



## *The Level of Psychological Adjustment Among University Students (A Field Study)*

مستوى التكيف النفسي لدى طلبة الجامعة (دراسة ميدانية)

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Received: 20/09/2025

published: 15/03/2026

تاريخ النشر: 2026/03/15

تاريخ الاستلام: 2025/09/20

### **Article abstract:**

This research investigated psychological adaptation among 23 students at Tizi Ouzou University, finding no significant gender or socioeconomic differences using Rogers' (1961) adapted instrument. Analysis through descriptive statistics and t-tests revealed generally high psychological adjustment levels among participants. The study emphasizes academic advisors' crucial role and recommends implementing enhanced support systems featuring mental health counseling and structured mentoring programs.

**Keywords :** Psychological Adjustment; ; University Students ; Gender ; Socioeconomic Status.

### **ملخص المقال :**

هدفت هذه الدراسة إلى تقييم مستوى التكيف النفسي لدى الطلبة الجامعيين لدى 23 طالباً في جامعة تيزي وزو، باستخدام المنهج الوصفي التحليلي واستبيان كارل روجرز (1961) المعدلة. خللت البيانات من خلال الإحصاء الوصفي واختبارات "ت". أشارت النتائج إلى مستوى عالٍ من التوافق النفسي وعدم وجود أي فروق ذات دلالة إحصائية بناءً على الجنس أو الحالة الاقتصادية. تؤكد الدراسة على الدور الحاسم للمستشارين الأكاديميين وتوصي بتنفيذ أنظمة دعم محسنة تشمل تقديم خدمات الاستشارات النفسية وبرامج الإرشاد المنظمة.

**كلمات مفتاحية:** التكيف النفسي ; الطلبة الجامعيون ; الجنس ; الحالة الاقتصادية.

## Introduction

A student's psychological well-being is deeply influenced by their foundational upbringing, which encompasses their educational background, moral principles, and the prevailing customs, traditions, and values of their society. The transition to a university environment often introduces students to unfamiliar social frameworks and organizational norms that can differ significantly from their established ones. This shift frequently generates substantial internal and external pressures, compelling students to navigate and often adopt new life standards. The ensuing adaptation process is critical, as it profoundly impacts their emotional equilibrium and overall psychological adjustment.

### 1. Research Problem:

The core elements of an individual's upbringing—their educational background, ingrained habits, traditions, and value system—act as fundamental mechanisms for achieving psychological adaptation. These components form an integrated system that guides a person's conduct within their community by establishing ethical behavior, social etiquette, and cultural benchmarks, all of which ensure alignment with societal expectations. Significant difficulty can arise when an individual must reconcile these deeply embedded frameworks with new, contrasting norms. This challenge is frequently observed among students entering university, where the effort to adapt to novel circumstances can trigger psychological distress. This distress often stems from a conflict between their pre-existing regulatory frameworks and the new standards they encounter, potentially disrupting their personal harmony and their interactions with peers and instructors. Based on this premise, the following research questions can be formulated:

### 2. Research Questions

- To what extent are university students psychologically adjusted?
- Are there statistically significant differences in psychological adjustment levels based on gender?
- Are there statistically significant differences in psychological adjustment levels based on socioeconomic status

### 3. Research Hypotheses

- University students demonstrate a high level of psychological adjustment.
- A statistically significant difference in psychological adjustment exists between male and female students.
- A statistically significant difference in psychological adjustment exists among students from different socioeconomic backgrounds.

### 4. Research Objectives:

This study seeks to achieve the following aims:

- To assess the degree of psychological adjustment among the university student population.
- To investigate and compare differences in psychological adjustment between male and female students.
- To examine the variations in psychological adjustment relative to students' economic standing.

## 5. Psychological Adjustment:

### 5.1. Definition and Concept:

Various scholars have defined psychological adjustment. Salah Makhaimar describes it as a dual-process involving the acceptance of an unchangeable reality (which can indicate rigidity, passivity, and surrender) and the active modification of a changeable reality (which reflects flexibility, positivity, innovation, and progression). He posits that this process forces an individual to either sacrifice their sense of self or to assert and impose it upon the external world. The outcome of this struggle is critical; failure may lead to neurosis, while success can result in genius (Zahran, 2005, p. 29).

