


A Comprehensive Investigation into First-Year University Student Adjustment

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<p>Revised: 2024-09-16</p> <p>Published: 2024-10-13</p> <p>Keywords: Batak Ethnicity, Boarding, Parent, Self-adjustment, University</p> <p>Copyright holder: © Author/s (2024)</p> <p>This article is under: </p> <p>How to cite: Nur'aini, N., Miswanto, M., Munir, A., Pristanti, N. A., & Ravsamjani, F. (2024). A Comprehensive Investigation into First-Year University Student Adjustment. <i>Bulletin of Counseling and Psychotherapy</i>, 6(3). https://doi.org/10.51214/002024061084000</p> <p>Published by: Kuras Institute</p> <p>E-ISSN: 2656-1050</p>	<p>ABSTRACT: The transition from high school to university represents a significant period of change in the lives of first-year students. This adjustment often involves challenges in academic, social, and personal domains, with students needing to adapt to new learning environments, peer dynamics, and, in some cases, independence from family. The aim of this research is to examine differences in first year students' adjustment based on gender, culture, and domicile and living with parents or in a boarding house. The methodology employed in this study utilizes a descriptive comparative approach, which involves the integration of Two Way ANOVA with the Rasch Ranking Model. This integration is achieved by converting the raw data into logarithmic data. The study obtained politomy data using a self-adjustment scale instrument, which was disseminated online. The data were analyzed using the Rasch model. The findings show there are significant differences between the adjustment of male and female students, as well as between the Batak tribe and other tribes. Adjustment is influenced by interactions between gender and ethnicity, as well as between ethnicity and place of residence. However, no major differences in adjustment were observed with respect to specific residences or housing types.</p>
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INTRODUCTION

The tendency for students to experience a transition period from high school to higher education is a period full of challenges for their academic and emotional adjustment from school to campus (Eshiemogie et al., 2022; Kwon, 2013). Adjustment refers to the act of making necessary adaptations to meet various needs and limitations, while also ensuring the ability to coexist and collaborate with others through meaningful interactions and relationships (Akhtar & Alam, 2016). Furthermore, freshmen encounter diminished levels of adaptation to college life in comparison to students in subsequent years (Ahn & Lim, 2005). The first year of college is a challenging period of transition and can serve as a crucial step towards successfully adapting to college life (Hong, 2018). Freshmen at college experience not simply a shift in their environment, but also a range of factors that arise from transitioning from high school to college. Creativity is a frequently discussed term in recent study on the adaptation to college life, and it is prevalent in the lectures, assignments, and team activities at a university (Lee et al., 2013). Creativity is also a major component that affects nursing college students' problem-solving skills along with their flexibility (Kim et al., 2018).

Ramsay et al. (2007) describe this phenomenon as a "dynamic process" that has the potential to result in a suitable alignment between an individual and their surroundings. The process of adapting to university life for students is seen as a multidimensional and intricate phenomenon (Sevinç & Gizir, 2014). Adolescents experience a diminished sense of belonging in their classrooms

and a heightened focus on academic performance and competition during this transitional phase (Salmela-Aro, 2017). Additionally, their perception of the emotional support they receive from their instructors diminishes. During periods of transitioning between schools, students face a higher likelihood of quitting school. This makes these transitions a crucial stage for identifying early indications of academic and emotional difficulties (Virtanen et al., 2018). Students' school involvement (Skinner, 2016), achievement (Hattie & Anderman, 2013), burnout (Chang & Lee, 2020), and teacher-student conflict (Longobardi et al., 2016) are all important parts of academic and emotional adjustment. Skinner (Skinner, 2016) stated that students' school engagement is the most important aspect of adjustment.

