Exploring Emotional Intelligence and College Adjustment in Final-Year College Students

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Abstract: This study aims to analyze the relationship between the dimensions of college adjustment and domains of emotional intelligence among final-year students (7th semester) with the Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) curriculum. This research used a correlational method with a non-experimental quantitative approach. The study respondents were final-year students of the Faculty of Psychology, Padjadjaran University, who participated in MBKM activities outside the university during the sixth semester and resumed regular classes during the seventh semester. Among 72 eligible students, 67 participated in the study. The instruments used to measure college adjustment and emotional intelligence were the translated version of Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ) and an instrument based on Goleman's emotional intelligence theory, respectively. Correlation tests were conducted using the Pearson Product Moment. The findings revealed a significant positive correlation between college adjustment and emotional intelligence ($r = 0.410$, $p < 0.05$). Furthermore, the analysis proved correlations among certain dimensions of college adjustment and domains of emotional intelligence. The implications highlight the role of MBKM activities in enhancing students' skills to support their adaptation and emotional intelligence.

Introduction

Throughout life, humans often adapt and adjust to their surrounding environments. For college students, changes requiring adjustment are experienced at the beginning and throughout their university years (Clinciu & Cazan, 2014). The ability of students to make these adjustments quickly and effectively is called college adjustment (Crede & Niehorster, 2012). According to Baker & Siryk (1984), college adjustment consists of four dimensions: academic adjustment, social adjustment, personal-emotional adjustment, and goal-commitment/institutional attachment. Student adaptation in university settings is considered a predictor of academic success (Van Rooij, 2018), academic achievement (Páramo, 2015), and college retention (Baker & Siryk, 1984). Students who adapt well to their environment are more likely to achieve positive academic outcomes. Meanwhile, failure to adjust to the university environment can harm students' psychological well-being and academic achievement (Katz & Somers, 2017).

Baker (2002) divided each dimension of college adjustment into several sub-dimensions in the form of words & phrases describing the different aspects of student adaptation more specifically. Sub-dimensions of academic adjustment include: the motivation to be in college and attend educational goals (motivation); the actual effort put forth to achieve academic goals (application); the effectiveness of efforts in academic activities (performance); and the satisfaction with the academic environment in college (academic

environment). Sub-dimensions of social adjustment include general social functioning related to college (general); the ability to build social relationships with fellow students and others (other people), the ability to adapt to the college environment away from home and significant people in their lives (nostalgia); and satisfaction with social experiences perceived during college (social environment). The personal-emotional adjustment has two sub-dimensions: the psychological state of students while in college (psychological) and the physiological responses when facing various activities in college (physical). Finally, sub-dimensions of goal-commitment/institutional attachment, in parentheses, include the level of student satisfaction as part of the college in general (general) and feelings or emotions related to the institution where they study (this college).

To understand the process of student adaptation in college, Siregar (2008) introduced the P3M model, which stands for *Pengenalan, Pengembangan, dan Penglepasan Mahasiswa* (Introduction, Development, and Release of Students). These three stages describe the steps students go through during their university studies. Stage P1 (*Pengenalan*/Introduction) takes place from the first semester until the end of the second semester when students transition from high school life to college. Stage P2 (*Pengembangan*/Development) takes place from the beginning of the third semester to the end of the sixth semester as a bridge for student development from adolescence to early adulthood, as students engage in self-exploration through organizational activities or by participating in the Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) program—the most recent curriculum in education from the Ministry of Education and Culture in 2020 (Direktorat Jenderal Pendidikan Tinggi Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 2020). The seventh and eighth semesters are stage P3 (*Penglepasan*/Release), where students pursue self-actualization and prepare for graduation.

The current final-year students in Padjadjaran University (Unpad) Faculty of Psychology are categorized at the Release (P3) stage where students strive for self-actualization after concluding their exploration in the previous stage, Development (P2). The class of 2020, as final-year students, undertake their studies with the MBKM curriculum, which creates a different learning experience from the previous cohorts. The MBKM program is designed to foster students' independence in developing their interests and knowledge by offering a more flexible approach to learning. It aims to prepare students for their careers after graduation better. Throughout their academic journey, they are directed to leave the college environment to explore non-academic activities during their study period before returning to the classroom to complete their classes and other obligations as college students (Direktorat Jenderal Pendidikan Tinggi Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 2020). Alongside the curriculum adjustments, the class of 2020 students, at the beginning of the P3 stage, are transitioning from fully online and hybrid learning modes to fully offline learning for the first time after the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions have been lifted.

