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## **FACILITATING FIRST-YEAR STUDENT ADAPTATION THROUGH THE STUDY OF “UNIVERSITY EDUCATION”**

*This paper focuses on the issue of transitioning from school to university education. It represents a critical phase in a student's life, requiring adaptation to new academic, social, and personal demands.*

*This process is essential for fostering independence, critical thinking, and time management skills that are pivotal for success in higher education. An important factor is adaptation to the structure of higher education itself because the framework of university learning significantly differs from secondary school education.*

*Students must also adapt to new social environments, often moving away from established support networks. Emotional and psychological challenges, such as homesickness and anxiety, are common during this period, necessitating robust support systems. The relevance of such transition remains constant due to the evolving requirements of higher education. As educational and societal expectations change, students face new challenges during this critical phase. Institutions must therefore prioritize effective transitional support to foster student success. Understanding and addressing the complexities of this transition is essential for improving students' future.*

*The analysis of employed methodologies is exposed in the article to adapt first-year students to academic life in universities across the United States and select European countries. This involved a comparative assessment of these practices against those utilized by Ukrainian educational institutions. Besides, synthesized qualitative data from direct student feedback is collected through the conducted survey and presented in this study.*

*It has been established that future research should explore the role of mentorship programs and peer support networks in mitigating transitional challenges, which could also provide valuable insights. Additionally, research on the differences in transition experiences across diverse demographic groups could inform more inclusive support strategies.*

**Keywords:** *higher education; adaptation; academic and personal adjustment; university structure.*

**Statement of the problem.** Higher education necessitates a self-directed approach to learning, making the transition from the

structured school environment both challenging and transformative. The persistent relevance of this issue lies in the ever-changing nature of education, driven by advancements in technology, globalization, and shifting societal needs. Rapid digitalization introduces novel learning tools and methods, compelling students to continually adapt to innovative academic practices. Additionally, the increasing diversity of student populations and the rise of interdisciplinary and non-traditional educational programs demand tailored support mechanisms.

As societal expectations and workforce requirements evolve, students face intensified pressure to acquire transferable skills alongside academic knowledge. This complexity ensures that transition challenges remain perennial, with no definitive solution. Some such requirements are obvious, absolutely logical, and constant. Nobody can object that effective assimilation fosters resilience, aiding students in coping with the stress of academic and personal adjustments (O'Donnell et al., 2016). Or that students who adapt well are better positioned to engage in campus and student activities, create a well-rounded university experience, and build supportive peer networks that enhance their social and emotional well-being (Piepenburg, Beckmann, 2021).

It ensures that students understand and utilize academic resources such as libraries, laboratories, workshops, counseling services, online learning platforms, and other tools (Jusri, Lechner, 2024).

**The article aims** to analyze the relevance and success of adapting first-year students to a higher education institution experience through teaching mandatory educational components, such as “University education”.

**Overview of related results.** There are many studies done on the topic, some of them examine how socio-emotional and academic challenges, along with coping mechanisms, affect students' adjustment to univer-

sity life. They show that both types of challenges hinder successful adjustment; however, effective strategies can alleviate these difficulties, emphasizing the critical role of support systems in strengthening coping abilities during the transition (Li, Lee, 2024).

Another study concentrates on students' psychological well-being, considering the important role of academic engagement, internal environment, and institutional support. It highlights the significance of university engagement, positive internal environments, and institutional support in promoting students' psychological well-being (Chaudhry et al., 2024). From an institutional management perspective, it is noteworthy that some research identifies potential negative outcomes associated with failed adaptation, highlighting the significant impact that inadequate adjustment can have on student socialization, performance, and overall institutional success (Woolcock, 2024).

Many universities offer specialized programs, courses, or workshops designed to help students adapt to higher education environments. These initiatives aim to ease the transition from high school to university by addressing academic, social, and psychological aspects of university life. These programs are tailored to address the diverse needs of incoming students, ensuring they have the support necessary to succeed in higher education. Some of these programs can be mandatory and incorporated into curricula to assist first-year students in adapting to higher education. These initiatives facilitate a smooth transition by familiarizing students with academic expectations, campus resources, and university life.