In the context of educational transition, adjustment for most overseas students does not only occur in the transition from primary to secondary education, but also includes their unique experiences in enrolling in universities and colleges. For the majority of overseas students, the process of enrolling at American universities and colleges can be a daunting experience involving significant adjustments in both their personal and cultural lives. Studies (Erichsen & Bolliger, 2011) have examined the difficulties and obstacles faced by overseas students enrolled in higher education institutions in the United States. The challenges encompass language barriers, struggles in adapting to the academic environment, misinterpretation, and complexities in communicating with professors and classmates. Additionally, students may experience stress, anxiety, a sense of isolation, cultural shock, financial difficulties, inadequate housing options, and feelings of loneliness due to changes in their daily routines. The multicultural personality encompasses several key traits, including emotional stability, social initiative, open-mindedness, flexibility, and cultural empathy. These traits enable individuals to remain calm in stressful situations, establish new relationships, embrace diverse worldviews, adapt to changing circumstances, and understand different cultural perspectives (Van Der Zee & Van Oudenhoven, 2001).

A recent study conducted by Russell et al. (2010) among 900 international students in Australia revealed that 41% of them encounter significant levels of stress. The stress may arise from feelings of homesickness, cultural disorientation, or imagined instances of discrimination. However, in contrast to (Mohamed, 2012) explanation, living arrangements can indeed be a determinant of college assimilation; specifically, students who reside with their families rather than on campus forge an advantage are deprived of such benefits. Hwang et al. (2014) did a study at a prominent institution in Texas to examine the usage of counseling services among international students. The data gathered during the six-year study revealed that a significant number of international students rely on their family and friends for support while facing challenges or experiencing psychological issues. Regrettably, not all students receive the necessary help, and a significant number of individuals lacked empathy towards hosting international students. Despite the availability of a counseling service at the university, it was underutilized by overseas students. Counseling was often perceived as a substitute for social support from family and friends, typically sought by students lacking any close relationships (Delaney, 2017; Miswanto et al., 2016, 2023). Maganga & Martin (2009) also identifies the propensity of international students to form groups with students from the same ethnicity or origin as a barrier to social adaptation, in addition to language and communication barriers.

Language is widely recognized as a significant academic challenge that impedes the seamless adaptation of international students (Mesidor & Sly, 2016). The subsequent research emphasized the difficulties faced by international students in their academic pursuits. Robertson et al. (2000) conducted a survey to gather information about the experiences of staff members with overseas students. The results suggested that the personnel lacked empathy as a result of the pupils' limited language skills. International students were chastised for their lack of accountability in their academic progress. Several studies have also examined the difficulties that students have in language acquisition and adjusting to their new life in the United States. Liu stated that her limited English skills hindered her ability to fully engage with the host community (Lai, 2019; Liu, 2012). She experienced

difficulty comprehending the discourse of her lecturers and peers in her graduate-level courses. She encountered challenges in accomplishing routine tasks, such as navigating public transportation, purchasing groceries, or seeking assistance. In addition to the social isolation experienced from their classmates, some overseas students also encountered difficulties posed by their teachers. Terui (Terui, 2015) conducted an examination of the challenges faced by six international students when engaging with native speakers, utilizing ethnographic methods.

The existing literature provides a foundation for understanding the challenges and dynamics of students' initial transition into higher education. However, a notable gap exists in a systematic analysis of first-year student adaptation based on factors such as gender, cultural background, residence, and living arrangements with parents or in student housing. This research aims to fill this void by thoroughly examining the differences in first year students' adjustment based on gender, culture, domicile and living with parents or in a boarding house.

METHODS

Participants

Sampling used an incidental sampling technique (non-probability sampling), the sample in this study consisted of 823 Universitas Negeri Medan students as respondents. The student respondents numbered 290 (35.2%) men and 533 (64.8%) women, consisting of several ethnicities in the city of Medan. Details of the sample in this study can be seen in table 2 below.

Procedures

The method in this research uses comparative descriptive, namely combining Two Way Anova. Respondents were given a self-adjustment instrument site consisting of 115 statements which were distributed online. Each respondent can choose one of the 5 alternative answers provided and is given 45 minutes to fill out the self-adjustment instrument.