From another perspective, psychological adjustment is defined as an individual's capacity to manage anxiety and to cultivate a sense of security and tranquility, thereby minimizing feelings of fear and tension (Zahran, 2005, p. 84).

Researcher Hamed Zahran further suggests that psychological adjustment is synonymous with personal congruence. It signifies an individual's happiness and self-satisfaction, stemming from the fulfillment of both innate, primary (internal) drives and secondary, acquired (external) motives. This fulfillment results in an internal state of peace. Additionally, Zahran notes that adjustment encompasses successfully navigating the demands of growth across various successive stages of life (Zahran, 1994, p. 19).

Iglal Serry defines the concept as a continuous, dynamic process. In this process, an individual strives to achieve a state of balance and harmony by modifying their own behavior and their environment (both natural and social), while also learning to accept the aspects that cannot be changed.

### 5.2. Coping Mechanisms:

Individuals naturally seek to fulfill their needs and motivations through socially acceptable means, which fosters personality equilibrium during their interaction with the physical and social environment. This process facilitates psychological and social adjustment through healthy methods and strategies. When encountering obstacles that block their goals and cause frustration, people employ various coping mechanisms. Some of these strategies involve directly confronting the problem, while others are indirect, utilizing alternative means.

Consequently, Abdel Moneim El-Meligi and Helmy El-Meligi (1970) propose that coping styles can be categorized as follows:

- Direct Confrontation: Facing obstacles or problems head-on.
- Substitution with Positive Value: Replacing an unattainable goal with an alternative of positive worth.
- Negative/Passive Approach: Characterized by withdrawal and neglect of the problem.

When an individual uses the direct confrontation approach, they remain in a state of continuous activity. Successful adjustment through this method contributes to ego strength and enhances the individual's sense of self-worth. Employing this coping strategy fortifies personality and prepares the individual to handle future challenges.

Substitute behavior can be either positive or negative. Positive substitute behavior can sometimes represent a more logical form of adjustment than direct confrontation. Conversely, negative substitute behavior in adjustment involves activities that use evasive tactics to escape realistic confrontation, ultimately weakening the individual's ability to address the problem.

Naturally, no individual relies solely on direct confrontation or an intelligent alternative method at all times. Everyone occasionally uses evasion and withdrawal. However, a strong personality tends to utilize the first two styles, while a weak personality typically resorts to the latter two when facing difficulties.

Based on this framework, coping mechanisms can be summarized as follows:

### 5.3 Indirect Coping Mechanisms:

When striving to regain equilibrium, an individual often resorts to a set of coping strategies. These can involve dealing with events directly and pragmatically, such as diverting attention to hobbies or other

activities. Alternatively, they may employ indirect methods through the use of defense mechanisms or psychological strategies.

Defense mechanisms are "a group of unconscious psychological processes, initially referred to as psychological defense methods or mechanisms by Sigmund Freud. They constitute a mixture of psychological strategies through which an individual deceives themselves when confronted with a threat or perceives external danger. Each psychological strategy represents the mental activity used to overcome a source of threat or danger in a specific way. Typically, all these strategies temporarily reduce the intensity of the feeling of threat or frustration. It is important to note that, from a strictly Freudian perspective, this is a distortion of reality" (Al-Qaddafi, 1998).

**\*Unconscious Strategies:** These are types of behavior and actions aimed at resolving a psychological crisis and alleviating mental distress. They are unintentional strategies that an individual emits automatically, without thought or awareness of their true motives. They represent a form of indirect adjustment. Abdel Hamid Mohamed Shadhli (2001) classified them into five groups, as follows:

## 6. Review of Previous Literature

**6.1. Belarossi (2015):** A study examining the nature of psychosocial adjustment among first-year university students and its relationship to their academic adaptation. The study concluded that the transition to university life presents significant psychological and social pressures, particularly during the first year. Students encounter challenges in three primary areas: academic adjustment (due to difficult curricula and different teaching methods), social adjustment (stemming from separation from family and the need to form new friendships), and personal-emotional adjustment (related to feelings of loneliness, anxiety, and depression).

