gerdes & Mallinckrodt (1994), and McGowen (1988).

Data Analysis

Sixty-nine questionnaires were distributed but only 67 of them were tabulated and analysed. The researcher reports a high reliability score ($\alpha = 0.74$) in the use of the SACQ. The findings are discussed in the following sections:

Firstly, in Tables 1.0 and 1.1, a description of the number of respondents frequently, less frequently or never attending religious services is shown according to gender and achievement.

From the details in the tables above, it is concluded that 64.1% of DDC students frequently attend religious services. As for the male students, they seem to attend religious services more frequently than their female counterparts. It also appears that a higher number of high and average achievers seem to frequently attend religious services.

Next, the adjustment/maladjustment levels to college by DDC students (as measured by the SACQ by Baker and Siryk, 1999) will be analysed in Table 1.2. This analysis will be based on *T*-scores tabulated for each raw score by the students in all the five adjustment subscales (Full Scale, Academic Adjustment Scale, Social Adjustment Scale, Personal-Emotional Adjustment Scale, and Attachment Scale). With a *T*-score of 50 as average, *T*-scores of 40 and 30 would be regarded as low and very low respectively, and 60 and 70 would be seen as high and very high respectively (WPS, 1999).

From Table 1.2 above, it can be seen that a higher percentage of DDC students have reported average and high adjustment levels in all the five adjustment subscales measured. It is reported that a very small percentage of DDC students have very low adjustment levels in college. Based on the findings above, it can be surmised that though college adjustment of DDC students appear encouraging and relatively in good standing, the percentage of those who are having low or very low adjustment levels of college adjustment is considerable. Collectively, there are as many as 17.38%, 15.93%, 14.48%, 17.38%, and 14.48% of DDC students who are having low and very low college adjustment in the Full Scale, Academic Adjustment, Social Adjustment, Personal-Emotional Adjustment and Attachment scales in the SACQ (Baker and Siryk, 1999) respectively.

Is frequency of RSA and college adjustment of DDC students related? To answer this question, a One-Way Analysis of Variance was conducted between measures of college adjustment and frequency of religious services attendance. It was found that there exists a significant difference between academic adjustment and frequency of religious services attendance ($F = 3.081, p < .05$). This means that DDC students of different academic adjustment levels attend religious services at different frequency. On all the other adjustment subscales the difference between college adjustment and frequency of RSA is not significant at $p < .05$.

Next, to see if frequency of RSA of these students predicts their college adjustment levels, particularly the academic adjustment levels, a linear regression analysis was carried out. The findings were not significant on all the five college adjustment subscales at $p < .05$. Therefore, it is concluded that frequency of RSA of DDC students do not predict their college adjustment levels.

Finally, to determine if gender and GPA (achievement) predict college adjustment of these students, a regression analysis was conducted. It was found that both gender and achievement of DDC students do not predict their college adjustment.

Discussion

Similar to findings by Salim (1984), Halpern (2000), Plante, *et al.*, (2001) and Lewin (2002), the results of this study indicate that the relationship between college adjustment and frequency of RSA are non-significant and that neither RSA nor gender and GPA scores predict college adjustment of DDC students. As such, college students who invest a lot in religion to help them in their college adjustment may be going about things in the wrong direction. Over-estimating the powers of RSA and having absurdly high expectations of religion and prayer often encourages students to associate their success and failures with external factors, so much so that they almost always neglect the more important internal factors such as hard work, good and healthy attitude, and discipline (to adjust well in college). It is the students who must adjust to (cope with) the college, and not the other way around.

However, there is indeed a significant difference in the academic adjustment of those who attend religious services frequently, less frequently or never at all. This can be explained by the findings in Schorr's (2002) and Sleek's (1998) studies on individuals who are heavily involved in their religion, appear to be more optimistic in life than those who are less devout. They are more likely to be good problem solvers, thus are less stressed and depressed (Sleek, 1998). Such students would naturally be able to concentrate in their studies and perform well in exams. Thus, frequency of RSA may be helping the DDC students be optimistic which in turn reduces their stress and depression levels and ultimately assist in their academic adjustment in college in general. Unfortunately, in this study, no personality tests were administered to determine whether these students are optimistic or pessimistic. Furthermore, is it not known which group of DDC students who benefit the most academically because of frequently attending religious services (i.e., is it those who frequent the most or the least or never at all religious services, who have good college adjustment and vice versa?)