Measures

Data was collected using a self-adjustment scale using a 5-point Likert scale with answer choices ranging from very suitable to very unsuitable. The self-adjustment scale measures four aspects, namely: 1) academic adjustment, 2) social adjustment, 3) personal-emotional adjustment, and 4) goal-commitment institutional attachment developed by Baker & Siryk (1984) and Baker (1989), as for an example of one item " I am facing some problems in achieving some subjects". Before completing the research instrument, participants were asked to provide personal information, including their identity, gender, cultural background, domicile, and whether they lived with their parents or in a rented accommodation. This demographic data was collected to allow for a more detailed analysis of how these factors might influence the adjustment process. Reliability indicates that the quality of the answers given by each person for each test is good and the quality of the items used in the measurement is very good. While the value of each test on Cronbach's alpha (KR-20) is 0.99, this indicates that the interaction between people and items is good. The categorization of fit and misfit items on the instrument can be shown by comparing the MNSQ OUTFIT value of each instrument item with an average MNSQ OUTFIT value of +1.03 logit, this means that 115 items on the instrument are not misfit – the ideal fit is at MNSQ OUTFIT range 0.5 – 1.5 logit (Alagumalai, S., Curtis, D. D., & Hungj, 2005; Marsinun et al., 2020; Trevor G Bond & Christine Fox, 2015). Complete information on the quality of the self-adjustment scale can be seen in table 1.

Data Analysis

The research data were analyzed using the ANOVA within the Rasch model to examine the relationship between demographic factors and student adjustment levels. In the Rasch model analysis, data was transformed into interval-level measurements using the logit (log-odds unit) scale,

which represents the probability of a participant successfully endorsing an item (Alagumalai, Curtis, & Hungi, 2005; Linacre, 2022). Additionally, the ANOVA within the Rasch model (also known as Differential Item Functioning or DIF analysis) was used to assess whether there were significant differences in adjustment levels based on factors such as gender, cultural background, and living arrangements (e.g., staying with parents versus living in rented accommodation). This ANOVA analysis helps to determine whether these variables influence students' academic, social, and emotional adjustments during their first year at university (Hafni et al., 2023; Sumintono, 2015; Syahputra et al., 2022).

Table 1. Adjustment Scale Quality (Item = 115)

Estimation	Values
Item Reliabilities	.99
Person reliabilities	.94
CRONBACH ALPHA (KR-20)	.99
Separation index of Item	11.94
Mean Item	.00
Mean person	.15
Mean INFIT MNSQ item	.99
Mean INFIT MNSQ person	1.01
Mean OUTFIT MNSQ item	1.03
Mean OUTFIT MNSQ person	1.03
Raw Variance Explained by measures	38,8%

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Research results on differences in student adjustment based on gender, ethnicity, domicile and living. Furthermore, the adjustment test based on gender, ethnicity, domicile and living is presented in Table 2. The table 2 presents demographic information and associated statistical measures for a sample of 823 students, emphasizing their self-adjustment. Gender distribution shows that 64.8% are female with a slightly negative mean measure in the context of adjustment, while 35.2% are male with a positive mean measure. Ethnically, a majority are Batak individuals (71.6%), with Minang and Melayu ethnicities exhibiting higher mean measures, possibly indicative of diverse adjustment experiences. Domicile data illustrates a fairly balanced distribution between city and village dwellers in terms of students' adaptive capacities. Living arrangements indicate that 64.8% of student's board, showing a positive mean measure in the context of adjustment, while 35.2% live with parents, displaying a slightly higher mean measure. The table provides a comprehensive overview of the sample's composition and key statistical measures, shedding light on students' adjustment experiences.