Consequently, higher education institutions must adopt dynamic and proactive strategies, continually refining support systems to address the evolving needs of transitioning students. Addressing this adaptation effectively is not just a necessity, but a cornerstone of ensuring student success in a rapidly changing educational landscape.

In the USA, University 101 courses (often called "College Success," "First-Year Seminar," or "Student Success" courses) are introductory programs designed to support first-year students in their transition to university life. These courses are more often than not a part of the mandatory curriculum for new students and focus on equipping them with the skills and knowledge necessary to succeed academically, socially, and personally in higher education. Their goals are to familiarize students with campus resources and academic support services (e.g., libraries, writing centers, tutoring), provide information about health, counseling, and

career services, and promote an understanding of academic integrity and plagiarism policies (University Colorado, 2025). They also teach time management, note-taking, and study techniques, emphasizing critical thinking, academic writing, and research skills. They can provide guidance on financial literacy and budgeting for college life, and highlight diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives (University Brigham, 2025).

European higher education institutions also offer orientation programs and courses designed to help students understand the structure of higher education and adapt to university life. While these may not be identical to the "University 101" courses, they serve a similar purpose in facilitating students' transition into higher education. Orientation Weeks in Germany known as "Orientierungswoche" introduce new students to academic life. They provide information about the university's structure, available resources, study regulations, and tips for successful studies. They often include campus tours, library introductions, and guidance on course selection (Universität Friedrich-Alexander, 2025). For example, Hochschule Darmstadt has a "Semester of Orientation" – a program designed for exploring different fields of study before committing to a specific degree program, giving new students insights into various disciplines, and helping them make informed decisions about their academic paths (Hochschule Darmstadt, 2025).

French universities provide several programs to help students transition into higher education. Some institutions offer integration programs designed to familiarize students with university life, academic expectations, and available resources ("Parcours d'Intégration") (Université de Lille, 2025).

In Spain, several universities offer "Programas de Acogida" to assist students in adapting to university life. These programs are designed to support domestic and international students, including those from refugee backgrounds (Universidad de Deusto, 2025).

Most European higher educational establishments (HEE) offer separate programs aimed at enhancing the linguistic component for international students or those needing to improve their language proficiency. Many universities have student associations that organize events to help newcomers integrate into campus life. Some have specific mentorship programs where senior students guide school graduates in the academic and social aspects. Such programs are integral in helping students navigate the complexities of European higher education systems, providing

them with the necessary tools and knowledge to succeed.

It is clear therefore that it is impossible to overestimate the importance of psycho-emotional support for first-year students at the beginning of their studies. Research devoted to this issue mostly highlights the significant role of different types of support in easing this transition and promoting academic success. Students often experience anxiety, social isolation, and academic pressure as they transition into their studies, that's why emotional support from peers and faculty, or psychological support through counseling services and peer groups can ease these difficulties and promote better integration into university culture (Ramírez-Martínez et al., 2024; Stokoe et al., 2024).

**Presentation of the main material.** The Poltava State Agrarian University, like most Ukrainian higher educational establishments, has a separate mandatory educational component, the objective of which is to conceptualize one's prospective specialty and career, identify the core characteristics of professional practice, and facilitate the transition to student life. Often, such subjects are called "University Education" or "Profession Introduction" aiming to familiarize students with the technologies and features of studying in a university, teach them to rationally manage their time, correctly plan tasks etc. Special attention is paid to academic integrity issues and accreditation of educational institutions or educational programs.