**6.2. Al-Otaibi, Maha bint Marzan (2012):** A study investigating mental health and its relationship to university adjustment among a sample of students at King Saud University. The findings indicated that students demonstrated a moderate overall level of both university adjustment and mental health. A positive correlation was identified between social congruence and university adjustment, whereas negative correlations were found between anxiety, depression, and the level of adjustment. The study also revealed differences in adjustment levels favoring male students and those enrolled in scientific specializations. However, no statistically significant differences were attributed to the academic level (year of study)..

**6.3. Van Rooij, Jansen, and Van de Grift (2018):** This study explored the psychological and academic adjustment of first-year university students during the transition to higher education. The results revealed that students experienced notable stress during the initial semester, particularly related to academic demands and self-regulation skills. Social integration and perceived support from peers and faculty were found to significantly predict better psychological adjustment and academic engagement.

**6.4. Chemers, Hu, and Garcia (2020):** This study examined the role of perceived social support and self-efficacy in university students' adjustment and mental well-being. The findings indicated that students who reported higher levels of academic self-efficacy and social support showed better academic and emotional adjustment, as well as lower levels of stress and anxiety. The study highlighted the mediating role of self-efficacy in the relationship between social support and university adjustment.

**6.5. Wilcox, Winn, and Fyvie-Gauld (2021):** This qualitative study investigated social adjustment experiences among first-year university students. The results showed that forming friendships and establishing a sense of belonging were critical factors in successful university adjustment. Students who experienced social isolation reported higher levels of psychological distress, whereas institutional support and participation in student activities facilitated better social and emotional adaptation.

## 7. Research Methodology:

This study employed an analytical descriptive design. As defined by Lamoureux (1995), this approach enables researchers to depict phenomena as they exist in reality while identifying relationships between different elements. This methodology extends beyond mere data collection to the analysis of interrelationships and the interpretation of findings, ultimately contributing to the process of making practical improvements and advancements (Maamari, 2014).

## 8. Study Sample:

The research sample consisted of 23 students from the University of Tizi Ouzou who completed the online questionnaire. The small size of the sample is mainly attributed to the low level of participation in responding to the electronic questionnaire, which is a common constraint in this type of research. Despite efforts to widely disseminate the questionnaire link, the low response rate limited the possibility of increasing the sample size. Nevertheless, the sample remains appropriate for the nature of the study, as it falls within descriptive exploratory research that does not aim at statistical generalization. Moreover, the homogeneity of the participants in terms of their university affiliation enhances the internal validity of the findings within their methodological limits.

### 9.1. Sample Characteristics:

#### 9.1. Gender Distribution of the Sample:

Table 1. Gender Distribution of Participants

| Gender | Frequency | Percentage |
|--------|-----------|------------|
| Male   | 03        | 13.04%     |
| Female | 20        | 86.95%     |
| Total  | 23        | 100%       |

Source: Researcher's preparation based on SPSS output

Table 1 indicates that the majority of participants were female, constituting 86.95% of the sample, while males represented 13.04%.

#### 9.2. Economic Distribution of the Sample:

Table 2. Economic Status of Participants

| Economic Category | Frequency | Percentage |
|-------------------|-----------|------------|
| Low               | 0         | 0 %        |
| Middle            | 17        | 73.91%     |
| High              | 6         | 26.08%     |
| Total             | 10        | 100%       |

Source: Researcher's preparation based on SPSS output

Table 2 shows that most sample members reported a medium economic status (73.91%), followed by a good economic status (26.08%). No participants fell into the low economic status category..

## 9. Research Instrument:

The present study employed a modified version of Carl Rogers' questionnaire (Rogers, 1961), selecting only 10 items based on methodological and scientific considerations aimed at effectively achieving the research objectives. Limiting the number of items was appropriate given the sample size and characteristics, as it helps reduce participant fatigue and enhances the accuracy of responses, particularly in online surveys. The chosen items were carefully selected to reflect the dimensions most relevant to the psychological adjustment variable under investigation, ensuring alignment between the measurement tool and the study's goals. The questionnaire items were adapted and phrased to suit the Algerian university context while preserving the original meaning of the scale. A three-point Likert scale (Agree – Neutral – Disagree) was used for ease of understanding and response, assigning 3 points for "Agree," 2 points for "Neutral," and 1 point for "Disagree" in positively worded items. The total possible score ranged from 10 to 30 points, with a midpoint of 20 (10 items  $\times$  2) set as the reference threshold to interpret the level of psychological adjustment.