Table 3 presents disparities in student adaptation according to gender, ethnicity, place of residence, and living arrangements. The investigation revealed notable disparities in adjustment based on gender and ethnicity, with intricate interplays between these variables. More precisely, there are notable disparities in the adaptation of male and female pupils, as well as between the Batak ethnic group and other ethnic groups. Adjustment is influenced by the interactions between gender and ethnicity, as well as between ethnicity and place of residence. Nevertheless, there were no notable disparities in adjustment observed in relation to place of residence or the specific type of home. These findings offer a comprehensive understanding of the aspects that can impact student adaptation within a given situation.

Apart from that, an interesting finding is that students from the Javanese ethnic group are lower compared to other ethnic groups such as Batak and Malay, where the Malay and Batak ethnic

groups are the dominant ethnicity. In addition, Malay and Batak ethnicities are the ethnic background in the city of Medan (Wijaya et al., 2021). Meanwhile, if viewed from a gender aspect, men are better able to adapt to Universitas Negeri Medan than women. For more details, you can see in the picture below the differences in adjustment in terms of gender, ethnicity, domicile, and living with (parents or guardians) of students at Universitas Negeri Medan.

Tabel 2. Descriptive Test of Student Adjustment

Demographics	Code	n (%)	Mean Measure	S. E.	SD	Median
Total Sample	*	823 (100%)	0.15	0.08	2.22	0.39
Gender						
Female	F	533 (64.8%)	-0.03	0.09	2.08	0.39
Male	M	290 (35.2%)	0.48	0.15	2.41	0.39
Etnis						
Batak	B	589 (71.6%)	0.21	0.09	2.08	0.39
Jawa	J	173 (21%)	-0.27	0.18	2.29	0.39
Minang	M	29 (3.5%)	1.08	0.68	3.51	0.46
Melayu	U	32 (3.9%)	0.31	0.43	2.34	0.35
Domicile						
City	C	442 (53.7%)	0.18	0.12	2.35	0.39
Village	V	381 (46.3%)	0.11	0.11	2.05	0.39
Living						
Boarding	B	533 (64.8%)	0.12	0.10	2.15	0.41
Parent	P	290 (35.2%)	0.20	0.14	2.34	0.35

Table 3. Differences in Adjustment in Based on Gender, Etnis, Domicile, and Living

No	Differentiated Aspects	Distinct Item	Tests of Between	
			F	Sig.
1	Gender	Male	9.50	0.00
		Female		
2	Etnis	Batak	3.77	0.01
		Jawa		
		Minang		
		Melayu		
3	Domicile	City	0.16	0.69
		Village		
4	Living	Parent	0.23	0.64
		Boarding		
5	Gender * Etnis		3.03	0.00
6	Gender * Domicile		1.17	0.28
7	Gender * Living		0.12	0.73
8	Etnis * Domicile		3.94	0.00
9	Etnis * Living		0.07	0.97
10	Domicile*Living		0.30	0.82
11	Gender * Etnis * Domicile * Living		1.69	0.0157

Figure 1 presents very interesting information about the comparison of adjustment between male students (identified by Code M and shown by the red line) and female students (identified by Code F and shown by the blue line). Through graphic visualization, it can be clearly seen that the level of adjustment of male students consistently shows higher numbers compared to female students throughout the observation interval. This consistent increase, depicted in the trend of the red line persistently above the blue line, provides a strong indication that male students have higher levels of

adjustment than their female counterparts. These findings may provide a valuable contribution to understanding differences in adjustment between college students based on gender.