In facing these challenges, students' emotional intelligence often develops as they learn through new experiences (Bar-On, 2002). Emotional intelligence is the ability to perceive, evaluate, and control one's own and others' emotions (Chapin, 2015). Goleman (1995) divides emotional intelligence into 5 domains: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. These domains are then grouped into two competency areas: personal (including self-awareness, self-regulation, and motivation) and social (including empathy and social skills).

In addition to categorizing areas, Goleman in *Working with Emotional Intelligence* (1998) details some competencies that explain each domain of emotional intelligence. These competencies are the subdomains of the five emotional intelligence domains. Competencies

derived from self-awareness are emotional awareness, accurate self-assessment, and self-confidence. Self-regulation comprises five competencies: self-control, trustworthiness, conscientiousness, adaptability, and innovation. Motivation has four derivative competencies: achievement drive, commitment, initiative, and optimism. Empathy has five derivative competencies: understanding others, developing others, service orientation, leveraging diversity and political awareness. Finally, the eight competencies derived from the social skills dimension are influence, communication, conflict management, leadership, change catalyst, building bonds, collaboration and cooperation, and team capabilities.

An initial survey was conducted on nine students after six weeks of attending classes in the seventh semester to understand the relationship between college adjustment and emotional intelligence in the environment of final-year students at the Faculty of Psychology, Unpad. Respondents consisted of 2 students enrolled in the *Kampus Mengajar* (School Teaching) program, 2 students in the *Asistensi Mengajar* (Teaching Assistance) program, and 5 students in the MSIB (Internship and Independent Study) program in the sixth semester. The survey results indicated that 8 out of 9 respondents experienced differences in feelings between the sixth and seventh semesters, which could be categorized into 4 dimensions of college adjustment according to Baker & Siryk (1984). The perceived differences included both positive and negative aspects. Positive differences included feeling easier to communicate with friends after a semester apart, finally meeting in person (social adjustment), and being more engaged with academic and non-academic environments within the faculty (institutional attachment). Negative differences included feeling more stressed and unmotivated in class (academic adjustment) and experiencing difficulties in managing expenses and personal needs independently again (personal-emotional adjustment).

In facing these differences, the respondents each had their ways to assist in the adjustment process. Their adjustment behaviors can be associated with the domains of emotional intelligence, where respondents identified their perceived feelings (self-awareness), regulated mood (self-regulation), strived for healthier lifestyles (motivation), formed support systems with friends (empathy), and socialized within and outside the academic environment (social skills). The evidence of the relationship between college adjustment and emotional intelligence has been discussed in previous studies. College adjustment and emotional intelligence are often studied among incoming freshmen undergoing the transition to college, where a significant positive relationship between college adjustment and emotional intelligence has been found (Astrina, 2019; Budiarti, 2021; Nasution, 2015; Ningsih & Febriana, 2016; Widihapsari & Susilawati, 2018). However, thus far, the scope of studies on these two variables tends to be narrow, repetitive, and still at a surface level. To date, no published research has examined college adjustment and emotional intelligence in final-year students. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the relationship between college adjustment dimensions and emotional intelligence domains among final-year students (7th semester) with the Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (MBKM).

Furthermore, this study formulates several other hypotheses regarding the relationship between some dimensions of college adjustment and domains of emotional intelligence that have not been extensively researched previously. A series of hypotheses were formulated based on the theoretical study of college adjustment by Baker & Siryk (1984) and emotional intelligence by Goleman (1995), as well as previous related research (Khajavi, 2002; McKinney, 2019). This study aims to prove the presence or absence of a relationship between: (1) personal-emotional adjustment and self-awareness; (2) personal-emotional adjustment and self-regulation; (3) personal-emotional adjustment and motivation; (4)

academic adjustment and self-regulation; (5) academic adjustment and motivation; (6) goal-commitment/institutional attachment and motivation; (7) social adjustment and empathy; and (8) social adjustment and social skills in final-year students at the Padjadjaran University Faculty of Psychology with the MBKM curriculum.

Research Method

This study employed a correlational method with a non-experimental quantitative approach. The criteria for respondents in this study were final-year students at the Faculty of Psychology, Padjadjaran University, who returned to classes in the seventh semester after participating in MBKM activities outside the university in the sixth semester. Out of the total number of students in the faculty, which amounted to 147 students, 72 met the criteria and were thus considered the population for this study. Sampling was conducted using the saturated sampling method where the entire population is included in the sample (Martono, 2014). It was done because the population size for this study was relatively small, and it was deemed necessary to collect data from the entire population to ensure that the research results could be generalized with minimal error.