Discussing academic integrity with first-year students is crucial for several key reasons. It establishes a foundational comprehension of ethical standards requisite at a university level, fostering an environment of academic honesty and responsibility. Early engagement in this dialogue makes sure that students should know what constitutes academic misconduct, including plagiarism, cheating, and data fabrication. Upholding academic integrity is essential for maintaining fairness and equity, ensuring that no individual gains an undue advantage through dishonest practices, thereby preserving the integrity of the academic community. Engaging first-year students in discussions about academic integrity helps to protect the reputation of both the students and the institution. A breach in integrity can damage the credibility of a student's academic record and tarnish the institution's reputation, affecting future opportunities. Moreover, plagiarism, falsification of data, or other forms of academic dishonesty can have serious legal and ethical consequences, including academic penalties, suspension, or expulsion. By dis-

cussing academic integrity, students are informed about these potential consequences and can decide if cheating on an exam paper is worth the potential trouble (Familiarization of first-year students, 2025).

The student government at the Poltava State Agrarian University works with first-year students in two ways. The first is to hold various events during the 1st semester of their study, aimed at getting to know each other and the general team spirit mentality, the second is targeted at familiarizing students with the structure of self-government, its features, functions and includes a mentoring program for first-year student groups by senior students – members of the student government of the faculties. All held events are necessarily covered on the student council's social networks (Instagram, TikTok) and serve both for general information and the creation of interesting content, as well as for attracting new subscribers – those considering university enrollment (Events in student life, 2025). All this cultivates a sense of belonging, which is critical for motivation, retention, and overall success.

There are several other structures at the Poltava State Agrarian University aimed at helping students, not only at the beginning of their studies but throughout their entire course. The Psychological Service is engaged in educational work to improve the psychological culture of all educational process participants, advisory, and methodological assistance on maintaining mental health and forming effective communication strategies. It also provides psychological and socio-pedagogical support in various dangerous, stressful situations and crises. Additionally, special attention is now being paid to psychological resilience during wartime conditions (Psychological service, 2025).

The Institute of the Ombudsman for all participants in the educational process (Human Rights Commissioner) of the Poltava State Agrarian University is an administrative board tasked with overseeing the adherence to the rights and entitlements of all educational process members. The Ombudsman guarantees the protection of rights and prevents violations of the teachers' and students' rights, contributing to developing a legal culture that is based on the principles of independence, justice, initiative, responsibility, humanity, openness, objectivity, and accessibility (Ombudsman, 2025).

Furthermore, "Trust boxes" are specialized means of getting student feedback, providing the possibility of anonymous appeal to university management at various levels – from the dean to the rector. These "boxes" can function in physical and electronic formats,

...serving as mechanisms for collecting direct and objective evaluations of the university's initiatives. They facilitate enhanced transparency and impartiality by incorporating students' perspectives as integral stakeholders in the institutional educational process.

A targeted survey was administered to evaluate the efficacy of the "University Education" curriculum in enhancing the academic preparedness and adaptation of first-year students of the Faculty of Engineering and Technology. The survey was conducted in January 2025 and included questions addressing various aspects of the adaptation process of school graduates transitioning to university life. The survey questions were categorized into two primary groups: those addressing general aspects of the organization of the educational process within the university, and those focused on the social dimensions of student adaptation. The survey focused on evaluating the student's academic success, participation in faculty and university-level social events, and the comprehensiveness of the provided information about the university's structure and educational environment.

Specific questions were aimed to assess how the information conveyed through the curriculum facilitated students' adaptation to higher education. A special emphasis was placed on evaluating the method of information delivery, including its clarity, completeness, accessibility, and importance. The effectiveness of knowledge assimilation was assessed through interactive methods, such as the ALIAS and other games, and by analyzing student engagement in events designed for first-year students.

The survey results (Fig. 1) showed that out of 93.1% of first-year students who regularly attended "University Education" classes, a total of 87.9% of respondents demonstrated awareness of the existence and operational characteristics of the psychological services, ombudsman, trust boxes, and similar support structures within the Poltava State Agrarian University.