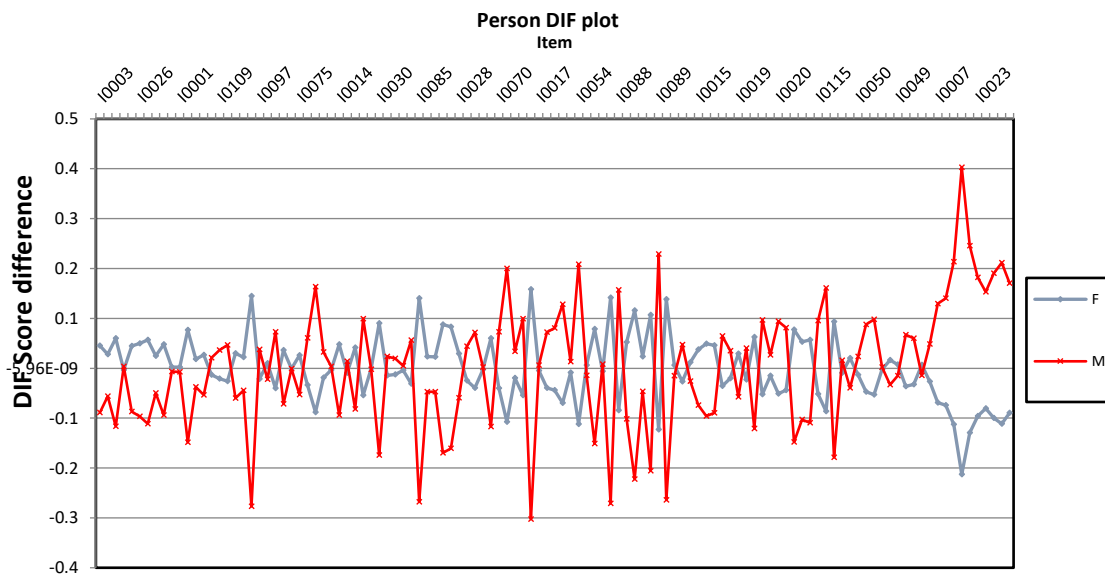


Figure 1. Student Adjustment (Gender) – Male (M); F (Female)

Apart from that, this study involves an in-depth review of adjustment based on ethnic factors in Medan City, which includes four main ethnic groups: Batak, Javanese, Minang, and Malay. Further observations regarding differences in adjustment among these ethnic groups are illustrated in more detail through a visual presentation in Figure 2. The results of this visualization provide a more detailed view of how levels of adjustment vary across ethnic groups, enriching our understanding of dynamics of adjustment amidst ethnic diversity in the city of Medan.

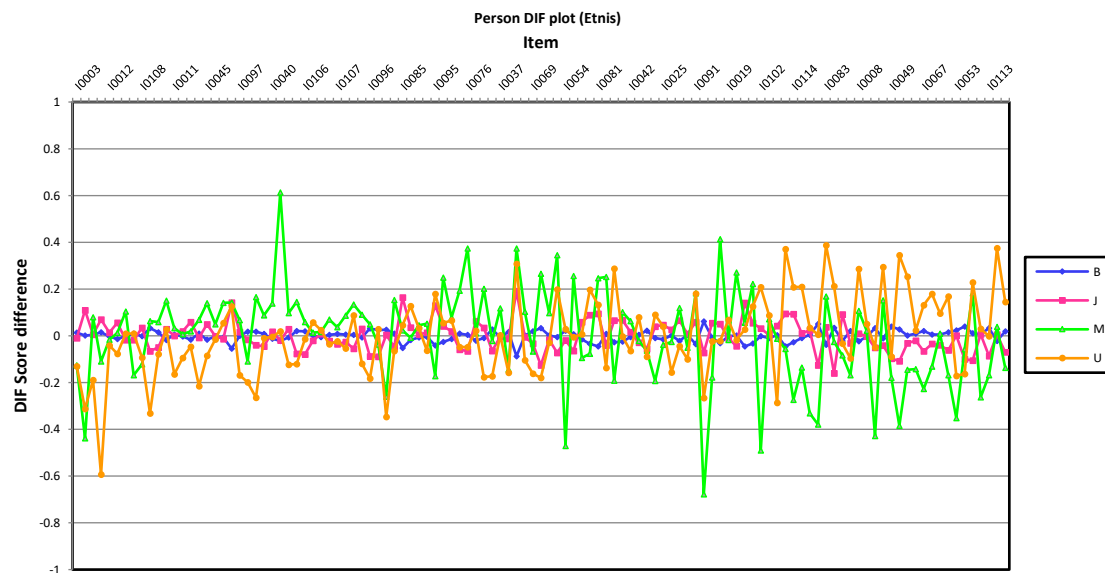


Figure 2. Student Adjustment (Ethnicity) – B (Batak); J (Jawa); M (Minang); U (Melayu)