To measure college adjustment, the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ) by Baker & Siryk (1989), adapted into Indonesian by Fitriana (2013), was used. The instrument consisted of 60 items, later modified to 61 items to tailor the instrument to the research population. The items comprised positive and negative statements measured on a Likert scale divided into six (1 = very inappropriate; 6 = very appropriate). The entire instrument's total score and each dimension could be categorized as low or high. Fitriana (2013) tested the instrument through content validity and construct validity, thus established as a valid instrument. The researcher conducted a content validity process with three expert reviewers on the modified instrument. The results of I-CVI and S-CVI were 1.00, indicating that the modified instrument was valid. After undergoing Cronbach's Alpha testing, the reliability of the SACQ instrument in this study was found to be 0.923, indicating that the instrument was reliable (Kaplan & Saccuzzo, 2017).

The instrument to measure emotional intelligence was developed by Siregar (2016) based on Goleman's (1998) theory of emotional intelligence. This instrument consisted of 69 positive items measured on a Likert scale divided into five (1 = not suitable; 5 = very suitable). The scores of this instrument were categorized into four levels: low, fairly low, fairly high, and high. Siregar (2016) conducted content validity with two expert reviewers to ensure the validity of the instrument for use. In this study, the reliability of the instrument tested using Cronbach's Alpha was 0.901, indicating that it was reliable. The researcher also collected demographic data including gender, types of MBKM activities participated in by students in the sixth semester, and data on the seventh-semester studies, including the number of credits, domicile, and estimated frequency of face-to-face classes during one semester.

The research was conducted with ethical approval from the Research Ethics Commission of Padjadjaran University with the number 207/UN6.KEP/EC/2024. This research utilized Google Forms questionnaires to collect data, which included informed consent and demographic data, as well as Google Sheets containing participant instructions and the items of the measurement instruments. Participants who agreed to participate in the study were provided with Google Sheets with limited access only between the researcher and the participants to guarantee confidentiality.

Data analysis in this study was conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics. Descriptive statistics were used to describe demographic data. Then, the distribution of scores on college

adjustment and emotional intelligence variables was examined overall and for each dimension and domain. Next, the normality of the research data was tested using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. Because the data were normally distributed, correlation tests were conducted using the Pearson Product Moment. Normality tests and correlations were performed on overall college adjustment and emotional intelligence data for each dimension and domain to answer the major and minor hypotheses.

Results and Discussion

Out of the 72 students who met the respondent criteria, 5 declined to participate. Therefore, a total of 67 final-year students from the Faculty of Psychology, Universitas Padjadjaran, participated in this study.

Table 1. Participant Demographics

Category	Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	6	9,0%
	Female	61	91,0%
6th Semester MBKM Activity	*Magang (MSIB)*	44	65,7%
	Kampus Mengajar	10	14,9%
	Asistensi Mengajar	13	19,4%

The majority of respondents were female (91.0%). Additionally, 44 respondents (65.7%) participated in the MSIB program as their MBKM activity in their sixth semester. Apart from these data, respondents also provided information on the number of credits taken, domicile, and estimated frequency of face-to-face classes during their seventh-semester studies. The credit range in the seventh semester was between 12-24 credits. Fifty-seven respondents (85.1%) resided in Jatinangor during the seventh semester. Most students attended >75% of their classes in person each week (86.6%).

Table 2. College Adjustment and Emotional intelligence Score Distribution

	College Adjustment					Emotional Intelligence					
Variable	Low		High		Variable	Fairly Low		Fairly High		High	
	n	%	n	%		n	%	n	%	n	%
CA	6	9,0	61	91,0	**EI**	0	0	58	86,6	9	13,4
AA	9	13,4	58	86,6	SA	1	1,5	57	85,1	9	14,4
SAdj	3	4,5	64	95,5	SR	4	6,0	55	82,1	8	11,9
PEA	34	50,7	33	49,3	M	4	6,0	57	85,1	6	9.0
GCIA	1	1,5	66	98,5	E	1	1,5	57	85,1	9	13,4
					SS	0	0	58	86,6	9	13,4

CA, College Adjustment; AA, Academic Adjustment; SAdj, Social Adjustment; PEA, Personal-Emotional Adjustment; GCIA, Goal-Commitment/Institutional Attachment; EI, Emotional Intelligence; SA, Self-Awareness; SR, Self-Regulation; M, Motivation; E, Empathy; SS, Social Skills.