## 10. Psychometric Properties:

The instrument used in this study demonstrates satisfactory psychometric qualities. It is based on the original version of the Psychological Adjustment Questionnaire, whose validity and reliability have been confirmed in prior research, notably by Baker and Siryk (1999), who reported strong construct validity and internal consistency when the scale was administered to university students. Additionally, applied studies within Algerian universities have indicated that adapted versions of this questionnaire are appropriate, showing acceptable reliability coefficients and content validity after items were modified to reflect the local cultural context. Therefore, the instrument employed in this study is considered psychometrically sound for addressing the research objectives, with the understanding that its results should be interpreted in light of the sample characteristics and the specific research setting.

## 11. Statistical Analysis Methods:

To address the research questions and test the study's hypotheses, both descriptive and analytical statistical methods were employed. The data were coded and processed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 25, to achieve the following analytical objectives:

Descriptive statistics were calculated to characterize the study sample and display its properties, including arithmetic means and standard deviations, to answer the research questions.

An independent samples t-test was applied to determine the statistical significance of differences between the means of two independent groups. This test was used to examine differences in psychological adjustment based on the variables of gender and economic status.

## 12. Presentation and Analysis of Results:

### - Identifying the Domains:

Three response options were adopted: Agree - Neutral - Disagree. Accordingly, the levels were determined as follows:

Range =  $(3 - 1) / 3 = 0.66$

Low: [1, 1.66]

Medium: [1.66, 2.32]

High: [2.32, 3]

### 12.1. Presentation, Interpretation, and Discussion of the First Partial Hypothesis:

The first partial hypothesis states that the level of psychological adjustment among university students is high. Given that the total number of items is (10), the score ranges were distributed as follows:

Low: [10, 16.6]

Medium: [16.6, 23.2]

High: [23.2, 30]

Table 3. Mean and Standard Deviation of Psychological Adjustment

|                          | Mean  | Standard Deviation |
|--------------------------|-------|--------------------|
| Psychological Adjustment | 26.39 | 3.72               |

Source: Prepared by the researcher based on SPSS output

SPSS analysis shows a mean score of  $\bar{X} = 26.39$  and a standard deviation of  $S = 3.72$ . The mean value falls within the high range [23.2, 30], indicating a high level of psychological adjustment. Consequently, the first partial hypothesis, which predicted a high level, is supported.

### 12.1. Analysis and Discussion of the First Partial Hypothesis:

The results of the first hypothesis indicate that the university student sample exhibited a high level of psychological adjustment. This finding aligns closely with the theoretical framework of the study and is consistent with several previous studies. For instance, Van Rooij, Jansen, and Van de Grift (2018) found that social integration and perceived support from peers and faculty significantly enhance first-year students' psychological adjustment. Similarly, Chemers, Hu, and Garcia (2020) reported that higher levels of academic self-efficacy and social support are associated with better academic and emotional adjustment and lower levels of stress and anxiety. Furthermore, the qualitative study by Wilcox, Winn, and Fyvie-Gauld (2021) highlighted that a sense of belonging and the formation of friendships are critical factors in successful social and emotional adjustment, which supports the observed high levels of psychological adjustment in our sample, especially if the university environment provides opportunities for social support and student engagement.

On the other hand, these findings contrast with some previous studies, such as Belarossi (2015) and Al-Otaibi (2012), which reported moderate or variable levels of psychological adjustment among first-year students due to academic, social, and personal pressures encountered during the transition to university life. This discrepancy can be attributed to several factors. Firstly, the small sample size (23 students) may have amplified the influence of individuals with higher adjustment levels, thus elevating the overall mean. Secondly, the unequal distribution of groups in terms of gender or academic specialization may affect natural variation in psychological adjustment, as prior research has indicated that male students or those in scientific disciplines tend to report higher adjustment levels (Al-Otaibi, 2012).