Overall, Figure 2 illustrates the dominance of the Minang line or code M (Minang) in providing responses to the self-adjustment instrument. However, it is important to note that although the Minang line appears to dominate, this cannot be used as the main benchmark because the amount of data collected is too small or not statistically representative. Therefore, to maintain the reliability of the analysis results, the main reference used is the Malay ethnicity, which received the second highest ranking in the average value of self-adjustment. This approach was taken to ensure that

research results reflect more consistent and reliable trends, as well as minimizing potential bias that may arise due to limited data from certain ethnic groups.

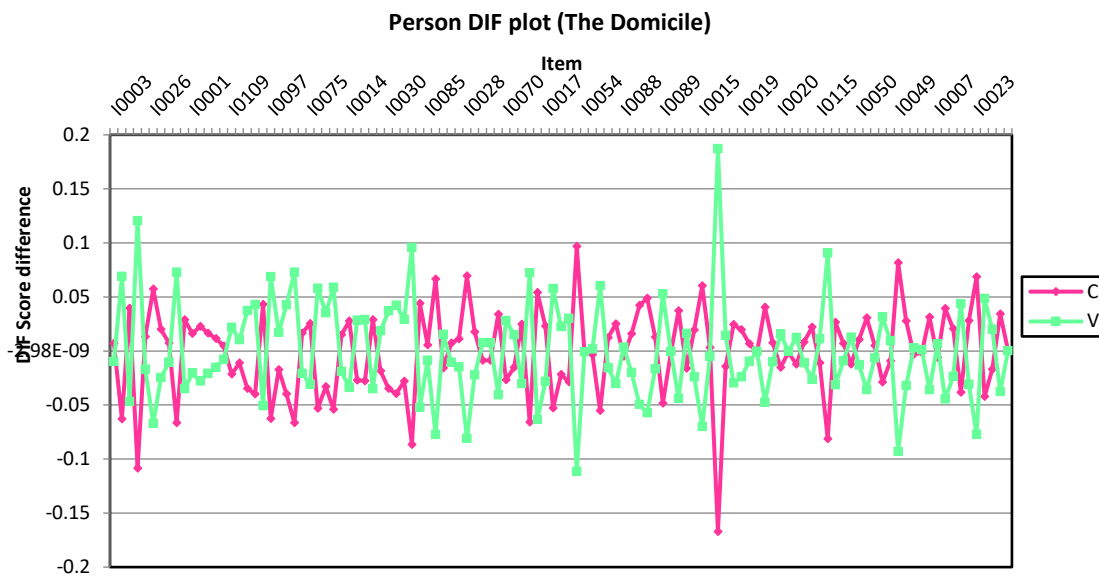


Figure 3. Student Adjustment (Domicile) – C (City); V (Village)

In Figure 3, it is clearly seen that students from cities show a slightly higher level of adjustment compared to their counterparts from villages. The results of this visualization provide a real picture of the differences in adjustment between these two groups, highlighting the tendency of urban students to adjust more easily to the educational environment. This understanding can be the basis for designing more specific support and intervention programs to improve the adaptation of students, especially those from urban or rural backgrounds.