Based on Table 2, most respondents received high college adjustment scores (91%). Similarly, most scores for other dimensions were classified as high, except for the personal-emotional adjustment dimension, which was fairly balanced between respondents with low and high scores, with a slightly larger percentage of low scores (50.7%). No respondents obtained low scores for emotional intelligence or its domains. Most respondents had overall scores fairly high (86.6%) and in each domain. The respondents with scores fairly low in the emotional intelligence domains ranged from 0% to 6.0%.

Table 3. Correlational Statistics of College Adjustment and Emotional Intelligence

Variable	r	p-value	Interpretation
College Adjustment-Emotional Intelligence	0,410	0,001	Moderate/substantial relationship

The results of the correlation test indicated a positive correlation between college adjustment and emotional intelligence overall in the population ($p < 0.05$). According to Guilford's criteria (1956), the correlation coefficient (r) indicates that the correlation between the two variables is interpreted as moderate/substantial ($r = 0.410$).

Tabel 4. Correlational Statistics of College Adjustment Dimensions and Emotional Intelligence Domains

CA	AA	SAdj	PEA	GCIA
EI				
SA			0.104	
SR	0.244*		0.179	
M	0.418**		0.253*	0.278*
E		0.454**		
SS		0.428**		

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)CA, College Adjustment; AA, Academic Adjustment; SAdj, Social Adjustment; PEA, Personal-Emotional Adjustment; GCIA, Goal-Commitment/Institutional Attachment; EI, Emotional Intelligence; SA, Self-Awareness; SR, Self-Regulation; M, Motivation; E, Empathy; SS, Social Skills.

Table 4 presents the correlation statistics of several college adjustment dimensions and emotional intelligence domains to address the hypotheses of this study. Out of the 8 formulated minor hypotheses, it was found that 6 of them showed correlations. The college adjustment dimensions that showed positive correlations with emotional intelligence domains were between academic adjustment and self-regulation ($r = 0.244$, $p < 0.05$) and motivation ($r = 0.418$, $p < 0.01$); social adjustment and empathy ($r = 0.454$, $p < 0.01$) and social skills ($r = 0.428$, $p < 0.01$); personal-emotional adjustment and motivation ($r = 0.254$, $p < 0.05$); goal-commitment/ institutional attachment and motivation ($r = 0.278$, $p < 0.05$). Meanwhile, two hypotheses did not show relationships between personal-emotional adjustment and self-awareness ($r = 0.104$, $p = 0.401$) and self-regulation ($r = 0.179$, $p = 0.147$).

This study indicates a positive correlation between college adjustment and emotional intelligence among final-year students practicing the MBKM curriculum. It suggests that the higher the emotional intelligence of final-year students, the better their ability to adapt to university life. Conversely, the higher the adaptation ability of final-year students, the higher their emotional intelligence. It is consistent with previous research demonstrating a significant relationship between college adjustment and emotional intelligence in the new student population (Astrina, 2019; Budiarti, 2021; Nasution, 2015; Ningsih & Febriana, 2016; Widihapsari & Susilawati, 2018).

Students with good emotional intelligence can demonstrate effective ways to manage stress and solve problems, which subsequently aid them in adapting to their ongoing studies (Sim & Bang, 2016). This explains the positive correlation observed between college adjustment and emotional intelligence among final-year students in the Faculty of Psychology at Unpad. Academic adjustment has a relatively strong positive correlation with self-regulation and motivation. This finding aligns with Van Rooij's (2018) research, which stated that students' self-regulated study behavior and intrinsic motivation have mutually

influential relationships with academic adjustment. Cazan (2012) stated that self-regulated learning strategies and motivational orientations are predictors of academic adjustment. Self-regulation and academic adjustment are reciprocal, where improvement in one variable affects the other (Cazan, 2012). Theoretically, motivation is one of the sub-dimensions of academic adjustment (Baker & Siryk, 1984), and one of the competencies that form the motivation domain is achievement drive (Goleman, 1995). It reinforces the relationship between the two variables. Final-year students at the Unpad Faculty of Psychology may have a good academic adjustment in the seventh semester because they can regulate themselves and maintain their learning motivation when faced with academic challenges. Reciprocally, the ability to regulate and motivate themselves becomes more honed as they strive to adapt to the academic demands they face in the seventh semester, which involve completing their thesis and attending other course lectures.