The answer to the last question above may lie in the fact that a higher number of high and average achievers seem to frequently attend religious services. It seems that perhaps those who are having poor GPA scores (low achievers) are not attending religious services as frequently as they should. However, this finding is not conclusive as the result of the regression analysis is not significant.

As for gender, the male students seem to attend religious services more frequently than the female students. This is not surprising as the highest number of students in this sample were Malay Muslim students. Muslims are expected to pray five times daily and it is compulsory for male Muslims to frequent the mosque for their prayers (especially on Fridays). In addition, female Muslim students are prohibited or exempted from prayers during menstruation. Thus, these reasons may explain why male DDC students seem to attend religious services more frequently than the female students.

Recommendations For Further Research

The relationship between religious affiliations, conviction, fervor, religious knowledge, religious studies/courses in campus and many other areas of interest, and adjustment of college students, should be investigated to fully understand the influence of religion as a coping resource. Furthermore, the variables investigated in this study are not the only variables that may be related to adjustment in college. They were selected for the pragmatic reason of manageability, and the researcher's personal observations. Thus, further multivariate research findings will ensure that college administrators, academic advisors and educators do not make the mistake of either over- or under-stressing the importance and place of religion in college students' adjustment.

On a cautious note, this researcher stresses that the present study did not reveal the effects of frequent religious services attendance as opposed to less frequent religious services attendance on college adjustment and GPA scores. Therefore, it is not advisable to assume that one affects adjustment in college more or less than the other variable. To find answers of such nature, an experimental and a longitudinal study should be undertaken.

Finally, the sample of this study is limited to First-year Second-semester DDC students at a public Malaysian university and as such, the results obtained and the conclusions drawn in this study are not generalisable to other student populations. Future studies should be based on stratified sampling procedures to include students of various age groups (year of study) and from the different programmes of study offered by the university.

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Table 1.0 The Frequency of Religious Services Attendance (RSA) by Male and Female DDC Students

Frequency of RSA	Sex	Number	Total %
More than 3 times	Male	21 (31.3%)	64.1
	Female	22 (32.8%)	
Less than 3 times	Male	5 (7.4%)	22.3
	Female	10 (14.9%)	
Never	Male	3 (4.4%)	13.3
	Female	6 (8.9%)	

n=67

Table 1.1: The Frequency of Religious Services Attendance (RSA) by High, Average and Low GPA Scoring DDC Students

Frequency of RSA	GPA Scores			Total %
	>3.5	2.0><3.5	1.7><2.0	
More than 3 times	10 (15.1%)	31 (46.9%)	1 (1.5%)	63.6
Less than 3 times	1 (1.5%)	14 (21.2%)	-	22.7
Never	4 (6.1%)	5 (7.5%)	-	13.6

n=66

Table 1.2: College Adjustment Levels of Computer Science (DDC) Students (N=69)

	Range of T-scores				
	0-30 %	31-40 %	41-50 %	51-60 %	61-70 %
FS	2.89	14.49	31.88	34.78	15.94
AA	2.89	13.04	33.33	34.78	15.94
SA	1.44	13.04	37.68	30.43	17.39
PEA	2.89	14.49	30.43	34.78	17.39
ATT	4.34	10.14	31.88	37.68	15.94

FS	Full Scale	AA	Academic Adjustment Scale
SA	Social Adjustment Scale	ATT	Attachment Scale
PEA	Personal-Emotional Adjustment Scale		

0-30 = very low adjustment level
 31-40 = low adjustment level
 41-50 = average adjustment level
 51-60 = high adjustment level
 61-70 = very high adjustment level