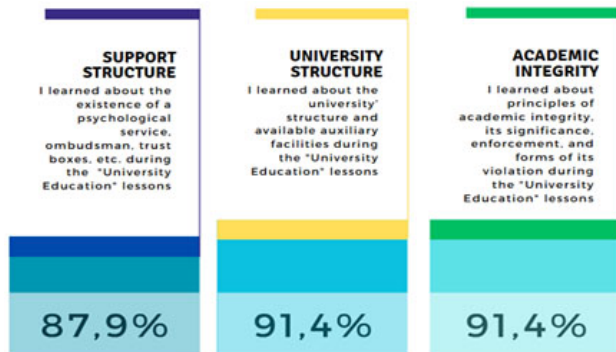


Fig. 1. Comparative analysis of the first group factors

A total of 91.4% of students exhibited comprehensive knowledge of the services and auxiliary structures available on the campus, including faculties, colleges, libraries, scientific and sports clubs, and the AMS (Automated management system). These students also demonstrated a high level of understanding of key concepts and specificities of higher education in Ukraine, such as educational programs, specialties, standards, and accreditation processes.

Additionally, 93.1% of respondents were familiar with the principles of academic integrity, its significance, the mechanisms for its enforcement, and the primary forms of its violation.

The high level of assimilation of the presented material indicates the positive effect of studying the discipline "University Education" on first-year students, which is expressed in the possession of mandatory basic information about the operational process of Ukraine's higher education institutions, their fundamental principles, as well as the structure and specifics of the university in which they study.

Fig. 2 shows that the activities and staff of the student self-government of the Faculty of Engineering and Technology and the Poltava State Agrarian University are known to 89.6% of respondents, and 69% of students confirmed their participation in the 2024 outdoor bonding activity for the first-year students named "Adaptiv", 55.2% personally participated in several specialized events organized by various structural divisions of the university.

At the same time, 98.3% of respondents speak of constant and two-way contact with their supervisors, indicating high-level informational and organizational support.

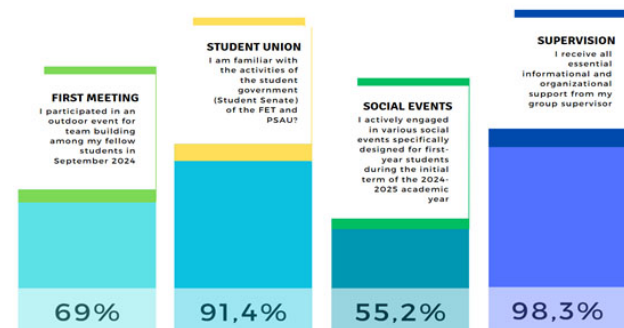


Fig. 2. Comparative analysis of the second group factors

The lower percentages of direct student involvement in various formats of events are confirmed by empirical evidence, but their validity and causality require further study. Given the high-level awareness and the con-

stant flow of given information, their limited personal participation in events requires a more detailed study. If controversial points are identified, the “University Education” curriculum for the 2025 enrollment year may be changed considering the results of our study.

The analysis of the academic success of those students who noted the positive effect of the content of the discipline on their adaptation to the educational process and student life of the university, based on the results of the first examination session of the 2024-2025 academic year, demonstrates the following distribution by grades (Fig. 3).

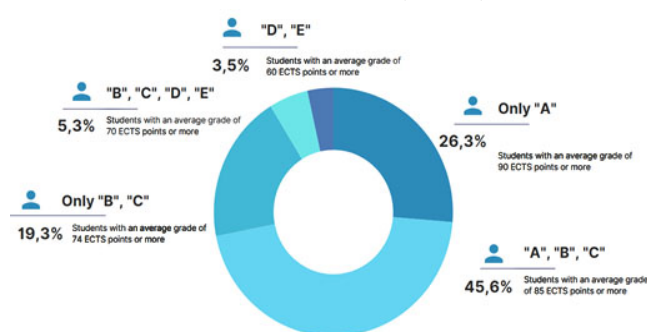


Fig. 3. Academic performance and outcomes of the first examination period

Fig. 3 shows the gradation of academic outcomes of first-year students, but at this stage, it does not allow for a more in-depth analysis of the relationship between the level of student success and the degree of influence of the theoretical and practical skills acquired by him while studying “University Education” curriculum.