The social adjustment dimension correlates relatively strongly with empathy and social skills domains. Gardner (1983) categorizes empathy and social skills as the interpersonal intelligence within emotional intelligence, while social adjustment involves building new relationships with people around them (Baker & Siryk, 1984). These three variables focus on the same key behaviors, which involve building relationships with others in the academic environment. Safara & Rafiee (2020) stated that social adjustment—often described synonymously with social skills—correlates with empathy, where empathy training can enhance social adjustment skills. This statement is also in line with the research by Blanke et al. (2016), which shows a relationship between cognitive empathy and social empathy with social adjustment. With face-to-face lectures, students find it easier to interact and build relationships with friends and other parties on campus, such as lecturers, security guards, and faculty staff. Students' abilities to empathize and socialize can help them adjust in social environments, and vice versa. Positive interactions in the university environment resulting from students' social adjustment can enhance their social skills and empathy.

The results of this study confirm the hypothesis that personal-emotional adjustment correlates relatively strongly with motivation but does not correlate with self-awareness and self-regulation. The correlation between personal-emotional adjustment and motivation aligns with the findings of Duchesne & Ratelle (2020), which showed that motivation can mediate between achievement goals and emotional adjustment. Students' ability to maintain intrinsic and extrinsic motivation to adapt helps them adjust personally and emotionally, which involves physical and psychological health and well-being. Conversely, students who excel in personal-emotional adjustment can enhance their motivation to achieve their goals. However, the lack of correlation between self-regulation and personal-emotional adjustment differs from the findings of Pellegrino (2019), which showed a significant correlation between emotional regulation and personal-emotional adjustment in students. Nevertheless, this result can be understood because there are situations where personal-emotional adjustment does not directly intersect with students' self-awareness and self-regulation abilities, even though all three involve personal aspects. Students may encounter challenges in personal-emotional adjustment when faced with situations beyond their control that have nothing to do with good self-awareness or effective emotion regulation. For example, students may fall ill due to consuming unfamiliar food or experience stress when something unexpected happens beyond what they had anticipated.

The goal-commitment/institutional attachment dimension in college adjustment correlates relatively strongly with the motivation domain in emotional intelligence. Previous studies have proven that goal commitment is related to student retention or the desire to stay

in college (Bowman *&* Felix, 2017). One sub-dimension of motivation in Goleman (1995) is commitment, which refers to the ability to align oneself with a group or organization. It can explain the correlation between the two variables. Although the seventh semester is their first time attending fully face-to-face classes in campus grounds, final-year students have spent a long time studying at their faculty. So, it is reasonable for them to already establish a strong attachment to their institution. The students' attachment to their campus and faculty and their desire to complete their studies are related to their motivation. Of course, the biggest motivation for final-year students is to graduate

The scores for college adjustment and emotional intelligence among final-year students—who participated in MBKM activities outside the university in the sixth semester and returned to campus in the seventh semester—are classified as high, both overall and in their dimensions and domains. MBKM activities such as MSIB, *Kampus Mengajar,* and *Asistensi Mengajar* allow students to apply their knowledge practically during their studies. Before the curriculum renewal, such opportunities could only be obtained when students entered their final semester or even after graduation. Implementing these programs enhances communication skills, critical thinking and problem-solving abilities, empathy, socialization skills, collaboration, and more (Jufriadi et al., 2022; Rahmawanti & Nurzaelani, 2022). Therefore, the experiences gained during their departure from formal lectures in the sixth semester help students adapt quicker to new environments and sharpen their emotional intelligence. Thus, when entering the seventh semester with its accompanying demands— first-time offline lectures, the role of final-year students (Release/P3), and completing the thesis—students tend to overcome difficulties effectively.

Conclusion
The conclusion of this study confirms a significant positive relationship between college adjustment and emotional intelligence among final-year students of the Faculty of Psychology, Padjadjaran University, with the MBKM curriculum. The analysis also reveals correlations between several dimensions of college adjustment and domains of emotional intelligence: academic adjustment and self-regulation and motivation, social adjustment and empathy and social skills, personal-emotional adjustment and motivation, and goal-commitment/institutional attachment and motivation. These results support the hypothesis that final-year students with high emotional intelligence tend to have better college adjustment abilities. The research implies that MBKM activities have the potential to contribute to enhancing students' skills that support both adaptive abilities and emotional intelligence.

Recommendation
Further research could target a broader population to better understand the MBKM curriculum's impact on college adjustment and emotional intelligence of Indonesian college students. This research proves that students tend to have no trouble readjusting to college after participating in MBKM programs and can still meet the demands of their studies. Practically, campus leaders as policymakers should consider integrating these findings into curriculum design, fostering emotional intelligence development as a tool that can assist students' adjustment in college. Faculty members and lecturers should be confident in supporting students' involvement in MBKM activities as a way to enhance their emotional intelligence without any worries on struggles in adjustment or readjustment. Students need to

take advantage of the activities available in the MBKM curriculum for their academic and personal development.

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