Discussion

The research results show the importance of first-year students' adjustment to college, as expressed by Ahn & Lim (2005), first-year college students also adjust less to college life (Ahn & Lim, 2005). Freshmen year is the hardest transition and may be the key to college success (Hong, 2018). College life for freshmen may entail environmental changes and other variables related to the high school-to-college transfer. In recent studies on college life adjustment, creativity has been introduced and is found in most university lectures, assignments, and team activities (Lee et al., 2013). Nursing college students' problem-solving and adaptation depend on creativity (Kim et al., 2018). Through this research, it was revealed that there were real differences in the level of adjustment between students based on gender. These findings firmly indicate that men have a tendency to show a higher level of adjustment ability compared to female students. In detailing these results, it appears that certain aspects of the academic and social context may be driving these differences. In addition to the inclination of women to encounter greater levels of stress compared to men, variations in personal-emotional adjustment between male and female students might be attributed to the heightened sensitivity of women towards physical disorders (Leventhal et al., 1992). An additional factor contributing to the variances in how males and females navigate tension and physical health concerns during the transition to college is the influence of social norms. In contrast to women, who are not subject to this social pressure to endure pain or other grievances, men are expected to exhibit fortitude (Taylor, 2015). Due to this sensitivity to physical disorders and differences in social pressure, female students may be more likely than their male counterparts to report emotional and physical complaints they experience during the transition period, resulting in relatively low scores on the emotional personal adjustment subscale.

The findings of this study align with prior research, indicating that there is no notable disparity in the average institutional attachment scores between male and female students (Fernández et al., 2017). This institutional attachment aims to assess student happiness regarding their decision to study and select the current institution. Therefore, it is expected that there are no notable disparities between the two gender groups. A study conducted in Belgium on first-year students found no discernible disparity in institutional attachment between students who reside alone near campus and those who reside with their family (Beyers & Goossens, 2002). If viewed from a cultural perspective, what are interesting are the students from the Batak culture who study at Universitas Negeri Medan.

This help from parents is linked to the three things that Batak people want in life that give them hope. People often call these three things "3H," which stands for Hamoraon, Hagabeon, and Hasangapon. Hamoraon means having a lot of money or things. Hagabeon means that there are many children who will carry on the family name. Hasangapon, on the other hand, is happy with his life (Dalimunthe & Lubis, 2019). The Batak people do everything they can to make sure these three well-known things happen in their lives. People who are married in Batak will try hamoraon, hasangapon, and hagabeon for their children as well. Because of this, Batak parents are ready and willing to help their kids go to big cities or even cities outside of Sumatra Island to finish their education. They want their kids to be more successful than their parents and have a better job and life. No matter where they live, Batak people tend to stay connected to their tribe's customs. The Batak tribe tries to keep their tribal identity even when they live outside of Batak by joining clan groups and marrying other Batak people. This is done to keep the traditions of the Batak culture alive.

Psychological adjustment refers to an individual's personal perception of suffering and their ability to operate effectively in everyday life (Cruz et al., 2020; Yildirim & Solmaz, 2021). Academic adjustment refers to a student's favorable attitude and appreciation of their academic tasks and surroundings (Wu et al., 2015). Social adjustment refers to an individual's capacity to adapt to their social environment by engaging in suitable and efficient social interaction (Lipka et al., 2020). Research has shown that the process of pupils adapting to their new environment has a positive impact on their academic achievements and social interactions (Alharthi, 2020; Fajri et al., 2023). Individuals who exhibit a high degree of psychological adjustment demonstrate the capacity to function effectively in the midst of crises (Lipka et al., 2020). Research has found a strong correlation between high levels of positive psychological adjustment and improvements in a student's satisfaction and overall quality of life. Additionally, this positive adjustment has been shown to decrease the negative effects of student melancholy, anxiety, stress, and burnout (Bantjes & Kagee, 2018; Ildil et al., 2022; Syahputra et al., 2024). Previous research has demonstrated a correlation between students' social and academic adaptation and their ability to study effectively and attain higher academic performance (Sujana et al., 2021).

CONCLUSION

The findings show there are significant differences between the adjustment of male and female students, as well as between the Batak tribe and other tribes. Adjustment is influenced by interactions between gender and ethnicity, as well as between ethnicity and place of residence. However, no major differences in adjustment were observed with respect to specific residences or housing types. The implication is that future research could deepen understanding of these complex interactions and involve factors such as social support, campus environment, and interpersonal relationship patterns to improve student adjustment.

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