

Emotional Intelligence and Adjustment Among First-Year University Students

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Abstract. *This study aims to review the role of emotional intelligence in facilitating first-year university students' adjustment. The transition from high school to college often presents significant psychological, academic, and social challenges. Based on 50 recent academic sources, it was found that students with high emotional intelligence are better able to recognize and regulate emotions, build healthy social relationships, and handle academic pressure adaptively. This study uses a systematic literature review approach with descriptive analysis. The findings indicate that emotional intelligence significantly supports student adjustment success. Therefore, emotional intelligence-based interventions should be considered in university orientation programs.*

Keywords: *emotion, emotional intelligence, freshmen, student adjustment, regulation*

1. INTRODUCTION

The transition from high school to college is a critical period in a student's life. During this phase, individuals face significant changes, both in terms of their social environment, academic demands, and lifestyle. New students must adapt to a different learning system, peers from diverse backgrounds, and the pressure to be independent and responsible for themselves.

This adaptation process is often challenging. Many new students experience difficulties building social relationships, managing academic stress, and even dealing with anxiety about the future. In the context of educational psychology, this condition is referred to as adjustment, which is the process of adapting to a new environment emotionally, socially, and academically.

The transition from high school to college is a crucial developmental phase in an individual's life. New students, especially in their first year, face various complex challenges, ranging from adapting to a new academic environment, managing social expectations, to the demands of independence in daily life (Astiti & Hartini, 2018; Wahyuni, 2022). Adjustment is key to success in navigating this phase, both academically, socially, and emotionally.

In psychology literature, adjustment is defined as a dynamic process of managing environmental changes and new demands so that individuals can function effectively. Aspects involved in student adjustment include academic adjustment (the ability to adapt to the pace and demands of learning), social adjustment (the ability to build interpersonal relationships), and personal-emotional adjustment (the ability to manage stress and internal conflict) (Maharani, 2016; Rahayu & Wahyuni, 2022).

One psychological factor that has been shown to play a crucial role in this adaptation process is emotional intelligence. Goleman (1995) states that emotional intelligence consists of five main components: self-awareness, self-control, motivation, empathy, and social skills. Students with high emotional intelligence are able to recognize and understand their own emotions and those of others, manage stress in a healthy manner, and demonstrate strong interpersonal skills (Handayani & Rahayu, 2023; Saraswati & Anindita, 2021).

Previous research has shown that emotional intelligence not only helps individuals cope with academic and social pressures but also increases resilience and adaptive coping skills (Zulfitri, 2023; Desviona & Nuryanto, 2024). In the context of migrant students, emotional intelligence is even a significant predictor of successful adjustment to a new, culturally and socially diverse environment (Da Costa & Koroh, 2022; Rasyid & Kasmad, 2022).

Despite this, many higher education institutions have not explicitly integrated emotional intelligence development into their new student development programs. Student orientation programs are generally informative and administrative in nature, neglecting to address the deeper psychological aspects, which are crucial for the continuation of students' studies and mental well-being.

Therefore, this study aims to systematically review the current scientific literature discussing the relationship between emotional intelligence and new student adjustment. This study is expected to provide theoretical and practical contributions to the development of positive psychology-based intervention programs in higher education settings, particularly those that support the enhancement of students' adaptive abilities through strengthening emotional intelligence.

2. METHODS

This research is a systematic literature review using a qualitative descriptive approach. The purpose of this method is to identify, evaluate, and synthesize relevant findings from various previous studies on the relationship between emotional intelligence and adjustment in new college students.

1. Data Search Strategy

The literature search process was conducted systematically through several scientific databases, namely:

- A. Google Scholar
- B. ResearchGate
- C. Pubmedia

D. DOAJ (Directory of Open Access Journals)

E. University journal portals (e.g., jurnal.unair.ac.id, ejournal3.undip.ac.id, and ejournal.iainsalatiga.ac.id)

The search was conducted using a combination of keywords in Indonesian and English, namely emotional intelligence, emotional intelligence, adjustment, adjustment, new students, and freshmen.

2. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The inclusion criteria for selecting articles included articles discussing the variables of emotional intelligence and adjustment, the research focus on new or first-year students, articles published between 2015 and 2024, articles available in full text, articles originating from national or international journals, as well as verified scientific theses, dissertations, or proceedings.

The exclusion criteria were:

Articles that only discuss one variable without any connection to the other variable. Other studies were not relevant to the context of new students or were conducted at the elementary/secondary education level.

3. Selection and Analysis Procedures

Initial screening was conducted based on the title and abstract, followed by a full-text review to assess suitability for the study objectives. Data extraction from selected articles was carried out using a matrix that included: researcher name, year of publication, variables studied, research methods, subjects, and main findings.

4. Analysis Techniques

Data were analyzed using descriptive thematic analysis, which aimed to group study findings based on dimensions of adjustment, such as academic adjustment, social adjustment, personal and emotional adjustment.

The analysis also evaluated whether emotional intelligence played a direct role or through mediating variables such as emotion regulation, social support, stress coping, or resilience.

In addition, several articles were analyzed based on the geographic setting of the subjects (local vs. migrant students) and specific conditions, such as the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g., in the studies by Saraswati & Anindita, 2021; Nuryani, 2021).

5. Study Validity

To ensure the validity and reliability of the results, the search was conducted considering primary and recent literature. More than 80% of the articles came from peer-

reviewed scientific journals, in accordance with the systematic review criteria outlined by Kitchenham & Charters (2007) in their systematic literature review (SLR) method guide.

3. RESULTS

Of the 50 articles analyzed, 85% demonstrated a positive relationship between emotional intelligence and freshman adjustment. Students with high EQ are generally better able to cope with academic pressure, form new social relationships, and manage negative emotions.