From a psychological perspective, these results can also be interpreted through psychosocial adjustment theory, which emphasizes the balance between personal and social pressures and the individual's ability to manage academic and emotional challenges. Additionally, Bandura's self-efficacy theory (1997) suggests that students with higher self-efficacy are more capable of adapting to university demands, which may explain the elevated adjustment levels in our sample, particularly when combined with notable social support from peers and faculty.

In conclusion, the high level of psychological adjustment observed in this study likely reflects an interaction of several factors, including sufficient social support, a sense of belonging, high self-efficacy, and individual student characteristics. However, these results should be interpreted cautiously due to the small sample size and unequal group distribution, which may limit the generalizability to the broader university student population.

### 12.2. Presentation, Interpretation, and Discussion of the Second Partial Hypothesis:

The second hypothesis proposed the existence of differences in the psychological adjustment of university students attributable to gender. To verify this hypothesis, we calculated the statistical significance of differences in psychological adjustment between male and female students using an independent samples t-test for unequal group sizes. The results were as follows:

**Table 4. Means and Standard Deviations of Psychological Adjustment by Gender**

| Gender | Sample Size (n) | Arithmetic Mean ( $\bar{X}$ ) | Standard Deviation (S) |
|--------|-----------------|-------------------------------|------------------------|
| Male   | 3               | 29                            | 1                      |
| Female | 20              | 26                            | 3.83                   |

Source: Prepared by the researcher based on SPSS output

Table 4 shows that the mean score for males was  $\bar{X}=29$ , while for females it was  $\bar{X}=26$ . The primary question remains whether the difference between these means is statistically significant.

**Table 5. Results of the t-test for Differences in Psychological Adjustment by Gender**

| t-value | df | Sample Means |        | Sig  |
|---------|----|--------------|--------|------|
|         |    | First        | Second |      |
| 1.32    | 21 | 26           | 29     | 0.20 |

Source: Prepared by the researcher based on SPSS output

Table 5 shows a significance value (sig. / p-value = 0.20), or 20%, which exceeds the standard significance level of 0.05 (5%). Consequently, we fail to reject the null hypothesis, which states there are no statistically significant differences in psychological adjustment based on gender. The alternative hypothesis, suggesting statistically significant gender-based differences, is rejected. Therefore, the second hypothesis is not supported.

#### 12.2.1. Analysis and Discussion of the Second Partial Hypothesis:

The results of the second hypothesis indicate that there were no statistically significant differences in psychological adjustment levels between male and female university students. This suggests that gender does not have a substantial effect on students' psychological adjustment within the current sample. This finding aligns with several recent studies emphasizing that psychosocial adjustment in higher education is influenced more strongly by environmental and psychological factors than by demographic variables such as gender. For example, Van Rooij, Jansen, and Van de Grift (2018) found that social integration and perceived support from peers and faculty were key predictors of first-year students' academic and psychological adjustment, while gender played a secondary or minimal role. Similarly, Chemers, Hu, and Garcia (2020) reported that academic self-efficacy and social support were stronger determinants of both academic and emotional adjustment than demographic characteristics.

From a theoretical perspective, this pattern can be interpreted through the multidimensional psychosocial adjustment theory, which posits that a student's ability to adjust is primarily shaped by environmental, social, and internal psychological factors—such as perceived support, self-efficacy, and academic stress—rather than fixed traits like gender. In addition, Bandura's self-efficacy theory (1997) supports the idea that students' beliefs in their ability to manage academic tasks and cope with stress are the main drivers of successful adjustment, irrespective of gender.

It is also important to interpret these results in light of the statistical analysis and sample characteristics. The small sample size and unequal gender distribution may limit the ability to detect subtle gender differences. Moreover, the relative homogeneity of the participants in terms of university affiliation and academic level

may have further minimized gender-related variation, reinforcing the conclusion that environmental and psychological factors exert a stronger influence on psychological adjustment than gender differences.