**Conclusions and prospects for further research.** Although there is substantial interest in this topic, it is frequently focused on narrow and specific aspects. Researching the adaptation and transition processes is necessary to comprehensively address the aforementioned challenges. A more detailed interpretation and assessment of limited personal participation and an inquiry into a relationship between the student’s academic performance and the subject’s curriculum will require additional analysis and can serve as a goal of our further research.

Helping school graduates transition to university life is crucial for ensuring their academic success and overall well-being. The challenges of higher education can be overwhelming without proper support systems, and a steep learning curve often marks this transition period. By providing targeted guidance, emotional support, and practical resources, universities can help students adapt more effectively, enabling them to thrive academically and socially. Tailored orientation

programs, mentorship opportunities, and accessible counseling services are essential in fostering this adaptation.

Encouraging the development of strong student support networks - both formal and informal - can empower graduates to navigate university life with confidence and resilience. These networks, whether through peer groups or academic advisors, provide valuable spaces where students can share experiences and seek advice. Additionally, addressing first-year students’ psychological and emotional needs is essential in creating a supportive environment that encourages growth and development. By reducing stress and promoting a sense of belonging, universities can help students avoid burnout and other negative outcomes.

Ultimately, investing in the successful adaptation benefits students and the university community. When well-supported during this critical transition, students are more likely to become engaged, productive, and contributing academic community members. This investment in student success fosters a diverse, inclusive, and thriving environment for all.

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### **СПРИЯННЯ АДАПТАЦІЇ ПЕРШОКУРСНИКІВ ЧЕРЕЗ ВИВЧЕННЯ «УНІВЕРСИТЕТСЬКОЇ ОСВІТИ»**

*Перехід від навчання в школі до вищої освіти є критичним етапом у житті студента-першокурсника, та вимагає адаптації до нових академічних, соціальних та персональних викликів. Цей процес необхідний для розвитку у студента незалежності, критичного мислення та навичок управління часом, що є ключовими для успішного навчання у вищій школі. Важливим чинником є її адаптація до структури самої вищої освіти, оскільки стиль і підхід університетського навчання суттєво відрізняються від навчання у школі.*

*Студенти також повинні адаптуватися до нового соціального середовища, часто віддаляючись від існуючих джерел підтримки. Емоційні та психологічні проблеми, такі як туга за домом і почуття тривоги, є поширеними в цей період, та вимагають сприяння у їх вирішенні.*

*Актуальність питання адаптації залишається незмінною через постійну зміну вимог вищої освіти. Оскільки освітні та суспільні очікування змінюються, студенти постійно стикаються з новими проблемами під час цього критичного етапу. Тому, заклади вищої освіти повинні пріоритетувати ефективну підтримку для сприяння успішності здобувачів освіти. Розуміння та вирішення потенційних складнощів*

*має важливе значення для майбутнього здобувачів вищої освіти.*

*Ми проаналізували методики, які використовуються для адаптації студентів першого курсу до академічного життя в університетах Сполучених Штатів і окремих європейських країн. Це включало порівняльну оцінку цих практик із тими, що застосовуються в українських ЗВО. Ми також узагальнили дані опитування, отримані при проведенні спеціального таргетованого анкетування студентів.*

*Ми встановили, що для майбутніх досліджень актуальними питаннями будуть роль менторських програм та підтримки груп однолітків у пом'якшенні проблем адаптаційного періоду, результати яких можуть викликати широкий інтерес. Крім того, дослідження відмінностей у адаптаційному досвіді різних демографічних груп могли б допомогти розробити більш інклюзивні стратегії адаптації здобувачів вищої освіти.*

**Ключові слова:** вища освіта; адаптація; академічна та особистісна адаптація; структура ЗВО.

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