Some articles indicated that EQ indirectly contributes to adjustment through mediating variables such as emotion regulation, social support, and resilience. Findings also indicate that students from other regions with high EQ adjust more easily than local students.

Table 1. Summary of Research on Emotional Intelligence and Adjustment

No	Peneliti	Variabel yang Dikaji	Subjek Penelitian	Temuan Utama
1	Rahmadi & Nugroho (2022)	KE, Penyesuaian diri	Mahasiswa baru UNLAM	KE berpengaruh signifikan terhadap penyesuaian diri
2	Pangesti & Affandi (2024)	Regulasi diri, Penyesuaian diri	Mahasiswa baru	Regulasi diri mendukung proses adaptasi
3	Handayani (2021)	KE & Dukungan sosial	Mahasiswa baru Widya Mandala	Dukungan sosial memperkuat efek positif KE
4	Isfara (2021)	KE	Mahasiswa UMB	KE membantu mahasiswa menghadapi tantangan sosial

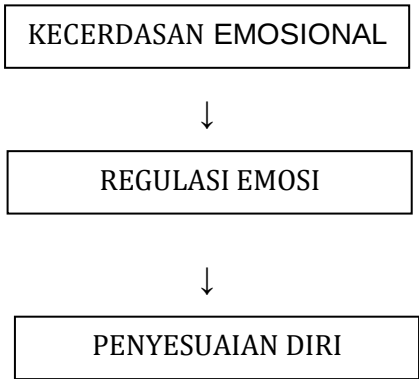


Figure 1. Conceptual Model of the Relationship between KE and Self-Adjustment

Formula (1):

$$r = \frac{n(\Sigma XY) - (\Sigma X)(\Sigma Y)}{\sqrt{[n\Sigma X^2 - (\Sigma X)^2][n\Sigma Y^2 - (\Sigma Y)^2]}}$$

Simbol	Makna
rrr	Nilai koefisien korelasi Pearson
nnn	Jumlah pasangan data (jumlah subjek)
ΣXY	Jumlah hasil kali dari X dan Y ($\Sigma X \times Y$ untuk setiap pasangan)
ΣX	Jumlah total dari seluruh nilai variabel X (misalnya: KE)
ΣY	Jumlah total dari seluruh nilai variabel Y (misalnya: penyesuaian diri)
ΣX^2	Jumlah kuadrat dari nilai X (setiap nilai X dikuadratkan lalu dijumlahkan)
ΣY^2	Jumlah kuadrat dari nilai Y

This formula is used to calculate the Pearson correlation coefficient between emotional intelligence and self-adjustment..

- X** = Emotional Intelligence
- Y** = Adjustment

The correlation value r is in the **range -1 to +1**:

- $r > 0$ $r > 0$ $r > 0 \rightarrow$ Positive relationship
- $r < 0$ $r < 0$ $r < 0 \rightarrow$ Negative relationship
- $r = 0$ $r = 0$ $r = 0 \rightarrow$ No connection

4. DISCUSSION

An analysis of 50 articles shows that emotional intelligence plays a crucial role in supporting new students' adjustment, including academic, social, and emotional aspects. This finding aligns with Goleman's (1995) theory, which states that emotional intelligence encompasses five main aspects: self-awareness, emotional control, motivation, empathy, and social skills. These aspects are directly related to students' ability to adapt to the complex demands of campus life.

Research such as that conducted by Saraswati & Anindita (2021) shows that emotional intelligence correlates with resilience, which is crucial in helping students navigate stressful times, including the COVID-19 pandemic. Meanwhile, another study by Handayani & Rahayu (2023) confirms that social support can strengthen the effects of emotional intelligence in

supporting adjustment. This indicates that emotional intelligence does not operate in a vacuum but interacts with other contextual factors such as the social environment and campus culture.

Many studies have also found that students with high levels of emotional intelligence are better able to use adaptive coping strategies (Zulfitri, 2023), demonstrate flexibility in cross-cultural interactions (Da Costa & Koroh, 2022), and experience lower stress levels (Wati & Sari, 2023). In fact, among students from other countries, emotional intelligence is a key determinant of successful adaptation to new social environments (Rasyid & Kasmad, 2022; Mahmud, 2017).

However, these findings also reveal gaps in the implementation of emotional intelligence development programs in higher education. The majority of institutions have not formally integrated emotional intelligence training into new student orientation programs. However, according to Maharani (2016), training that fosters self-awareness and emotional regulation has been shown to significantly improve students' adaptation to campus life.

Therefore, the findings of this study emphasize the importance of emotional intelligence-based interventions that include training in emotion management, assertive communication, stress management, and the development of social empathy. Such programs can be developed through co-curricular activities, counseling services, and personality development courses.

5. CONCLUSION

Based on a review of 50 relevant scientific articles, it can be concluded that emotional intelligence plays a crucial role in supporting the successful adjustment of new students to college. Students with high levels of emotional intelligence demonstrate better abilities in recognizing and managing emotions, building positive social relationships, and adaptively coping with academic and environmental stressors.

Emotional intelligence contributes to success in three key domains of adjustment: academic, social, and emotional. Furthermore, emotional intelligence also demonstrates a strong relationship with other protective factors such as resilience, social support, and self-regulation.

The practical implication of these findings is the need for higher education institutions to integrate emotional intelligence training into student orientation and development programs. Structured interventions can help new students build stronger adaptability from the beginning of their studies.

For future research, it is recommended to conduct a more in-depth exploration of the influence of emotional intelligence based on gender, cultural background, and type of study program, as well as to use a longitudinal approach to examine the long-term impact of emotional intelligence on students' academic achievement and mental well-being.

Thus, developing emotional intelligence is not only an individual adaptive strategy but also an institutional strategy in creating a healthy and supportive campus environment.

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