### 12.3. Presentation, Interpretation, and Discussion of the Third Partial Hypothesis:

The third hypothesis proposed the existence of differences in the psychological adjustment of university students attributable to economic status. To verify this hypothesis, we calculated the statistical significance of differences in psychological adjustment between students of good and medium economic status using an independent samples t-test for unequal group sizes. (Note: There were no students from low economic backgrounds in the sample). The results were as follows:

Table 6. Means and Standard Deviations of Psychological Adjustment by Economic Status

| Economic Status | Sample Size (n) | Arithmetic Mean ( $\bar{X}$ ) | Standard Deviation (S) |
|-----------------|-----------------|-------------------------------|------------------------|
| Middle          | 17              | 26.66                         | 4.34                   |
| Good            | 6               | 26.29                         | 0.81                   |

Source: Prepared by the researcher based on SPSS output

Table 6 shows that the mean score for the medium economic status group was  $\bar{X}=26.66$ , which is very close to the mean of the good economic status group,  $\bar{X}=26.29$ . The primary question remains whether the difference between these means is statistically significant.

Table 7. Results of the t-test for Differences in Psychological Adjustment by Economic Status

| t-value | df | Sample Means |        | Sig  |
|---------|----|--------------|--------|------|
|         |    | First        | Second |      |
| 0.83    | 21 | 26.66        | 26.29  | 0.20 |

Source: Prepared by the researcher based on SPSS output

Table 7 shows a significance value (sig. / p-value = 0.83), or 83%, which far exceeds the standard significance level of 0.05 (5%). Consequently, we fail to reject the null hypothesis, which states there are no statistically significant differences in psychological adjustment based on economic status. The alternative hypothesis, suggesting statistically significant differences attributable to economic status, is rejected. Therefore, the third hypothesis is not supported.

#### 12.3.1. Analysis and Discussion of the Third Partial Hypothesis:

The results of the third hypothesis indicate that there were no statistically significant differences in psychological adjustment levels among university students based on family economic status. This suggests that material conditions are not the primary factor influencing students' psychological adjustment. This finding is consistent with previous research highlighting the dominant role of psychological and social factors in university adjustment. For example, Van Rooij, Jansen, and Van de Grift (2018) and Chemers, Hu, and Garcia (2020) emphasized that social support, self-efficacy, and social integration are more critical determinants of psychological adjustment than demographic or economic variables. Similarly, the qualitative study by Wilcox, Winn, and Fyvie-Gauld (2021) found that a sense of belonging and effective social networks are key to successful adjustment, regardless of students' economic background.

From a theoretical perspective, this pattern can be interpreted through multidimensional psychosocial adjustment theory, which posits that an individual's adjustment capacity is primarily shaped by the interplay of social pressures and personal coping abilities rather than material resources. Additionally, Bandura's self-efficacy theory (1997) supports the idea that students' belief in their ability to manage academic and social challenges is the main determinant of psychological adjustment, irrespective of economic conditions.

It is important to consider these results in light of the statistical analysis and sample characteristics. The small sample size and unequal distribution of students across economic categories may limit the detection of subtle differences. Furthermore, the relative homogeneity of the university environment, including access to academic and social support services, may reduce the impact of economic disparities on psychological adjustment, reinforcing the conclusion that psychological and social factors are the primary drivers of adjustment in this context.

## Conclusion:

In conclusion, this study evaluated the favorable level of psychological adjustment among university students and identified key factors that promote this positive state. These factors include a focus on psychological and material support, the crucial role of academic advisors, and the necessity of implementing educational programs that encompass academic support systems, psychological counseling, and guidance. Enhancing equality in academic opportunities and access to services is fundamental for fostering student congruence with their peers, professors, and overall university life. This, in turn, leads to the modification and improvement of positive behaviors while reducing negative ones. Furthermore, the study's analysis of differences based on gender and economic status confirmed that these specific variables did not create significant variations. This finding suggests that other, more profound and influential factors are primarily responsible for shaping psychological adjustment outcomes.

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**Note:** This research paper utilized generative artificial intelligence tools solely for purposes of phrasing, translation, and language review. The intellectual content remains the full and sole responsibility of the author(s).